



**Maryland**

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Special Education Workgroup Interim Report

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Improving Education for Students with Disabilities

Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services

July 2024

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## Note from the Co-Chairs

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On behalf of the Blueprint Special Education Workgroup, we are pleased to provide this interim report. As co-chairs, we begin from two different perspectives—one inside and one outside of the system—but we share fully the belief that much progress is underway, with tremendous credit due to the dedicated participation of Workgroup members. This report demonstrates substantial progress toward fulfilling the Workgroup’s mission—to review instruction, services, and funding for special education in Maryland and make recommendations for a plan to improve the educational experiences and long-term outcomes of students with disabilities. Our mission is reflected in the expansive arc of topics we have covered and still have before us. This report outlines the beginning of an ambitious roadmap to ensure that students with disabilities are included in and benefit from the transformational promise of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future.

Our challenge, as our diverse members review the complex landscape in which students with disabilities are served in our schools, is to question sometimes deeply held beliefs and longstanding practices, interrogate the research, and listen to one another and to students, families, and educators across the state. We bring to this work, first and foremost, a commitment to students, equal measures of optimism and practicality, and a bit of radical imagination inspired by the Blueprint’s bold vision.

The backdrop of our work is recognition that students with disabilities are underserved and, therefore, failing to achieve their potential. While many studies and task forces over decades have recommended reforms, these were rarely implemented, with little follow-up and accountability. This Workgroup was intended to solidify specific recommendations into an MSDE plan with tasks and timelines that would spur action and enable accountability. That course is well underway.

We recognize, too, that the recommendations we have approved so far, and will approve in the coming months, encompass a body of work too great to realistically be accomplished in the near term. Yet the commitment that MSDE and Workgroup members made at the outset is that we would not produce another report to be filed on a shelf. How do we balance these considerations? Prioritization is essential. Priorities must be set within the capacity of MSDE, while concurrent efforts are made to bolster that capacity. The responsibility for actualizing that challenge rests upon all of us.

These recommendations taken as a whole portray a picture of what all of us must build together. It won’t happen this year or next, but every step, beginning with those already underway at MSDE, will get us closer to that vision as we prioritize the work, steady but with urgency, setting concrete tasks and timelines to achieve it. We are committed to seeing this through not only for our students, but also for our educators who have long been under-resourced and overstretched.

As we look forward to the months ahead, we are deeply appreciative of the cooperative, transparent work between the Workgroup and MSDE. It holds promise for all of our students with disabilities.

Best,

Liz Zogby  
Special Education Policy & Advocacy Project  
Maryland Down Syndrome Coalition

Dr. Carey Wright  
State Superintendent of Schools, Maryland  
State Department of Education

# Executive Summary

The Blueprint Special Education Workgroup was established in the Initial Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan, released on December 1, 2022, by the Blueprint Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB). The Implementation Plan requires for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to convene a Blueprint Special Education Workgroup to discuss and make recommendations on instruction and services for students and disabilities.

## Blueprint Special Education Workgroup Overview

The Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan specifically addresses students with disabilities (SWD) in Pillar 4: More Resources for Students to be Successful, Objective 3: Improve education for SWD. The outcome measures delineated in this objective include:

- Special education funds are used to provide consistent, high-quality special education programs in all schools; and
- Increased rate of students that require special education and/or other services meet annual expected progress targets as laid out in students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 504 plans.

The plan indicates that in Fiscal Year 25, MSDE and local education agencies (LEAs) will implement the Workgroup's recommendations to improve the education of students receiving special education services in Maryland's P-12 schools. As part of this work, the Workgroup is required to:

- Collect and report data on the number and percent of students receiving special education services at each P-12 school, the services available to them, and the accessibility of P-12 teachers, administrators, and staff to these students and their families;
- Review methods of teaching and providing services to students who receive special education services in P-12 schools in the State; and
- Make recommendations on improving the education of students receiving special education services in P-12 schools in the State, including whether additional funding should be provided and addressing learning loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Workgroup Requirements

**4.3.2:** MSDE shall establish a Workgroup to collect student data and review instructional methods provided to students who receive special education services.

**4.3.2(a):** The Workgroup shall collect data on the number and percent of students receiving special education services at each P-12 school, the services available to them, and the accessibility of P-12 teachers, administrators, and staff to these students and their families.

MSDE and AIB shall identify Workgroup members representing various special education interests who demonstrate commitment to diversity, equity, and expertise.

The Workgroup shall share its work plan with the AIB and provide regular updates on its progress.



**4.3.2 (b):** The Workgroup shall review methods of teaching and providing services to students who receive special education services in public P-12 schools in the State.

The Workgroup's review shall include methods used in the State and other states and other countries, including addressing learning loss related to COVID-19, in addition to recruiting and retaining special education teachers and staff.

The Workgroup may expand the scope of its review based on recommendations of its members and/or AIB and MSDE to include topics like the impact of teacher shortages on special education and resulting quality or services provided; supports provided to special educators; co-teaching models and supporting general educators in implementing co-teaching models as well as supporting special education students when a special educator is not providing services; increasing family involvement and collaboration in special education programming; and how top-performing systems structure the school day to effectively provide remediation and special education services.

**4.3.2(c):** The Workgroup shall make recommendations on improving the education of students receiving special education services in P-12 schools in the State, including whether additional funding is needed and addressing learning loss because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Workgroup may make other recommendations related to additional topics studied by the Workgroup.

**4.3.3:** The Workgroup submits a final report with its findings and recommendations, including addressing learning loss resulting from COVID-19 pandemic.

**4.3.3(a):** AIB shall incorporate the Workgroup's findings and recommendations into the updated Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan.

The Workgroup shall submit an initial report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by 12/1/23, an interim report by 7/1/24, and a final report by 12/1/24.

**4.3.3(b):** MSDE and LEAs shall implement the Workgroup's recommendations to improve the education of students receiving special education services in Maryland P-12 schools.

### Workgroup Meetings

As an integral part of preparing for the Blueprint Special Education Workgroup Meetings, MSDE convened a series of listening sessions with a wide variety of stakeholders to assess and uncover strengths and opportunities for growth and identify best practices and exemplars in the delivery of specially designed instruction. Sessions were held in late Spring and early Summer of 2023. MSDE invited Advocates, Directors of Student Support Services and Directors of Special Education from each LEA, and Principals and Teachers from across the State, as well as all members of the Special Education State Advisory Committee, to participate in listening sessions, during which participants were placed in breakout rooms of no more than ten (10) people. MSDE staff asked a series of questions and took notes on the discussion. Please see the Workgroup's Initial Report (December 2023) for a summary of Listening Session questions and a quantitative analysis of themes and sub-themes. The themes mentioned in the Listening Sessions were instrumental in the selection of topics for the Workgroup meetings.

Beginning in August 2023, the Blueprint Special Education Workgroup was co-chaired by State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury until his departure from MSDE on October 6, 2023, and Liz Zogby, the director of the Special Education Policy & Advocacy Project and co-chair of the Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition. Following Superintendent Choudhury's departure, Dr. Carey Wright, State Superintendent, assumed the role of co-chair with Ms. Zogby.

The Workgroup met in a hybrid format through 2023 and moved to a completely virtual format in 2024. Each meeting was focused on one or more guiding questions and topics aligned with the Workgroup requirements. Short briefs on the meeting topics were distributed to Workgroup members 10 days prior to each meeting, and members were encouraged to send any initial thoughts in writing for circulation to all members in advance of the meeting.

During these meetings, experts and practitioners highlighted national best practices and research on focus topics, and time was built into each meeting for Workgroup members to engage and collaborate. At the conclusion of each meeting, members were given an "exit ticket" to be completed within five days to respond to the questions discussed during the meeting. This feedback, along with notes from the small group discussions, were compiled, distilled, and recirculated to members. Workgroup recommendations were crafted from this feedback, sent in advance of each meeting, and approved at the subsequent meeting. Workgroup meeting agendas, a short brief on the topic, and resources were posted on the MSDE website [here](#). Agendas, the topic briefs, and distillations of the Workgroup member feedback from exit tickets and small group discussions on each topic are also included at the end of this report in Appendices A-E.

Since the release of the first report, five additional Workgroup meetings have been convened:

- Meeting 4: November 29, 2023
- Meeting 5: January 30, 2024
- Meeting 6: February 28, 2024
- Meeting 7: March 20, 2024
- Meeting 8: April 24, 2024

The [initial report](#) was published in December of 2023 and provided background information, data, national best practices, and research, in addition to initial findings and recommendations from the Workgroup. This interim report builds on the initial report, providing an overview of meetings 4 through 8 and sharing recommendations and plans developed by the Workgroup.

