



# FOCUS on Results

Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services

May 2010

**In FOCUS***Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)*

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) regulations (300.167) require that each state establish and maintain an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for students with disabilities in the state.

The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is Michigan's State Advisory Panel to the State Board of Education (SBE) and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE).

This **FOCUS on Results** document includes:

- A look at how a cross-section of stakeholders are brought together to consider many perspectives when advising the SBE and the MDE. **Cover Story**
- Guidance to better understand the roles and duties of the SEAC. **Page 4**
- Technical assistance to address the SEAC at a meeting. **Page 7**

This **FOCUS on Results** document addresses:

## State and Federal Policy

2009-2010 Volume 8,  
Issue 3, Packet 18, Article 1

## Diverse Group of Stakeholders Provides Special Education Policy Guidance

Michigan's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Supports Opportunities for All Students

### SEAC

The mission of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is to support opportunities for all students in Michigan, especially those with disabilities, by gathering, sharing, and disseminating information to the public; advising the State Board of Education; and working with the Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE-EIS).

They hail from Detroit, Kalamazoo, Traverse City, even the little town of Norway, four hours west of the Mackinac Bridge. They are teachers, parents, school superintendents, social workers, and entrepreneurs. Some are longtime advocates of special education, others are beginners in the system. They are a diverse group, yet they're united in one purpose—to support opportunities for all students in Michigan, especially those with disabilities.

The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), a federally-mandated body, meets monthly during the school year to learn about, discuss, and offer advice to the state education agency on issues affecting students with disabilities. The 33-member committee consists

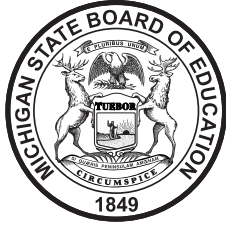
of representatives from 25 organizations plus 8 members-at-large, comprising what one member calls "Michigan's special education stakeholders in a microcosm."

The diversity of stakeholders makes the SEAC highly valued by the State Board of Education (SBE) and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) for its input on policy, performance goals, and the unmet needs of students with disabilities.

### Advisory Versus Advocacy

First-year SEAC delegate Gary Brandt became an activist for students with special needs in 2007 when he realized that his son's elementary school did not comply with today's accessibility standards. "Now our school is user-friendly for everybody."

Brandt is excited to offer his perspective as he begins his three-year SEAC term. Sharing unique experiences can be vital to the work of the SEAC. The array of backgrounds among the members is part of why the collective opinion of the SEAC members is so highly valued.



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2009-2010 Volume 8, Issue 3, Packet 18, Article 1

However, Brandt and other newcomers recognize that while they may come to the SEAC as advocates, their role as members of the SEAC is different.

Members of the SEAC Executive Committee are assigned as mentors to first-year members. The mentors guide the new members through the varying processes of the SEAC and orient them to the collaborative culture of this unique advisory committee.

Third-year member and SEAC vice-chair Tom Caldwell takes on mentoring duties. Beginning as a special education teacher in 1968 and now serving as superintendent of the Iosco Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA), Caldwell has deep roots in both general and special education, and a natural bent for consensus building.

"Everyone comes to the table as an advocate for their organization, for their cause. But we need to leave that advocacy role at the door," Caldwell says. "Here we're giving advice, not advocating. It's a subtle and important difference."

### A Single Voice

The SEAC is designed to help foster an environment where members share viewpoints in order to advise policy as a single voice. After any new issue has been introduced, members break up into small groups for structured discussion, ensuring that all members get a chance to speak.

Third-year SEAC member and supervisor of special education-related services at Eaton Intermediate School District (ISD) Sheri Kraft appreciates the small-group activities and ease of

communication within the SEAC. "It's a very participatory process. SEAC is structured so that we all have a voice...and not just the loudest voices are heard."

Arriving at a point where 33 individuals speak in a single voice usually requires some compromise. In this large and varied group, reaching consensus does not necessarily mean everyone shares the same view on a particular issue.

Rather, the SEAC has come to agreement on its collective advice, and that advice may point out where differences exist. The SEAC may make suggestions as to how those differences might be overcome. "We've never had so much dissension that we couldn't come to consensus. At SEAC, we're here to focus on the big picture—what's best for everybody," Caldwell says.

As an advisory panel, rather than advocacy committee, the work of the SEAC is done once the advice is sent on to the SBE and the MDE.

