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QTA – A brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

State Special Education Advisory Panel Budgets

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### Purpose and Method

This activity was completed as part of the Cooperative Agreement between Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). In response to an inquiry from its membership, NASDSE surveyed states about their budgets to support the activities of state special education advisory panels (SEAPs). The NASDSE survey questions were as follows:

1. Does your state special education advisory panel have an annual budget?  
If yes:
2. What is the total amount of that budget?
3. What items are included in the budget?
4. What source of funding is used for that budget?

The survey was expanded for this QTA because it complements a recent Project FORUM analysis of SEAPs.<sup>1</sup> NASDSE first collected data from 33 states, and Project FORUM subsequently contacted the non-responding states to complete the data set. This document is a brief summary of survey information received from a

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed information on the operations of state advisory panels, see *State Special Education Advisory Panels: Changes Since the Passage of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, written by Diane Miller for Project FORUM in April 2001 and available online at: [http://www.nasdse.org/forum\\_activities\\_and\\_documents.htm](http://www.nasdse.org/forum_activities_and_documents.htm).

final total of 48 states and two non-state jurisdictions. Most states added at least a brief explanation of their responses to the survey items.

### Background

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each state education agency (SEA) establish and maintain “an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State” [CFR §300.150]. Membership of the SEAP is also prescribed by regulation [CFR §300.651].

The specific functions assigned under IDEA regulations [CFR §300.652] to the SEAP are:

- Advise the SEA of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities;
- Comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities;
- Advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary under section 618 of the Act;
- Advise the SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in Federal monitoring reports under Part B of the Act;
- Advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities; and,
- Advise on eligible students with disabilities in adult prisons.

IDEA regulations further provide that the advisory panel shall meet as often as necessary to conduct its business, and that “the advisory panel shall serve without compensation but the State must reimburse the panel for reasonable and necessary expenses for attending meetings and performing duties.” [CFR §300.653]

## Survey Results

Of the 50 respondents, a total of 32 states and one non-state jurisdiction reported that they do not have a line item budget for their SEAP. In all cases, these states commented that they provide funds to reimburse the expenses incurred by SEAP members for the costs they incur related to the SEAP. In most cases, the reimbursement is made from IDEA Part B funds, although ten states mentioned SEA funds as the source of the payments.

Sixteen states and one non-state jurisdiction maintain a budget for their SEAPs. The total amounts ranged from \$5,000 to \$150,000. Most states use Part B funds for their budgets, although a few states mentioned that they use state funds or a combination of state and federal funds.

The items included in these budgets varied considerably. In some states, the salaries of SEA staff who provide administrative support to the SEAP were included in the budget. Other states mentioned staff support as a separate cost that was not reflected in their SEAP budget. Aside

from the SEA staff costs associated with SEAP activities, states include some or all of the following line items in their SEAP budgets:

- Travel, meals and lodging in connection with meetings and/or retreats, sometimes provided as a set stipend per meeting;
- Child care costs;
- Reimbursement for loss of wages;
- Printing and postage costs, supplies, auditory equipment, guest speakers, and other logistical support services for meetings; and,
- Support for members to attend conferences or other training activities.

## Summary Comments

As with many other aspects of special education, the issue of supporting SEAP activities varies greatly among states. The lack of a separate line item budget for the SEAP does not mean that a state has no expenditures for this activity, nor that it spends less than states that have developed a specific budget. For example, one state director who reported *not* having a SEAP budget commented the state spends approximately \$80,000 annually for SEAP activities, an amount in the middle of the range of all reported budget totals. The survey conducted for this document confirms that all states provide some level of financial support for their SEAP. However, financing is handled so differently by states that it is not appropriate to generalize about the costs they incur or the type of expenses they cover.

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