## Overview of Meetings

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MSDE welcomes meaningful input and public engagement to determine how we reduce the opportunity and achievement gaps for students with disabilities compared to same-age peers. To address the specified requirements of the AIB plan, MSDE has hosted a series of meetings starting in August of 2023. Each meeting is focused on a guiding question and includes a spotlight on best practices and research on the topic. This section provides an overview of the meetings that have been held since the release of the initial report.

### MEETING 4: NOVEMBER 29, 2023

This meeting facilitated Workgroup members' continued exploration of tiered interventions leading to improved outcomes for *all* students. Dr. Rebecca Zumeta Edmonds, Managing Researcher at the AIR, guided the Workgroup to consider what is necessary to fully implement Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) throughout Maryland. The Workgroup also participated in small group discussions to identify barriers and curate recommendations for implementation in Maryland.

#### Guiding Question

1. How can general and special education be more effectively integrated so that the instruction and built-in supports in general education can better meet the needs of students, resulting in fewer referrals and identification?

#### Pre-Reading: What is a Multi-Tiered System of Supports?

Workgroup members read Penharkar's (2023) [MTSS: What is a Multi-Tiered System of Supports?](#) to provide a foundation for meeting 4. This article documents the history of response to intervention (RTI) and how it evolved into a comprehensive multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) to more effectively and comprehensively support students. Penharkar defines MTSS as "a framework meant to support students in achieving their best possible academic and social-emotional outcomes. MTSS models include tiers of instructional and other kinds of support, so that all students can make progress by getting the kind of education that meets their needs" (para. 6). She then details each of the three tiers of MTSS, discusses how extensive the use of MTSS is across the country, and describes how MTSS is connected specifically to special education.

#### Pre-Reading: Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

In preparation for this meeting, Workgroup members also read Zhang et al.'s (2023) [Response to Intervention \(RTI\)/Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\): A Nationwide Analysis](#). Every state utilizes a tiered support system of some kind and in this article the authors examine the RTI/MTSS models across the country. The overarching finding of this analysis was that states are making substantial efforts toward addressing all of their students' distinct needs through a single, comprehensive tiered system of supports. In addition, the authors share the specific strategies and approaches of each state in supporting and cultivating their models.

#### Guest Presentation: Getting Started with MTSS

Dr. Rebecca Zumeta Edmonds presented [Getting Started with MTSS](#) to the Workgroup during this meeting. Dr. Edmonds began by reviewing the history and components of MTSS with the Workgroup, then shared five considerations for supporting MTSS implementation at the state level: all means all, keep it simple, leverage resources from other initiatives and funding streams, provide multiple avenues

for learning, and remove barriers. Dr. Edmonds concluded her presentation by sharing guiding questions to guide a discussion around the implementation of MTSS in Maryland. These questions included:

- What do we want for students, staff, and families in Maryland?
- What is our highest priority for MTSS implementation?
- How does MTSS connect to other initiatives in the state?
- How can we maximize our resources?
- What are the obvious barriers and how might we address them?

### Key Takeaways

- The Workgroup arrived at a consensus on three recommendations.
  - Revise COMAR and MSDE guidance to explicitly provide:
    - Students without significant cognitive disabilities are legally entitled to IEP goals and services that enable them to meet grade-level standards. When these students are behind grade-level standards, they should receive IEP goals/services that enable them to close or narrow the gap between standards and their performance levels.
    - Students with significant cognitive disabilities are legally entitled to IEP goals/services that enable them to have access to grade-level content standards (i.e., the general education curriculum) and to meet alternate grade-level standards. Goals should be based on evidence-based instructional practices, related services, and LRE principles that maximize their potential.
  - Review state monitoring tools and compliance protocols to ensure that IEP goals narrow or close the gap between present levels of achievement and grade-level standards, and that, based upon research and professional judgment, IEP services are reasonably calculated to enable the goals to be achieved.
  - Develop a comprehensive early literacy plan to ensure that all students in general education receive evidence-based instruction, including high-dosage tutoring, within an MTSS/Response to Intervention (RTI) framework in general education, with the highest priority in grades K-3.
- Recommendations on MTSS planning and implementation from Dr. Edmonds' presentation:
  - All means all – students with disabilities can and should be served across all tiers.
  - Keep it simple – identify priority area(s) for initial implementation.
  - Leverage resources from other initiatives and funding streams – e.g., SSIP focus on math, Ready to Read Act requirement for screening (and progress monitoring), use of SPDG for training/TA.
  - Provide multiple avenues for learning – should MD consider establishing a state MTSS center (like Michigan and Oregon); teacher and leader preparation should include MTSS competencies (Coppin State/NCII partnership); online learning.

- Remove barriers – need an action plan with attainable steps; review of district and state assessments; logic vs. lore (common misconceptions).

### **MEETING 5: JANUARY 30, 2024**

Workgroup members delved into the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and the use of Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. A panel of experts from the Workgroup shared their experiences with SDI, and Workgroup members participated in breakout groups and shared highlights of those breakouts with the larger group.

#### **Guiding Question**

1. What evidence-based instruction and related services will enable all students with disabilities to meet the standards and expectations under IDEA?

#### **Overview of MSDE's Current SDI Guidance**

To set a foundation for this meeting's discussion around the development of IEPs and implementation of SDI, MSDE provided an overview of the Division's current guidance in these areas. The overview started by emphasizing that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the foundation for SDI. For students with disabilities, the IEP provides the diagnostic prescriptive tool to implement specially designed instruction, which should, in turn, narrow the gap in the performance of students with disabilities compared to their same-age peers. MSDE emphasizes that the IEP team must ultimately consider how special education and related services, implemented through an effective IEP, can change the trajectory of a student's growth to reduce or close the gap.

Best practices for IEP teams were then discussed, starting with the need to develop, as appropriate, IEP goals that are:

1. Aligned to academic content standards of grade level enrollment, and
2. Aligned to academic content standards from earlier in the learning progressions, or
3. Aligned to age/grade-appropriate functional skills impacted by the disability and interfere with, prevent, or affect communication and interpersonal interactions, participation in school and learning activities, and independence in school and potential post-school settings.

The remaining best practices discussed included implementing evidence-based instructional practices and strategies or approaches that have proven to be effective in leading to desired outcomes, analyzing trend data to reasonably calculate student progress toward grade-level standards and setting ambitious IEP goals, regularly reviewing student data to monitor student progress and make data-informed decisions about adjustments to instructions and interventions, and considering the information and training needs of parents/guardians and school personnel.

Finally, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) were reviewed. MSDE emphasizes that when schools have a strong MTSS, the foundation is laid for teaching to the diverse needs of a variety of learners. An effective tiered framework employs evidence-based screening, standards-aligned curricula, team-based collaborative planning, and a strong evidence-based instructional approach that is based on universal design for learning (UDL) principles and differentiated instruction (DI) to address the individual characteristics of the students in each class (UDL and DI serve as the instructional base for all students, including students with disabilities). Importantly, SDI is most powerful when delivered within an integrated tiered system of support as it provides students with disabilities the opportunity for more

intensive instruction in areas of skill deficits, alongside their peers with similar learning needs. However, a student with a disability and unique learning needs stemming from that disability will require specially designed instruction to make progress in the curriculum.

### **Pre-Reading: Louisiana Department of Education Special Education Playbook - SDI**

Prior to this meeting, Workgroup members read an excerpt from the Louisiana Department of Education's [\*Playbook for Special Education System Leaders\*](#) specific to SDI and IEP services. The key points addressed in this paper are included below (as written in the article):

- Specially designed instruction (SDI) must meet the needs of each individual student but needn't exclude best practices that help other students
- School and staff schedules must support the best practice strategies
- Elementary master schedules must enable staff to avoid pulling students from core reading and math for special education and related services
- When the entire elementary grade has intervention at the same time, grouping by area of need is easier
- If the whole school has intervention at the same time, it is harder to provide content-strong teachers for the extra instructional time
- Secondary schedules should include extra time intervention courses

### **Specially Designed Instruction Panel**

During this Workgroup meeting, members had the opportunity to hear from a panel of experts from Maryland's LEAs moderated by Nate Levenson. Panel members included Beth Morton, principal of Huntingtown High School (Calvert County Public Schools), Ericka Levy, Psy.D., an Educational Specialist and Behavior Consultation Team member (Baltimore City Public Schools), and Diane McGowan, Director of Specially Designed Instruction and Compliance (Anne Arundel County Public Schools).