Though the SEAC works to advise as a collective entity, individuals find personal benefits as SEAC members. Jackie Igafo-Te'o of Jackson, a second-year SEAC member-at-large, is a mother of two students with special needs. "It's been really beneficial for me. Being a part of SEAC, I know what's going on."

Igafo-Te'o was particularly interested when the SEAC reviewed and advised on State Performance Plan (SPP) target rates for suspension and expulsion for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The discussions opened her eyes to how informal suspensions (e.g., the school requesting a parent take a child

### SEAC Composition

The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) members are appointed by the State Board of Education (SBE) and serve three-year terms. State law caps membership at 33. Twenty-five organizations are represented and eight at-large members are also appointed by the SBE.

As required by the IDEA, at least 51 percent of the members must be either individuals with disabilities or

parents of children with disabilities, ages birth through 26.

Eight ex-officio members attend meetings and provide input, though they do not vote. The ex-officio members always include the State Director of Special Education and the immediate past chair of the SEAC. The SEAC also includes additional ex-officio members representing various agencies.

### Organizations With SEAC Representation

American Federation of Teachers Michigan (AFTMi)

The Arc Michigan (Arc)

Autism Society of Michigan (ASM)

Citizens Alliance to Uphold Special Education (CAUSE)

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

Learning Disability Association of Michigan (LDAM)

Michigan Association for Children with Emotional Disorders (MACED)

Michigan Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (MASCD)

Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE)

Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA)

Michigan Association of Intermediate Special Education Administrators (MAISEA)

Michigan Association of Learning Disabilities Educators (MALDE)

Michigan Association of Local Special Education Administrators (MALSEA)

Michigan Association of Teachers of Children with Emotional Impairments (MATEDC)

Michigan Association of Nonpublic Schools (MANS)

Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA)

Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA)

Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB)

Michigan Association of School Social Workers (MASSW)

Michigan Association of School Psychologists (MASP)

Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP)

Michigan Education Association (MEA)

Michigan Speech-Language-Hearing Association (MSLHA)

Michigan Transition Services Association (MTSA)

Statewide Parent Advisory Committee (SPAC)

### Statement of Compliance With Federal Law

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) complies with all Federal laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination and with all requirements and regulations of the U.S. Department of Education (USED).

#### Compliance With Title IX

What Title IX is: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is the landmark federal law that bans sex discrimination in schools, whether it is in curricular, extra-curricular or athletic activities.

Title IX states: "No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid."

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is in compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended, 20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq. (Title IX), and its implementing regulation, at 34 C.F.R. Part 106, which prohibits discrimination based on sex. The MDE, as a recipient of federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education (USED), is subject to the provisions of Title IX. MDE does not discriminate based on gender in employment or in any educational program or activity that it operates.

The designated individual at the MDE for inquiries and complaints regarding Title IX is:

Norma Tims, Office of Career and Technical Preparation, Michigan Department of Education, Hannah Building, 608 West Allegan, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909, Phone: (517) 241-2091, Email: [timsn@michigan.gov](mailto:timsn@michigan.gov).



## Legal References to the SEAC

**Federal Statute—**  
*INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2004 (EXCERPT); Sec. 612 State Eligibility*

### (21) STATE ADVISORY PANEL—

(A) IN GENERAL—The State has established and maintains an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State.

**State Statute—***STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION (EXCERPT); Act 287 of 1964*

388.1009a Special education advisory committee; creation; appointment and terms of members; ex officio members; chairperson; expenses; duty.

Sec. 9a. The special education advisory committee is created in the department of education and shall consist of not less than 9 and not more than 33 members appointed by the state board of education for terms of 3 years. ...Each year the committee shall elect a chairperson and other officers as it considers necessary. ...The committee shall act as an adviser to the state board of education in the field of special education.



home without documentation) are not included in reported data. As a member of the SEAC, she is learning about issues that apply to her own personal concerns as a mother of students with disabilities. The work of the SEAC keeps her informed.

"Due to my involvement with SEAC," she says, "I feel educated and empowered."

## SEAC Web Site <http://seac.cenmi.org>

The SEAC Web site contains information on the committee's history, its current members, a meeting schedule, meeting notes archives, annual reports, and links to federal and state legislation.

## The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Roles and Responsibilities

The Special Education Advisory Committee's (SEAC) roots go back to Act 287 of 1964, which created a committee to "...act as an adviser to the state board of education in the field of special education."

The 1997 reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) mandated many changes that guide the role and responsibilities of the SEAC today.

