Agenda Topic: Continuous Improvement Plan for Special Education

Materials: Continuous Improvement Plan

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Purpose of Agenda Item

Presentation of the proposed Continuous Improvement Plan for Special Education

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item

Approval of the Improvement Plan for Submission to the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs

Background Information

For the past year the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has been working with various stakeholders to develop an improvement plan for special education in Illinois. The improvement plan is a required component of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process for Illinois. Annual receipt of our federal grant under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is dependent on compliance with the federal requirements covered by this Monitoring Process. A state self-assessment identifying critical issues in special education was submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in December 2000. A draft improvement plan was submitted in October 2001 following months of development by members of the State Steering Committee. The State Steering Committee was made up of over 50 representatives including parents, teachers, administrators and others with an interest in special education service delivery. Public hearings, which were attended by Larry Ringer and Cynthia Bryant of the U.S. Department of Education, were held throughout the state during the week of October 15-19, 2001. Hundreds of comments were received regarding the implementation of both Part B and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in Illinois.

The Illinois State Board of Education is responsible for implementing Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which provides services for individuals ages 3-22. After consultation with the Department of Human Services, the agency responsible for administering programs under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (services for individuals ages birth to age 3), the draft improvement plan
was separated into two components: Part B and Part C. A small Part B work group was convened in December to revise the Steering Committee’s draft and ensure that the final proposed Improvement Plan met the criteria set by OSEP. External consultants who have experience in working with other states that have Improvement Plans already approved by OSEP were employed to facilitate the revision process of the work group.

The Improvement Plan comprises five primary goals to be accomplished within five years:

**Goal 1:** Illinois will increase by 4.5 percentage points per year, the percentage of youth with disabilities who exit school with a standard diploma (reaching 90% in the year 2007) and increase employment and/or post-secondary education opportunities.

**Goal 2:** Illinois will increase by 5 percentage points, per year, the number of students with disabilities (3-21) who are provided Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in general education classrooms (80% or more of the school day) in the school they would attend if not disabled.

**Goal 3:** Illinois will increase by 1 percentage point per year, starting in 2003, the number of fully-certified or licensed general and special education teachers, administrators, and related services personnel who are prepared to provide FAPE in the Least Restrictive Environment with individualized supplementary aids and services to students with disabilities.

**Goal 4:** Illinois will increase the meaningful, effective involvement of families in the educational process of children with disabilities as measured by analyses of survey data and progress from baselines to be established in 2002-2003.

**Goal 5:** Illinois will have a general supervision and monitoring system that improves student outcomes, as measured by a) the percentage of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) monitored who are identified as being in the lower quartile on a goal measure, and b) annual progress of monitored LEAs on the Critical Indicators (e.g., as standardized test data, drop-out rates, graduation data, etc.).

All of the goals were developed using existing baseline data to establish measurable benchmarks and outcomes. After approval by OSEP, the Improvement Plan will serve as the blueprint for special education compliance and program development activities over the next five years.

Another phase in the monitoring of Illinois’ special education compliance by the U.S. Department of Education will take place when OSEP representatives visit Illinois during the week of April 22-26, 2002. OSEP representatives will visit several local programs around the state and evaluate internal ISBE records, documents and procedures. Any
state findings of noncompliance must be addressed through corrective actions that will become a part of the Improvement Plan.

**Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications**

The Improvement Plan for Special Education provides a comprehensive five year agenda for special education services in Illinois. The Improvement Plan is performance based and sets clear expectations for the Illinois State Board of Education and local school districts. Districts that do not meet the performance standards established by the Improvement Plan will be held accountable for improvements in their service delivery and individual student outcomes. The Illinois State Board of Education will report annually on statewide performance standards and outcomes.

The five goals of the Improvement Plan align with the State Board mission and goals adopted in October, 2001.

**Board Goal A: Student Achievement**

The Illinois State Board of Education will support local districts in helping all students meet the Illinois Learning Standards and in closing the achievement gap.