Beth Morton addressed the question of what expertise is required of IEP teams to reconcile the "I" in IEP with the requirement for evidence-based services that are based on peer-reviewed research to the extent possible. Dr. Levy addressed the question of what expertise is required of IEP teams to reconcile the "I" in IEP with the requirement that evidence-based services be "reasonably calculated" to enable each student's goals to be achieved. Diane McGowan addressed the question of what TA IEP teams need to ensure they understand the IDEA requirement that IEPs must provide evidence-based SDI as part of services that are reasonably calculated to enable each student's goals to be achieved.

### **Breakout Sessions**

Following the SDI panel, the Workgroup broke into small groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Do IEP teams generally understand the requirement under IDEA that IEPs must provide evidence-based specially designed instruction (SDI) as part of services that are reasonably calculated to enable each student's goals to be achieved?
2. What are evidence-based services that are "based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable"? What expertise is required of IEP teams to reconcile the "I" in IEP with the requirement for evidence-based services that are "based on peer-reviewed research to the

extent practicable”? (What are general guidelines for teacher judgment in consideration of appropriate evidence-based instruction?)

3. What is the meaning of “reasonably calculated” to enable each student’s goals to be achieved?
4. What technical assistance (TA) - i.e., what knowledge and skills should be included and how should the TA be structured and delivered - will IEP teams need to respond to the above requirements?
5. How should SDI be integrated into RTI?
6. What is current MSDE guidance – in effect, menus of evidence-based practices – on evidence-based best instructional practices associated with particular disabilities (e.g., SLD, Autism, ID) or generic practices (e.g., UDL). Are there priorities for where such guidance is required?
7. Who can design and deliver SDI? How should IEPs document the provision of SDI (e.g., primary/secondary provider)?

### **Exit Ticket Feedback**

Starting in January, exit tickets were given after each meeting in response to Workgroup member feedback. The exit ticket protocol aims to ensure everyone’s thoughts are captured accurately and in an actionable way. The exit ticket given at the end of meeting 5 asked “As the State works to ensure that students with disabilities receive the most appropriate and impactful supports, what are the steps MSDE can take? (That is, what are specific elements of an action plan MSDE should develop to provide evidence-based practice standards, technical assistance, data collection and analysis, and monitoring that will ensure the accountability of MSDE and the LEAs? Responses to the exit ticket, organized by topic, are included in Appendix F.

### **Key Takeaways**

Themes that emerged from the breakout discussions around evidence-based practices used to develop IEPs and implement SDI included:

- There is a need for MSDE to provide a repository of resources of evidence-based practices, approved interventions, and more accessible guidance around the implementation of these practices to help teams work toward making real progress and provide higher quality instruction for students
- Students with disabilities are everyone’s students; it’s important to make discussions about a student’s education accessible for families
- Training for staff and parents is critical
- Classroom teachers trust that the curriculum they are being given is grounded in research; need for supports to make the curriculum accessible to all students
- There are outside factors that can limit the full implementation and monitoring cycle of the IEP
- Improve the collaborative relationship and supportive partnership between MSDE and LEAs

**MEETING 6: FEBRUARY 28, 2024**

Workgroup members developed recommendations to enhance technical assistance developed and provided by MSDE, inform critical uniform data elements, and address improvements to MSDE monitoring protocols. Workgroup members also participated in breakout groups and shared highlights of those breakouts with the larger group and heard from the President of the Maryland State Education Association. The Maryland Online IEP was also considered in the discussion and members were asked to provide feedback on the MOIEP in their exit tickets.

**Guiding Question**

1. How can MSDE ensure the effective implementation of IEPs, including technical assistance, monitoring, and uniform data collection?

**MSDE's Accountability to Improve Performance**

Before the meeting, workgroup members received an overview of MSDE's current general supervision model. This overview explained that the Division utilizes Accountability to Improve Performance (AIP) to meet the federal general supervision and comprehensive monitoring requirements. AIP is designed to examine special education performance, specifically evaluating whether and how local Infants and Toddlers Programs (LITP) and local education agencies (LEA)/public agencies (PA) improve results for children with developmental delays and students with disabilities and ensure compliance with IDEA and the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) requirements. AIP audit activities include:

- Desk Audit Review
- Service/Related Service Review
- Alternate Framework Review
- Restraint and Seclusion Record Review
- Policies and Procedures Review
- Case Studies

**Pre-Reading: State Education Agency Technical Assistance Models**

In preparation for this meeting, Workgroup members read about several state models used to provide technical assistance (TA) to school districts. The TA models included in this overview were Virginia's Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC), Massachusetts' District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) model, the Priority Partner Model, and the SEA Blanket Model. The key attributes of the models that were considered included:

- State funded (TTAC, DSAC, Priority Partner Model, SEA Blanket Model)
- Special and general education (DSAC, Priority Partner Model, SEA Blanket Model)
- Limited travel (TTAC, DSAC)
- Regional so support can be in person (TTAC, DSAC)
- High levels of expertise and alignment with SEA (Priority Partner Model)
- Led by trusted advisors (DSAC)



- Mixed Levels of expertise and alignment with SEA as silos within SEA can lead to disconnected messaging (SEA Blanket Model)
- Partners change as areas of focus change (Priority Partner Model)
- Special education only (TTAC)
- University-led (TTAC)

### Breakout Sessions

Following the review of MSDE's current practices, the Workgroup broke into small groups to discuss the following questions related to technical assistance:

- What additional ideas do you have for technical assistance provided by MSDE?
- In your opinion, what are the "right" data and measurements are to ensure effective IEP implementation? What support do school systems and practitioners need to collect data?
- Are there instances in your work where too much or too little data is required?
- Do you feel there is a clear understanding of monitoring standards and expectations?
- Do you have ideas for how MSDE monitoring can be improved? Are there aspects of monitoring that you would recommend keeping in place?
- How do you feel about the "judgments" of monitors? Are there patterns of disagreements over their findings?

A summary of the feedback from these small group discussions can be found in Appendix G.

### Maryland State Education Association Special Educator Research

Cheryl Bost, president of the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), joined the Workgroup to present [Key Findings from the MSEA Special Educator Focus Groups](#), research conducted with MSEA members who work in special education or primarily with students with disabilities. This research was mixed-methods in nature, comprised of a qualitative component that involved focus groups and a quantitative component that involved an online survey.

The first major finding of this research that Ms. Bost shared with the group was that most special education members feel "overwhelmed" or "sad" with how things are going at their job. The results of the focus group and survey revealed that members are stressed about the amount of work and paperwork they have and the lack of staff to help ease the load and are concerned about student behavior and how to keep students (and themselves) safe. A few members also indicated that they feel there is a push to move their students to general education before the students are ready for that transition. In addition, some paraeducators mentioned that they often find themselves taking over teachers' duties.

The second finding that was shared was that special educators don't feel supported. Overall, participants prioritized addressing staff shortages, emphasized that they do not feel as though they are being listened to, and do not feel that anyone is advocating for them.

As part of this work, MSEA also asked participants about what recommendations they had that would improve conditions. The primary recommendations that participants mentioned are included below:

- To recruit and retain special educators, members say they need to be paid more, treated with respect and have manageable caseloads, which would be greatly aided by administrative support on IEP paperwork.
- Members are somewhat interested in professional development, but it needs to be something new and more hands-on.
- Members feel the electronic case management system to oversee IEPs requires more work than it should.

In addition to sharing their recommendations, participants were also asked to rank a list of proposals for public school employees who work with students who receive special education services. Overall, participants ranked increasing pay for special educators the highest, followed by reducing paperwork. Ms. Bost noted that more veteran special educators (those with 20 or more years of experience) were more likely to prioritize reductions in paperwork and less likely to prioritize pay.