### Public Comment

According to Elizabeth Bauer, member of the State Board of Education (SBE), "Policy direction

is best when it is informed by the people it affects...SEAC's work filters up through the department and is incorporated in the documents that come to the attention of the State Board for action."

The process of "filtering up" can take months. Sometimes members (in particular those new to the process) feel challenged by the pace. However, the SEAC members understand that their influence works to support improvements for students and the overall system of education.

The SEAC's advice on extended school year (ESY) services

### Quick Look at the SEAC

1. SEAC serves as an advisory committee to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE-EIS).
2. SEAC is a stakeholder group, which comes together to give advice.
3. The advice of SEAC is based on fact and good judgment.
4. SEAC provides policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in Michigan.
5. SEAC does not set policy.
6. SEAC is required by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA).
7. The diversity of SEAC membership enhances the quality of advice given.
8. SEAC participation helps members (contacts, information, etc.).

is a recent example of the committee's influence on policy. The SEAC's discussion of the issue revealed a wide range of opinions held among stakeholders in Michigan on the appropriate application of ESY for students with disabilities.

The SEAC informed the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) of the many differences among committee members. Their advice included recommendations on how the state might move forward to resolve these differences.

The resulting policy change dictates that a student's need for ESY be evaluated yearly and on an individual basis. Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan expressed his gratitude to the SEAC for its recommendations. Says Tom Caldwell, "SEAC's input helped to resolve that issue to everyone's satisfaction."

The process at times moves faster when the state seeks direct feedback on pressing issues, as it did in 2008, when drafting Proposed Professional Standards for Michigan Teachers.

"All of SEAC's suggestions were taken seriously, and many were incorporated into the final document," says Bonnie Rockafellow of the MDE Office of Professional Preparation Services. "It was important to get SEAC's feedback so that these standards would be appropriate for all teachers, not just those in general education."

## Target Work

Under the IDEA, Michigan is responsible for a six-year State Performance Plan (SPP) for special education. The SPP for special education is comprised of

20 performance indicators that measure the state's progress.

Eleven of the indicators are results indicators, with targets set by the state, rather than by the U.S. Department of Education. The SEAC provides feedback on the proposed targets, applying what some members call the Goldilocks test: are the proposed targets too high, too low, or "just right?" To do this job properly, SEAC members must be thoroughly versed in the results indicators under consideration.

Typically, one month's meeting is slated to have a learning session, with experts presenting on the rationale and intent of the proposed targets. The following month's meeting includes an "action item" when the SEAC makes a decision on its advice on the target. Action items are the formal advice the SEAC gives the MDE and the SBE.

To generate advice, the SEAC members break into small groups to discuss the issue at hand. According to Breitung Township Schools Director of Instruction, Jan Van Gasse, the 2008-2009 SEAC chair and a former at-large member, "This is very focused work—there's a lot of learning that has to go on. Everyone brings a different knowledge base, and the give-and-take between the old and new members is fascinating to watch."

Three SPP results indicators were on the SEAC's agenda for the 2009-2010 term: Indicator 4A (Suspension/Expulsion Rates among students with IEPs), Indicator 7 (Preschool Outcomes—goals for improving cognitive and social outcomes for preschool children with disabilities), and Indicator 8 (Facilitated Parent Involvement—how well are schools helping

## The SEAC's Role

- Advise the State Education Agency (SEA) of unmet needs within the state in the education of children with disabilities.
- Comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the state regarding the education of children with disabilities.
- Advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary.
- Advise the SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under Part B of the Act.
- Review and comment on completed due process hearing findings.
- Advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.
- Submit an annual report of its activities and suggestions to the SEA by July 1 of each year.



## SEAC 2009-2010 Agenda

During the 2009-2010 school year, the SEAC:

- Publicly commented on State Board of Education (SBE) policy on mental health in schools.
- Publicly commented on the rules packages proposed by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE-EIS), which includes a service plan for students with disabilities in non-public schools.
- Provided feedback on proposed targets for three State Performance Plan (SPP) performance indicators.
- Inaugurated virtual meetings in partnership with Michigan Virtual University.



parents become partners in their child's education).

## Unmet Needs

In addition to commenting on policy and providing feedback on SPP goals, the SEAC is charged with identifying unmet needs within special education and bringing them to the attention of the SBE and MDE.

One such need emerged in 2008 when a local school district faced termination of an evidenced-based practice (peer-mentoring program) due to a state pupil accounting audit. LINKS, supported by the Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START) project, connects students without disabilities and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during the school day to foster both academic success and positive social interaction.