**Special Education Goals and Desired Results**

Increase by 4.5 percentage points, per year, the percentage of youth with disabilities who exit school with a standard diploma (reaching 90% in the year 2007) and increase employment and/or post-secondary education.

**Expected Results:**

- Decrease the drop-out rate of students (ages 14-21) with disabilities.
- Increase the percentage of students with disabilities who participate in statewide (ISAT, PSAE, & IMAGE) or alternate assessments (IAA).
- Increase the percentage of students with disabilities who perform at the “meet standards” or “exceed standards” level as measured by the ISAT/PSAE or alternate assessments (IAA).
- Decrease the percentage of students with disabilities who are suspended or expelled.

Develop a general supervision and monitoring system that improves student outcomes, as measured by a) the percentage of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) monitored who are identified as being in the lower quartile on a goal addressed in the Plan, and b) annual progress of monitored LEAs on the Critical Indicators.
Expected Results:

- Improved monitoring for compliance through utilization of a risk-based analysis based on a review of data derived from Goals 1 through 4 of the Improvement Plan and other concerns related to implementation of IDEA.

- Monitored LEAs (or Joint Agreements) achieve required progress on the critical indicators for which they were cited.

- Required procedural safeguards are assured through a more efficient and comprehensive application of the 23 Illinois Administrative Code Part 226, the School Code and IDEA.

- Increased opportunities exist for parent input into the monitoring process.

Board Goal B: Policies and Services

The Illinois State Board of Education will generate policies, programs, products, and services that support local district efforts to ensure student success.

Special Education Goals and Desired Results

Increase by 5 percentage points, per year, the number of students with disabilities (3-21) who are provided Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment in general education classrooms (80%+ time) in the school they would attend if not disabled.

Expected Results:

- Revised and enhanced statewide student data collection system (Funding and Child Find Tracking System) that provides state and local school district information on least restrictive environment and other data for students with disabilities.

- Enhanced ability of local education agencies to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment through the provision of training and technical assistance on curriculum modifications, positive behavioral supports, assistive technology and collaboration between regular and special education personnel.

- Increased percentage of children with disabilities (ages 3-5) served in general settings with non-disabled peers 80% or more of the time, and a decreased percentage of students with disabilities (ages 3-5) who are in general settings with non-disabled peers less than 40% of the time.

Increase by 1 percentage point per year, starting in 2003, the number of fully-certified or licensed general and special education teachers, administrators, and related services
personnel who are prepared to provide FAPE in the Least Restrictive Environment with individualized supplementary aids and services to students with disabilities.

Expected Results:
- Increase the percentage of fully-certified general education teachers who are prepared to instruct students in the least restrictive environment.
- Increase the percentage of fully-certified special education teachers and related service personnel.

Board Goal C: Funding

The Illinois State Board of Education will provide advocacy and leadership for adequate and equitable funding of Illinois public schools.

Special Education Goals and Desired Results

Under all five special education goals, the Improvement Plan includes specific statewide training and technical assistance for school administrators, teachers, related service personnel and parents. This training and technical assistance will be funded by our annual grant award under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA.) Local education agencies may also use their IDEA grants to support activities necessary to meet the goals of the Improvement Plan. Although not a specific activity of the Improvement Plan, advocacy for increased federal funding of IDEA is an essential part of the Illinois State Board of Education’s federal agenda.

Board Goal D: Collaboration

The Illinois State Board of Education will work with partners in all sectors of government, education, and private enterprise to support continuous improvement of Illinois education.

Special Education Goals and Desired Results

Increase the meaningful, effective involvement of families in the educational process of children with disabilities as measured by analyses of survey data derived from the goals of the Plan and documented progress from baselines to be established in 2002-2003.

Expected Results:
- Increased involvement of parents in determining appropriate services for their children and in program improvement activities.
- Design and implement a regional mentorship program for parents using existing Parent Training and Information Centers as a base.

(Special note: Several other activities under each of the five Goals are also aligned with this Board goal. These activities include implementation of interagency agreements
with other state agencies especially the Department of Human Services, collaboration with institutions of higher education to address personnel shortages, working with the Department of Corrections regarding services to students in juvenile detention centers and consultation with advisory boards, professional and parent organizations and other interested parties on specific issues.)