Cheryl concluded the presentation by emphasizing another important theme that emerged throughout this research: despite their frustrations, special educators are passionate about the work they do helping students. In addition, Ms. Bost shared a summary of the next steps:

- Increase pay
- Reduce paperwork requirements and provide more planning time
- Hire IEP data clerks to help with caseloads
- Make systems/protocols less redundant and more user-friendly

### **Exit Ticket Feedback**

The exit ticket distributed at the end of this meeting asked “Given our guiding question, How can MSDE ensure the effective implementation of IEPs, including technical assistance, monitoring, and uniform data collection?” Workgroup members responded to the following prompts related to that overarching question:

1. What specific takeaways, ideas, or suggestions do you have for how MSDE can improve technical assistance?
2. What specific takeaways, ideas, or suggestions do you have for how MSDE can improve uniform data collection?
3. What specific takeaways, ideas, or suggestions do you have for how MSDE can improve monitoring?
4. What are your thoughts or suggestions on recommendations this Workgroup could propose to make the Maryland Online IEP system “better” and that MSDE could bring forward to the MOIEP workgroup for consideration?

An overview of the feedback received during breakout sessions and from the exit ticket can be found in Appendix G.

## Key Takeaways

- The workgroup reviewed and approved a recommendation related to Specially Designed Instruction: MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with tasks and timelines within 60 days. The plan should include:
  - MSDE should increase its capacity (staff positions, knowledge base, and/or means) to provide sufficient guidance and TA;
  - Guidance and TA to LEAs, including review of current TABs and creation of more accessible guidance for educators and staff, to increase understanding that SDI requires evidence-based specially designed instruction as part of services that are reasonably calculated to enable each student's goals to be achieved;
  - Dissemination of a menu of evidence-based best practices that LEAs must select from (subject to waivers); availability of TA on the evidence-based best practices based on ongoing needs assessments and monitoring; and guidance on factoring in, where appropriate, IEP Team judgment; and
  - The relationship between RTI and SDI (a continuation of the discussion of MTSS/RTI under the Topic of Integration).

## MEETING 7: MARCH 20, 2024

Workgroup members discussed recommendations derived from the February meeting and collaborate through small and large group discussions to address the multi-layered guiding questions below related to teacher qualifications, recruitment, and retention.

### Guiding Questions

1. What are the knowledge, skills, and expertise that general and special educators need to effectively teach all students, including students with disabilities?
2. How can educator preparation programs and licensure requirements for certification and recertification be better aligned to these knowledge, skills, and expertise?
3. What is the role of Higher Education vs. LEAs in developing the required knowledge, skills, and expertise? What short- and long-term strategies will enhance supply and encourage retention of general and special educators

### Pre-Reading: Teacher Qualifications, Recruitment & Retention

An issue brief addressing teacher qualifications, recruitment, and retention was shared with Workgroup members in preparation for meeting 7. As the brief explains, teachers are the most important factor affecting student outcomes with some estimates of their effect two to three times higher than any other in-school factor. For Maryland's students with disabilities, 72% of whom spend 80% or more of each school day in general education classrooms (LRE A), teacher quality among both general and special educators matters. Defining the knowledge and skills necessary for general and special educators to increase the use of evidence-based best practices will also positively impact those subsets of students with disabilities that have low and stagnant rates of inclusion in general education environments.

The remainder of the brief provided background knowledge around the prerequisite knowledge, skills and expertise for educators to effectively teach students with disabilities, the state of educator

preparation and licensure programs in Maryland, and the state of teacher shortages in Maryland and strategies that could improve both the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers.

### **Breakout Session 1: Knowledge, Skills, and Expertise of Special Educators and General Educators**

First, Workgroup members broke into small groups to discuss the following questions related to the knowledge, skills, and expertise of special and general educators:

- What are the knowledge, skills, and expertise that general and special educators need to effectively teach all students, including students with disabilities?
- How can educator preparation programs and licensure requirements for certification and recertification be better aligned to these knowledge, skills, and expertise?
- What is the role of higher education versus LEAs in developing the required knowledge, skills, and expertise?

### **Breakout Session 2: Recruitment and Retention of Special Educators**

Workgroup members participated in a second breakout discussion focused on the recruitment and retention of special educators. The questions that drove this discussion included:

- What short-term strategies will enhance supply and encourage retention of general and special educators?
- What long-term strategies will enhance supply and encourage retention of general and special educators?

### **Exit Ticket Feedback**

To conclude this meeting, Workgroup members were invited to complete an exit ticket related to critical educator knowledge, skills, and expertise. The exit ticket questions are included below. An overview of the feedback from this exit ticket and the breakout sessions can be found in Appendix H.

1. What knowledge, skills, and expertise do you think ALL educators should have (i.e., “a common trunk”) to effectively teach all students, including students with disabilities?
2. What knowledge, skills, and expertise (if any) should be specific to general educators and to special educators?
3. What specific takeaways, ideas, or suggestions do you have for improving the alignment of educator preparation programs and licensure requirements to the development of these knowledge, skills, and expertise? (Consider what roles MSDE, the LEAs, and Institutions of Higher Education should play).
4. What strategies do you think would be most effective in enhancing supply and encouraging retention of general and special educators?

### **Key Takeaways**

The Workgroup reviewed and approved the following recommendations related to effective IEP implementation:

- MSDE should develop a plan for a plan to address the effective implementation of IEPs, including technical assistance, uniform data collection, and monitoring, within 60 days. The plan should cover:
  - Technical assistance, including more direct support and coaching for IEP teams and LEAs from MSDE; clear, achievable standards linked to available resources; menus of evidence-based practices (instruction and interventions); accessible differentiated guidance documents for educators; and professional development.
  - Uniform data collection, including the need for review and revision of current data elements and technical assistance for collection and analysis of the data.
  - Monitoring: clear communication of the monitoring requirements and the criteria used to determine compliance, a balance between support and enforcement, and review of the composition of monitoring teams.
- MSDE should review the Maryland Online IEP (MOIEP) and Maryland Online Individualized Family Service Plan, including data collection, reporting capabilities, user experience, and current mechanisms for feedback and revision, with particular attention to families who do not speak English as their native language, and report on suggested improvements and/or alternatives within six months.

### **MEETING 8: APRIL 24, 2024**

Workgroup members discussed recommendations derived from the March meeting and collaborated through small and large group discussions to discuss what standards for evidence-based staffing models in special education and related services could be implemented in Maryland that would improve student outcomes and be sustainable, as well as what standards and guidance MSDE could offer to define and ensure appropriately trained and supervised staff are available throughout the systems?

#### **Guiding Question**

1. What evidence-based staffing models aligned with service delivery models for special education and related services could be implemented that would improve student achievement, be sustainable, improve working conditions, and encourage retention of educators?

#### **Review of MSDE's Current Practice: Staffing Plans**

Annually, Maryland LEAs develop and submit to MSDE a Special Education Staffing Plan, pursuant to COMAR 13A.05.02.13: A public agency shall develop a staffing plan consistent with the procedures provided by the Department to ensure that personnel and other resources are available to provide FAPE to each student with a disability in the least restrictive environment as determined by an IEP team. The local board shall approve the staffing plan. MSDE has a Staffing Plan Review Guide for LEA use that contains suggested content for each of the required elements of the staffing plan and a scoring rubric for internal LEA review and analysis of its plan. MSDE reviews the plans, but does not approve them, nor are they part of MSDE's comprehensive monitoring.

Wide variability is evident among the LEA plans in: the scope and content elements included, the level of specificity, and the process for development (including opportunities for stakeholder input and evidence of that input). There is also significant variability in staffing and student-provider ratios. Student-teacher ratios for self-contained special education classrooms are often specified in these

plans, but there is little or no explicit guidance for the allocation of special education staff to provide services under the various service delivery models to students who spend most of the day in general education classrooms.

### **Pre-Reading: Staffing Aligned with Service Delivery**

In preparation for this meeting, Workgroup members read an issue brief on the topic of staffing and service delivery which includes how, where, and by whom special education and related services are delivered to students with disabilities. The brief explains that this topic covers a variety of facets of staffing and provision of special education and related services— instructional models (e.g., co-teaching, small group, direct instruction from a special educator or related service provider, and consultation), locations (e.g., inside or outside of the general education classroom), types of personnel (e.g., general and special educators, related service providers, paraprofessionals, IEP chairs and clerks), student-teacher/provider ratios, and caseloads and workloads.

Ultimately, these decisions have wide-ranging impacts on students, educators, and school systems, including the academic achievement and social growth of students, the working conditions of educators, and the budgets of schools and districts. Decisions about service delivery overlap with other recent topics we have explored in the Workgroup: how IEP teams define specially designed instruction and the knowledge, skills, and expertise of educators. With respect to funding—a future Workgroup topic—staffing is limited by financial and resource constraints. Staffing for service delivery models based on limited funding results in staffing that does not provide FAPE as mandated by IDEA and also negatively affects working conditions and teacher retention.

### **Breakout Groups and Exit Ticket Feedback**

Workgroup members participated in a breakout discussion focused on staffing and service delivery and were asked for their individual feedback on these topics in the exit ticket. The questions that drove the breakout discussions and were included in the exit ticket can be found below. A summary of the feedback from small group discussions and exit tickets can be found in Appendix I.

1. What evidence-based standards for staffing should MSDE require annually in LEA Staffing Plans?
2. What guidance, if any, should MSDE provide to LEAs on class sizes in general and special education classrooms and proportions of students with and without disabilities in general education classrooms, at different grade levels?
3. What evidence-based standards or guidance for teacher/provider-student ratios under various service delivery models should be adopted by MSDE?
4. What workload standards based on best practices or professional judgment could MSDE set?
5. What staffing standards and guidance could MSDE define to support the alignment of staffing with service delivery models?
6. What standards for hiring, training, and utilizing paraprofessionals as part of students' IEPs could be established by MSDE to ensure that appropriately trained and supervised personnel positively impact student learning? What strategies could be employed to reduce overreliance on paraprofessionals?

## Key Takeaways

The Workgroup reviewed and approved the following recommendations related to Teacher Qualifications, Recruitment & Retention:

- MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with tasks and timelines within 60 days to ensure that general and special educators have the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed to effectively teach students with disabilities (as compiled by the Workgroup). The plan should consider:
  - A review and revision of COMAR to align standards and competencies, clinical experiences, and entrance and exit requirements for educator preparation programs (EPPs) and the requirements for initial licensure and renewal of licensure for educators and administrators with the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed to effectively teach students with disabilities.
  - A review in collaboration with IHEs of current EPPs (traditional and alternative), focusing on the development of general and special education teacher candidates who can effectively teach students with disabilities.
  - Developing standards in collaboration with LEAs and IHEs for systemic support of early career teachers (e.g., IHE faculty in schools as coaches).
  - Developing standards in collaboration with LEAs for professional learning and ongoing support, coaching, and mentoring of general and special education teachers and related service providers to effectively teach students with disabilities.
- MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with tasks and timelines within 60 days to enhance supply and encourage retention of general and special educators. The plan should consider:
  - Development of innovative recruitment proposals in collaboration with MHEC/IHEs and LEAs (e.g., dual certification programs; programs for general educators to add special education licensure; School to Teacher pipeline/recruitment of HS students, Grow Your Own programs, paid student teaching, and loan forgiveness).
  - Developing a rebranding strategy for special education.
  - Developing teacher career ladders in collaboration with LEAs that provide adequate co-planning and noninstructional time, provide equal opportunity to special education teachers, and consider innovative proposals for additional training (e.g., teacher sabbaticals; paid summer training programs).
  - Determining if paperwork can be reduced for teachers and related service providers.
  - Developing professional learning for principals in collaboration with LEAs on developing inclusive mindsets and high expectations in school communities, and improving school culture, including more respect and support for educators.

## Recommendations

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The Workgroup is committed to making research-based systemic recommendations that will revisit and improve every aspect of education for Maryland's students with disabilities. To that end, the following recommendations focus on the themes explored during Workgroup meetings.

As the Workgroup continues its study of evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, it will identify additional recommendations to improve statewide systems and policies that will enable Maryland to implement these recommendations. This will be reflected in the December 2024 final report.

The Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services has initiated plans for each of the approved recommendations which include major components, key activities within each major component, timeline for activities, lead, support partner(s), and completion date. A draft of the plan for a plan for recommendation 2 (monitoring) has been included in Appendix J. In addition, the Division has created a shared project tracker to monitor progress in fulfilling each of the proposed recommendations.

### STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS UNDER IDEA FOR SWDS TO ACHIEVE, INCLUDING AMBITIOUS IEP GOALS

#### Recommendation 1: Standards and Expectations

COMAR and MSDE guidance should be revised to explicitly provide:

- Students without significant cognitive disabilities are legally entitled to IEP goals and services that enable them to meet grade-level standards. When these students are behind grade-level standards, they should receive IEP goals/services that enable them to close or narrow the gap between standards and their performance levels.
- Students with significant cognitive disabilities are legally entitled to IEP goals/services that enable them to access grade-level content standards (i.e., the general education curriculum) and meet alternate grade-level standards. Goals should be based on evidence-based instructional practices, related services, and LRE principles that maximize their potential.

#### Recommendation 2: Monitoring

Review state monitoring tools and compliance protocols to ensure that IEP goals narrow or close the gap between present levels of achievement and grade-level standards, and that, based upon research and professional judgment, IEP services are reasonably calculated to enable the goals to be achieved.

#### Recommendation 3: Comprehensive Early Literacy Plan

MSDE should develop a comprehensive early literacy plan to ensure that all students in general education receive evidence-based instruction, including high-dosage tutoring, within an MTSS/RTI framework in general education, with the highest priority in grades K-3.



## **SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION**

### **Recommendation 4: State-Level Capacity and Guidance on SDI**

MSDE should develop a plan for a plan to address state-level capacity and guidance around implementing specially designed instruction (SDI). This plan should include:

- MSDE should increase its capacity (staff positions, knowledge base, and/or means) to provide sufficient guidance and TA
- Guidance and TA to LEAs, including review of current Technical Assistance Bulletins and creation of more accessible guidance for educators and staff, to increase understanding that SDI requires evidence-based specially designed instruction as part of services that are reasonably calculated to enable each student's goals to be achieved
- Dissemination of a menu of evidence-based best practices that LEAs must select from (subject to waivers); availability of TA on the evidence-based best practices based on ongoing needs assessments and monitoring; and guidance on factoring in, where appropriate, IEP Team judgment
- The relationship between RTI and SDI (a continuation of the discussion of MTSS/RTI under the Topic of Integration.)

## **IEP IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Recommendation 5: Effective Implementation of IEPs**

MSDE should develop a plan for a plan to address effective implementation of IEPs, including technical assistance, uniform data collection and monitoring, within 60 days. The plan for a plan should include:

- Technical assistance, including more direct support and coaching for IEP Teams and LEAs from MSDE; clear, achievable standards linked to available resources; menus of evidence-based best practices (instruction and interventions); accessible differentiated guidance documents for educators; and professional development
- Uniform data collection, including the need for review and revision of current data elements and technical assistance for collection and analysis of the data
- Monitoring: clear communication of the monitoring requirements and the criteria used to determine compliance, a balance between support and enforcement, and review of composition of Monitoring teams.

## **MONITORING, DATA COLLECTION, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

### **Recommendation 6: Review of MOIEP**

MSDE should review the Maryland Online IEP (MOIEP), including data collection, reporting capabilities, user experience, and current mechanisms for feedback and revision, and report on suggested improvements and/or alternatives within six months.

## TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

### Recommendation 7: Knowledge, Skills, and Expertise

MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with tasks and timelines within 60 days to ensure that general and special educators have the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed to effectively teach students with disabilities (as compiled by the Workgroup). The plan should consider:

- A review and revision of COMAR to align standards and competencies, clinical experiences, and entrance and exit requirements for educator preparation programs (EPPs) and the requirements for initial licensure and renewal of licensure for educators and administrators with the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed to effectively teach students with disabilities
- A review in collaboration with IHEs of current EPPs (traditional and alternative), focusing on the development of general and special education teacher candidates who can effectively teach students with disabilities
- Developing standards in collaboration with LEAs and IHEs for systemic support of early career teachers (e.g., IHE faculty in schools as coaches)
- Developing standards in collaboration with LEAs for professional learning and ongoing support, coaching, and mentoring of general and special education teachers and related service providers to effectively teach students with disabilities

### Recommendation 8: Recruitment & Retention of Educators

MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with tasks and timelines within 60 days to enhance supply and encourage retention of general and special educators. This plan should consider:

- Development of innovative recruitment protocols in collaboration with MHEC/IHEs and LEAs (e.g., dual certification programs, programs for general educators to add special education licensure, School to Teacher pipeline/recruitment of high school students, Grow Your Own programs, paid student teaching, and loan forgiveness)
- Developing a rebranding strategy for special education
- Developing teacher career ladders in collaboration with LEAs that provide adequate co-planning and noninstructional time, provide equal opportunity to special education teachers, and consider innovative proposals for additional training (e.g., teacher sabbaticals, paid summer training programs)
- Determining if paperwork can be reduced for teachers and related service providers
- Developing professional learning for principals in collaboration with LEAs on developing inclusive mindsets and high expectations in school communities and improving school culture, including more respect and support for educators

## Appendices

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### **APPENDIX A**

Agenda from the fourth Blueprint Special Education Workgroup meeting held on November 29, 2023.