All of the activities in the Improvement Plan are based on needs identified by the OSEP Steering Committee through last year’s Self Assessment, after extensive review of the available data. Data regarding post-secondary outcomes for students was considered a priority by stakeholders in the creation of the plan, but it is difficult to quantify due to limited data collection and analysis at the state level. The Plan calls for the creation of a proposal to expand data collection at the state level that would necessitate some additional data collection at the local level. This data is necessary to determine whether the services provided to students with disabilities are, in fact, providing them with the skills necessary to succeed as adults. Every effort will be made to ensure that no unnecessary data burdens are placed on local education agencies or the state with the creation of this proposal.

A significant policy consideration for the Board is the establishment of specific percentages for measurable achievement of change over time. Although, there are some groups and individuals who oppose the use of these percentages, OSEP has indicated that the establishment of measurable results is required. The data that is available clearly indicates that Illinois is not achieving, or at least can not demonstrate that it is achieving, the results for students with disabilities that many other states are reporting. Establishment of specific, measurable performance standards will allow the Illinois State Board of Education and our educational partners to know whether the Improvement Plan activities are working or need modification in order to achieve improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

The use of specific, measurable performance standards will also impact local education agencies through implementation of the revised monitoring system. Local programs that are performing in the bottom 10% on key compliance criteria, such as placements that comply with least restrictive environment mandates, will be selected for monitoring and corrective action. The data from all local educational agencies will be more widely distributed and available to parents and the general public. Although the extent of public disclosure will not be much different than what is currently done for regular education, it is much more detailed than what has been released in the past for students with disabilities. The Plan increases the public accountability regarding special education both for the Illinois State Board of Education and local education agencies.

The activities in the Improvement Plan will have some impact on the use of federal funds at the state level and may require an increase in the use of state funds as activities to implement the Improvement Plan are undertaken. Federal funds will be used for the training and technical assistance to be provided to school personnel and parents. Federal and state funds may be needed for use as incentives for addressing personnel shortages under Goal Three. The data collection activities and implementation of the monitoring system will probably require the reallocation of fiscal and human resources within the agency but the full impact cannot be determined at this
time. Adequate staff to perform the required monitoring functions was specifically identified as an issue by the Steering Committee and through public comment. It is expected that School districts may also have to reallocate fiscal and human resources to address the deficiencies that are identified through implementation of the revised monitoring system. Overall, the Improvement Plan addresses the need to apply current data and resources in more effective and productive ways.

The Improvement Plan does not call for any legislative changes at this time. Modifications to the School Code or state rules may be needed in the future in response to OSEP’s on-site monitoring or their review of state policies and procedures.

Communication with the public at the state and local levels is a major aspect of the Improvement Plan. During the Public Forums this fall, many parents expressed their displeasure with the communication from and between their local school officials and the Illinois State Board of Education. They requested more information on services and procedural safeguards and increased opportunities for input at the local and state levels. In particular, they want to be informed of monitoring visits and other compliance functions. The dissemination of special education data and information in a variety of formats is an essential part of the Plan.

Pros and Cons of Various Actions

This Improvement Plan outlines five goals for special education in Illinois. Approval of the Improvement Plan will increase accountability for special education services in Illinois and will compel the Illinois State Board of Education to use data in decision-making prior to interventions and monitoring. Approval of the Improvement Plan is an essential component in the overall process of establishing our continued eligibility to receive federal special education funding. Failure to submit an approvable Improvement Plan could result in the delay or even denial of our annual allocation of approximately $301,000,000 from IDEA funds.

Superintendent’s Recommendation

The State Board should authorize the submission of the proposed Improvement Plan to the U.S. Department of Education.

Next Steps

- Submit the Improvement Plan to the Department of Education for review and wait for their response; modify the Plan if needed.
- Upon acceptance of the Plan, begin implementation of all activities.
- Provide the State Board periodic updates on the progress of major activities in accordance with the timelines for accomplishing the desired results.