### **APPENDIX B**

Agenda from the fifth Blueprint Special Education Workgroup meeting held on January 30, 2024.

### **APPENDIX C**

Agenda from the sixth Blueprint Special Education Workgroup meeting held on February 28, 2024.

### **APPENDIX D**

Agenda from the seventh Blueprint Special Education Workgroup meeting held on March 20, 2024.

### **APPENDIX E**

Agenda from the eighth Blueprint Special Education Workgroup meeting held on April 24, 2024.

### **APPENDIX F**

Exit ticket responses from Meeting 5.

### **APPENDIX G**

Feedback from breakout groups and exit ticket responses from Meeting 6.

### **APPENDIX H**

Feedback from breakout groups and exit ticket responses from Meeting 7.

### **APPENDIX I**

Feedback from breakout groups and exit ticket responses from Meeting 8.

### **APPENDIX J**

Draft plan for a plan for Recommendation 2: Review state monitoring tools and compliance protocols to ensure that IEP goals narrow or close the gap between present levels of achievement and grade-level standards, and that, based upon research and professional judgment, IEP services are reasonably calculated to enable the goals to be achieved.

## Appendix A: Meeting 4 Agenda



## Blueprint Special Education Workgroup

**Wednesday, November 29, 2023 | 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

YouTube streaming link: <https://youtube.com/live/LjC5RQ8diKM?feature=share>

**Welcome**

- Dr. Carey Wright, Interim State Superintendent of Schools
- Liz Zogby, Special Education Policy & Advocacy

**Public Comment**

- Registered Guests

**Meeting #3 Guiding Question Continued**

- How can general and special education be more effectively integrated so that the instruction and built-in supports in general education can better meet the needs of students, resulting in fewer referrals and identification?

**Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Expert Presentation**

- Rebecca Zumeta Edmonds is a managing researcher at the AIR in Washington, DC, where she serves as the co-director of the National Center on Intensive Intervention, and as project director for an Investing in Innovation and Improvement (i3) Development Grant. She previously coordinated services for the Response to Intervention Center at AIR and led the Knowledge Utilization service area of the National Center on Systemic Improvement.

**Introduction of Nathan Levinson and Small Group Discussions**

- Giving Voice to Workgroup Members

**Future Meetings and Next Steps**

- Timelines/Due Dates
- Initial Report
- Small Group Meetings with Nate Levinson and Dr. Antoine Hickman (December – January)
  - Exploration
  - Prioritization
  - Recommendations
- January 30, 2024 – Guiding Question #4: How can general and special education be more effectively integrated so that all students with disabilities are able to access and participate in the general education curriculum with their nondisabled peers while also receiving the specially designed instruction and related services and supports they need to be successful?

## Appendix B: Meeting 5 Agenda



## Special Education Workgroup Agenda

**Wednesday, January 30, 2024 | 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

YouTube streaming link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfPwYRZJI3Q>

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**Welcome**

- Thank you from the Co-Chairs

**Public Comment**

- Registered Guests

**Discussion of the Arc of Future Discussions**

- Share Feedback and Process Changes

**MSDE Overview on Current SDI Guidance**

- Brief Overview

**SDI Panel**

- Moderated Panel with Consultant, Nate Levenson
  - Diane McGowan, Director, Specially Designed Instruction and Compliance  
Anne Arundel County Public Schools  
Department of Special Education
  - Beth Morton, Principal, Huntingtown High School  
Calvert County Public Schools
  - Ericka Levy, Psy. D., Educational Specialist II  
Behavior Consultation Team  
Baltimore City Public Schools

**Small Group Discussion**

- Breakout Groups

**Large Group Share Out**

- Each Group Shares Highlights

**Exit Ticket**

- Workgroup Member Opportunity for feedback

**Wrap Up/Closing**

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## Appendix C: Meeting 6 Agenda



## Special Education Workgroup Agenda

**Wednesday, February 28, 2024 | 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

YouTube streaming link: <https://youtube.com/live/VJ25K2t92tg?feature=share>

**Welcome**

- Dr. Carey Wright, Interim State Superintendent of Schools
- Liz Zogby, Special Education Policy & Advocacy

**Public Comment****Workgroup feedback from January 30th meeting****Proposed Recommendations**

- Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)

**MSDE Updates on Workgroup Recommendations****Overview of Current Technical Assistance, Uniform Data Collection, and Monitoring****Small Group Breakouts**

- **Topic: Technical Assistance**
  1. What additional ideas do you have for Technical Assistance provided by MSDE?
- **Topics: Uniform Data Collection and Monitoring**
  2. In your opinion, what is the "right" data and measurements to ensure effective IEP implementation? What support do school systems and practitioners need to collect data?
  3. Are there instances in your work where too much or too little data is required?
  4. Do you feel there is a clear understanding of monitoring standards and expectations?
  5. Do you have ideas for how MSDE monitoring can be improved? Are there aspects of monitoring that you would recommend keeping in place?
  6. How do you feel about the "judgements" of monitors? Are there patterns of disagreements over their findings?

**Breakout Group Share Out with Workgroup****Exit Ticket Reflections****Guest Speaker**

- Cheryl Bost, President, Maryland State Education Association

**Wrap Up**

Maryland State Department of Education

## Appendix D: Meeting 7 Agenda



## Special Education Workgroup Agenda

**Wednesday, March 20, 2024 | 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

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YouTube streaming link: <https://youtube.com/live/7cmFHAzZeuo?feature=share>

**Welcome**

- Dr. Carey Wright, Interim State Superintendent of Schools
- Liz Zogby, Special Education Policy & Advocacy

**Public Comment**

**Highlights from February 28th**

**Discussion of Potential Recommendations**

**Knowledge, Skills & Expertise of Special Educators and General Educators**

- Breakout Groups
- Large Group Share Out

**Recruitment and Retention of Special Educators Breakout Groups**

- Breakout Groups
- Large Group Share Out

**Exit Ticket Reflections**

**Wrap Up/Closing**

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Maryland State Department of Education

## Appendix E: Meeting 8 Agenda

**Special Education Workgroup Agenda****Wednesday, April 24, 2024 | 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.**

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YouTube streaming link: <https://youtube.com/live/6bpLNwoEWyc?feature=share>**Welcome**

- Dr. Carey Wright, Interim State Superintendent of Schools
- Liz Zogby, Special Education Policy & Advocacy

**Public Comment****Highlights from March 20th****Discussion of Potential Recommendations****Current MSDE Practices**

- Staffing and Service Delivery

**Breakout Groups****Large Group Share Out****Special Education Blueprint Report Update****Exit Ticket Reflections****Wrap Up/Closing**

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Maryland State Department of Education



## Appendix F: Meeting 5 Exit Ticket Feedback

### Guidance/Technical Assistance

- More accessible guidance documents with practical guidance for IEP teams
- Areas needed:
  - How goals align to grade-level standards; creating goals and accommodations for all students with disabilities (including students who take the alternate assessment)
  - Comprehensive view of student support including paraeducators, related services, etc.
  - Identifying evidence-based practices, including interventions, to support students with SLD (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia)
  - How to adjust interventions for students when needed (I in IEP)
  - IEP progress monitoring
  - Data collection and analysis specifically related to increased student needs post-pandemic (for IEP coordinators and key central staff)
  - Co-teaching strategies

### Relationship between MSDE and LEAs

- Increased communication, less punitive
- Facilitate sharing of knowledge, resources and training across LEAs
- Support for LEAs to find and apply for grants

### MTSS

- Approved lists of evidence-based practices/interventions for LEAs to choose from; comprehensive resource bank; toolkit of EBPs for common issues (e.g., phonemic awareness)
- Stronger, standardized statewide MTSS process
- Clear, empirically based assessments that measure student progress on state standards available to all LEAs
- Universal progress monitoring platform (align IEP goals/objectives to state standards)

### Data Collection and Analysis

- Transparent, easily accessible on MSDE's website

### Monitoring

- Include enforcement action/more accountability
- Less punitive/more collaborative
- Acknowledge that special education is only one component of instructional team that should be held accountable for student progress
- Accountability to determine individual student progress on IEP goals and objectives

- Support consistency across all LEAs – ensure knowledge and design of programs are in alignment

#### Professional Development

- Systematic PD offered by MSDE
- Quarterly modules for teachers, with PD credit
- Effective co-teaching strategies
- IEP progress monitoring

#### Teacher Training/EPPs

- Collaborate with IHEs on developing well-rounded general educators
- Expand course requirements for general educators to include advocacy and instructional strategies/SDI
- Emphasis on co-teaching

#### Teacher Retention

- Address teacher workload issues caused by excessive oversight and mandates

#### Parent Engagement

- Get “ground view” of what is happening in each LEA through more frequent “spot checks on LEAs,” attend SECAC meetings, conduct two surveys of parents and community stakeholders per year
- Collaboration/information sharing with families and advocates/lawyers about FAPE (MSDE lead to lessen this load on LEAs – energy, time, staffing)

**Appendix G: Meeting 6 Breakout Group and Exit Ticket Feedback**

What specific takeaways, ideas, or suggestions do you have for how MSDE can improve technical assistance?

Coaching model (for IEP chairs, for teachers)

- Train the Trainers (for large LEAs)
- Direct support from MSDE; dedicated MSDE liaison for each LEA who could learn specific factors impacting that LEA and help determine/prioritize needs
- More MSDE staff needed for support
- Guidance should be:
  - short/chunked
  - more accessible/easy-to-understand
  - differentiated for different audiences
  - searchable in a central platform
  - disseminated/publicized (educators don't know they exist)
- More attention to who gets what TA – transition coordinators, IEP chairs, administrators, general educators
- Evidence-based practices
  - High dosage tutoring
  - High leverage practices
  - Discipline
- Data collection – what data is needed, how to collect it, and why they need to collect it
- Train LEAs in monitoring process to facilitate greater self-monitoring

What specific takeaways, ideas, or suggestions do you have for how MSDE can improve uniform data collection?

- Universal data tools where multiple stakeholders can input data (use of MOIEP for embedded data collection)
- Data should be collected more frequently – spot checks, “in real time” that will be easier for teachers and more actionable
- Time cost for data collection should be accounted for in staffing
- Dedicated staff member assigned to review paperwork
- Create/publish a calendar of what data is collected/when
- Progress monitoring on student goals should be primary focus of data collection
  - Aligned to standards and student needs

- Narrow the gap
- Reasonably calculated
- Evidence-based
- Replicable and clear
- Supplementary aids
- Outcomes
- Growth measurements (trajectory of skill development)
- Probe for sample growth model
- Parent input (survey responses are too low)
- Too many IEP goals is counterproductive (increases workload without improving outcomes, worry about authenticity of data)

What specific takeaways, ideas, or suggestions do you have for how MSDE can improve monitoring?

- Monitoring teams should include:
  - Specialists who can determine if goals and services are appropriate
  - Parents
  - Peer monitor (i.e., Special Ed director/staff from other LEAs)
- Educate teachers and school-based staff on monitoring – consider asynchronous courses for CE credit
- Greater enforcement
- School site visits (like Blueprint ERTs)
- Coaching cycle – with 3 goals for LEA to work on and follow-up coaching

What are your thoughts or suggestions on recommendations this Workgroup could propose to make the Maryland Online IEP system “better” and that MSDE could bring forward to the MOIEP workgroup for consideration?

- Facilitate flexibility and creativity
- More drop-down menus for goals and objectives
- All LEAs should be required to use the same system
- iPad compatible
- If there is a workgroup, Kara Muffley would be a great resource
- Customizable reports and forms (like TieNet)
- Focus on student needs not adults; caution about cookie-cutter approaches in IEPs that drive individualized instruction

- Standard tool for progress monitoring and data about implementation fidelity
- Update all dates in supplementary aids instead of entering each one separately

**Appendix H: Meeting 7 Breakout Group and Exit Ticket Feedback**

What knowledge, skills, and expertise do you think ALL educators should have (i.e., “a common trunk”) to effectively teach all students, including students with disabilities?

- Content knowledge/state standards
  - Basic ELA/math pedagogy
  - How to organize and break down content to make it accessible for learning
- Instruction/frameworks
  - UDL (Universal Design for Learning)
  - Inclusive teaching practices, incl. students w/ most significant disabilities
  - Co-teaching
  - Differentiation
  - Use of accommodations and supports in classroom
  - Modification
  - SDI
  - Overlap of instructional strategies/support for EL/SWD
  - AT and use of educational technology in classroom for diverse learning needs
- Special education law and policy (IEPs and 504s)
- Assessment
  - Informal/authentic/strengths-based assessment
  - Accessibility/accommodations in assessment
  - Diagnostic testing
  - Testing and designation of English Language Learners
- Behavioral principles/practices/management
  - Positive behavior supports
  - Positive classroom climate
  - CPI training (Crisis Prevention Institute)
  - Understanding behavior as communication
  - Reframing behavior as student “having a hard time, not giving a hard time”
- Trauma-informed
- Restorative practices and SEL
- Cultural competency/culturally responsive practices

- Understanding students and families
- Addressing biases
- Understanding intersectionality/disability
- Communication and Collaboration
  - With other adults in classroom/professionals
  - With families (including families who do not speak English)
  - Building relationships with all students
  - Supporting communicative competence (e.g., AAC), collaboration with SLP
- High expectations/mindset shift/inclusion/belief that all students can learn
- Awareness of post-school opportunities for SWD (work/postsecondary options)
- Child development and how students learn

What knowledge, skills, and expertise (if any) should be specific to general educators and to special educators?

- Specific to special educators
  - Advanced knowledge of:
    - Complexities of differentiation
    - Behavior support practices/management
    - Child development
    - Special education practices (collaboration, law, assessment, Tier 2/3 instruction, IEP process)
    - Learning process (how to further break down content for SDI for mastery)
- Specific to general educators
  - More than just one course in special education/disability
    - Understand learning disabilities and strategies that will help all (e.g., MLL, SWD), make learning accessible for all
    - How and why to reach all students
    - Understand diverse student needs
  - Advanced knowledge of:
    - Curriculum development
    - Classroom management
  - Content and pedagogy of Tier 1 instruction
    - Curriculum development
    - Classroom management

- How differentiate (including for understanding at multiple grade levels)

What specific takeaways, ideas, or suggestions do you have for improving the alignment of educator preparation programs and licensure requirements to the development of these knowledge, skills, and expertise? (Consider what roles MSDE, the LEAs, and Institutions of Higher Education should play).

- EPPs/Role of IHEs
  - Existing EPPs should include more:
    - Hands-on/school-based experiences for students
    - Courses explicitly about disability/special education for general education students
      - Hands on experiences in various settings
      - Working with students with variety of disabilities
    - All content courses should integrate how to differentiate content
    - Pedagogy, student diversity, child development, behavior
    - Case management training for special education students (including 3rd party billing, progress note writing)
    - Content knowledge for special education students
  - Align programs with professional standards (incl. National Board Certification), state standards, best practices, and the current needs in schools
  - Address disincentive of 5yr/Special Education programs - need extra time for field work and credits, but extra cost and time not offset by inc. pay for graduates
  - Develop dual certification programs
    - Pilot program: 5-yr dual certification program with residency component where IHE faculty support pre-service teachers with mentoring and coaching through internship and 1st yr of teaching
  - Put all general/special education students in common courses for 1<sup>st</sup> semester
  - Dismantle silos in EPPs – streamline to look more like schools/classrooms
  - Develop a “school track” for related service providers
  - Graduate programs include greater emphasis on SWD, special education, understanding of post-school outcomes
- Licensure/Role of MSDE
  - Recertification requirements:
    - Emphasis on disability/special education (to limit barriers to initial licensure for out-of-state teachers)
    - Focus on differentiation and working with MLL and SWD (over ELA/math)



- Emphasize educators are lifelong learners; problem that teachers reach point where they don't need any more continuing ed to get re-certified
- Support LEAs in identifying and implementing training programs (behavior and child development)
- Role of LEAs
  - Professional development/learning should include:
    - Goal that all educators have a shared knowledge base (new/experienced, in/out of state, special/general)
    - Emphasize teaching SWD, special education, understanding of post-school outcomes
    - Focus on instruction/pedagogy, not just specific content
  - Provide wrap-around instructional support for educators
  - Principals should be instructional leaders, but often overwhelmed with administrative duties
  - Mentoring/coaching – develop individual development plans for educators to get coaching and grow in areas where they struggle
- Collaboration of LEAs, IHEs and MSDE
  - Pay student teachers
  - Create/refine feedback loop to IHEs for new educators' missing competencies
  - MSDE specialists and IHE faculty collaborate on integrating “common trunk” content into current coursework

What strategies do you think would be most effective in enhancing supply and encouraging retention of general and special educators?

- Supply
  - School to Teacher Pipeline: Encourage high school students to pursue teaching
    - Apprenticeship model
    - CTE model
    - Financial incentives for coming back to your county to teach
    - State scholarships/grants
    - Loan forgiveness
    - High School to Teaching program (MCPS), Teacher Academy of MD (TAM) in Charles County
  - Encourage paraprofessionals to become teachers; daycare providers to become early childhood educators (e.g., Towson)

- Encourage teachers who lose positions (Howard, BCPS) to pivot to area of need (special education – with additional training)
- Rebranding of Special Education profession
  - More than “dealing with behaviors,” value of neurodivergence
  - Public ad/social media campaign about need for/rewards of teaching
- Pay student teachers for a year
- Accelerate students through innovative EPPs via IHE/LEA cooperation
- Understand why MD relies on out-of-teacher teacher training programs. Ensure that teachers in MD have skills to implement the Blueprint.
- Retention
  - *Paperwork [mixed opinions]*
    - Lessen paperwork burden
    - Paperwork isn’t the reason people leave
    - Standardize paperwork across LEAs – lack of uniformity
    - Shift paperwork to case manager model
  - *Culture of school*
    - Team approach
    - Student focused/whole child approach/focus on student strengths
    - Respect/support of/compassion for teachers from administration
    - Trust and relationships prioritized; requires time
  - *Support for early career teachers*
    - Less about benefits – more about support to be successful
    - Student teaching with master teachers – longer than 1 semester
    - Must be systemic
    - Focus on individual development (identify areas for growth; offer support)
    - Don’t give first year teachers the most difficult assignments
    - Protect planning time with mentors of new teachers
  - Support for all teachers
    - Support mental health
    - Task Force on SEL and building resiliency in teachers (what support do teachers need) – LEAs to implement solutions

- 
- Ongoing coaching/feedback
  - Clear communication and expectations, and tools to meet expectations
  - Reduce noninstructional responsibilities of teachers
  - In classrooms: provide adequate staffing and consult support when needed
  - Increase pay
  - Balance pay across state
  - Time – for planning, for relationship building (no IEP writing at home)
  - Sabbaticals – every 3-4 years, mini-sabbatical to learn new technique
  - Leadership academy/training for principals on building positive, collaborative culture and community in schools
  - Training for coaching/mentoring
  - Related Service Providers need:
    - Mentors
    - Collaborative/team environment (for support and for sick days etc.)
  - Caseload parity and Workload analysis
  - Incentives for dual certification
  - Shorten school week to 4/4 ½ days to compete with remote work; student/teacher mental health; time for teacher collaboration, PD
  - Town hall with MSDE
  - Importance of collaboration of MSDE, IHEs and LEAs to make these strategies work

## Appendix I: Meeting 8 Breakout Group and Exit Ticket Feedback

### Staffing Plans

- MSDE should gather evidence-based standards (from research literature, other states' standards, national organizations like ASHA, AOTA, NEA) for LEAs to use in development of staffing plans
- MSDE should provide guidance on how LEAs should adapt if they can't fully meet staffing standards
- MSDE should require LEAs to have transparent processes for developing staffing plans (timelines, circulate draft, discuss at board meeting, public comment period)
- LEAs should have standing advisory boards (teachers, principals, support staff, HR, parents, students) to provide input on feasibility of plans and need for adaptations
- LEAs should maintain "staffing pools" to respond to changes in staffing needs throughout the year
- Staffing plans should include numbers of vacancies, and the LEA's plan to provide FAPE in light of vacancies
- Staffing plans should include discussion of student outcomes and how the new plan will lead to improved student outcomes

### Standards for Service Delivery

- Baseline standards for teacher/staff to student ratios for different service delivery models at elementary, middle, and high school levels, with flexibility (with justification)
- Staffing must be based on student needs, not what LEAs can afford
- Ideas for standards:
  - No more than 30% of students requiring specialized instruction in co-taught classes
  - Cap of 8 students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in one class, with at most a 2:1 student to provider ratio)
  - Ratios for public and nonpublic separate schools should be the same
  - Natural proportions of students with disabilities in elementary school classrooms
  - When the primary provider for SDI is the general education teacher, add consult with special education teacher for design of SDI
  - Document small group size in IEP
  - Cap on small group size
  - Baseline standards for how a special educator's time should be split between instruction, evaluations, case management/paperwork, preparation/planning, supervising paras. Standards for the use of Blueprint-required noninstructional time should be provided
  - Provide guidance on evidence-based collaborative instructional models, including standards for scheduling and co-planning time

- Define IEP Chair role including scope, training, and how the position should be funded

#### Paraprofessionals

- MSDE should develop standards for paraprofessionals including:
  - Minimum qualifications
  - On the job training to help them reach standards over time
  - Develop baseline certification (e.g., associate degree and school-based practicum)
  - Increase pay and benefits
  - Career path models
  - Determining a 1:1 aide as an appropriate support
  - Appropriate role/tasks for aides/paraprofessionals (e.g., paraprofessionals should deliver academic instruction)
- Robust training (with MSDE support) with annual professional development requirements to include:
  - See CEC Core Competencies
  - Personal care (feeding, hygiene, toileting)
  - Behavior principles and practices
  - Data collection
  - Knowledge about disabilities
  - Inclusive best practices
- Data collection on the use of paraprofessionals and contracted vs. employees
- Inform parents that goal is to fade support and to develop student independence to the extent possible
- Provide training to teachers on supervision and appropriate roles for paraprofessionals

**Appendix J: Draft Plan for a Plan, Recommendation #2 (Monitoring)**

**Recommendation #2:** Review State monitoring tools and compliance protocols to ensure that IEP goals narrow or close the gap between present levels of achievement and grade-level standards, and that, based upon research and professional judgment, IEP services are reasonably calculated to enable the goals to be achieved.

**Category:** Standards and expectations under IDEA for SWDs to achieve, including ambitious IEP goals

Major components	Activities	Timeline for Activities	Lead	Support Partners*	Completion Date
<b>A. Identify best practices for the monitoring of narrowing the achievement gap</b>	<b>A1.</b> Review current research/evidence-based practices for monitoring	9/30/2024	Policy and Accountability (P&A) Branch	Federal TA Providers OSEP PSTA Branch	December 31, 2024
	<b>A2.</b> Review published Differentiated Monitoring and Support Reports from Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)	9/30/2024			
	<b>A3.</b> Initiate conversations with federal Technical Assistance (TA) providers	Ongoing			
	<b>A4.</b> Review guidance documents created by the Performance Support and Technical Assistance (PSTA) Branch	12/31/2024			
<b>B. Investigate inclusion of content experts in the current Case Study process</b>	<b>B1.</b> Initiate conversations within the MSDE Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL)	7/1/2024	P&A Branch	MSDE, OTL Special Education State Advisory Council (SESAC) Local Special Education Directors	June 1, 2025
	<b>B2.</b> Explore appropriate opportunities for various stakeholders (parents and Special Education Administrators) to contribute to the monitoring process	3/30/2025			
	<b>B3.</b> Identify additional stakeholder roles and responsibilities during case study process	6/1/2025			
<b>C. Disseminate new monitoring tools to local leaders across the state and replace outdated version on the MSDE website</b>	<b>C1.</b> Based on revised and newly generated guidance, amend monitoring tools	9/1/2025	P&A Branch	LEAs LITPs MSDE, OTL	October 1, 2025
	<b>C2.</b> Conduct Monitoring Cohort Meeting with LEAs scheduled for monitoring in the 2024-2025 school year	10/1/2025			
	<b>C3.</b> Post revised monitoring documents on the MSDE website	10/1/2025			
	<b>C4.</b> Disseminate monitoring documents to LEAs, LITPs and stakeholders	10/1/2025			
<b>D. Implement a Revised Monitoring and Accountability Criteria Based on Updated Guidance</b>	<b>D1.</b> Implement new monitoring processes	2025-26 Cohort	P&A Branch	LEAs LITPs MSDE, OTL	September 1, 2026
	<b>D2.</b> Review monitoring process and documents during the 2025-2026 cohort year	2025-26 Cohort			
	<b>D3.</b> Revise (as needed) monitoring process and documents for the 2026-2027 cohort year	9/1/2026			