As part of an elective credit, specially trained students accompany their-age students with ASD to their classes, modeling appropriate behavior and benefiting all involved. A pupil accounting auditor was concerned that the students without disabilities lacked engagement in their own education when participating in LINKS. The auditor interpreted this as a loss of classroom "seat time" for the specially-trained students, meaning the district would either have to close the program or lose funding.

A SEAC parent member brought the issue to light at a SEAC meeting. "This was an evidence-based program, and a win-win situation," says the SEAC member. "But the district was getting 'dinged' for implementing best practices."

Discussion among the SEAC revealed that the problem was statewide in scope, with several other districts avoiding experiential credit programs due to potential loss of funding.

"This was clearly a case of policy colliding with student needs," says one SEAC member. "These learning experiences are highly motivating to the students who participate in them. In many cases, it's the difference between a student staying in school and doing well, versus not staying at all."

Identifying situations like this, where policy may inhibit evidence-based programs and practices, is central to the SEAC's purpose. The committee drafted a letter to the SBE outlining its concerns, which the agency took under advisement.

The local school district retained its LINKS program, although doing so required an appeals process that lasted nearly a year. While the statewide issue has yet to be resolved, the SEAC's action may be an important "link" to potential changes—or clarifications—in pupil accounting policy that will better serve all students.

## Annual Report

At the end of each term, the SEAC publishes its annual report. This document is due to the State Education Agency (SEA) by July 1. The annual report reflects the important purpose and key activities of the committee over the past year and serves to provide advice to the state regarding the development of policy supporting the education of children with disabilities. The annual report is accessible to the public on the SEAC Web site.

# Public Welcomed at Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Meetings

*Meetings of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) shall be open to the public [34 CFR 300.653(d)].*

The public is welcome to attend and observe the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) meetings. Attendance at a meeting provides an opportunity to listen to presentations and discussions.

Members of the public are sometimes invited to join the SEAC members in their smaller discussion groups. This allows non-members to participate in the SEAC process and share their perspective, though they do not vote on final decisions.

Members of the public may also make a formal request to address the SEAC as a group. Anyone wishing to address the SEAC must fill out a form prior to the meeting. Forms are available online at <http://seac.cenmi.org> or on-site at the registration table.

A maximum of one hour is reserved for public participation at each SEAC meeting coming after roll call, adoption of the agenda, and approval of the minutes.

Presentations are limited to five minutes each, and the SEAC chair has discretion to adjust the time as the situation warrants.

Presenters must identify their name, address, and relevant organization to which they belong, if any. When speaking for an organization, the presenter should indicate if the presentation represents the organization's official position. If more than three people representing a single organizational unit or consortium wish to address the SEAC, the presentation is limited to one spokesperson with ten minutes or up to three presenters with three minutes each.

Presenters may wish to provide written statements in advance to the SEAC recording secretary to be made available to members of the committee.

Items identified during the public participation are reviewed at the end of the meeting when the committee discusses future agenda considerations.

## Request to Address the Meeting

A written request is required to address the meeting. Request forms are available at the SEAC Web site at <http://seac.cenmi.org>. The form can be filled out online or downloaded as a PDF.

You are required to provide your name, address, the subject to be discussed, and the represented organization (if applicable).

Request forms to address the meeting are also available at the registration table on-site at meetings.

## Meetings

The SEAC meets the first Wednesday of each month from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Meetings are held in Lansing and announced annually.

In January 2010, the SEAC held its first virtual meeting where members met online. Meeting agendas and related documents are available on the SEAC Web site at <http://seac.cenmi.org> and on-site at the registration table.

A regular SEAC meeting includes establishment of a quorum (at least 17 members), approval of the agenda and past meeting's summary, public participation, state department reports, reports from ex-officio members, committee reports, presentations, and dialogue.





The Center for Educational Networking (CEN) is a statewide education information network that produces and disseminates publications and documents related to the education of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

CEN produces ***FOCUS on Results*** to offer valuable, up-to-date information for special education stakeholders, including parents, teachers, school administrators, counselors, and others.

If you have access to the Web and would like to receive email updates when new issues of ***FOCUS on Results*** are available, send a request to [info@cenmi.org](mailto:info@cenmi.org) or visit [www.cenmi.org](http://www.cenmi.org) and click on the FOCUS icon.

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## FOCUS Highlights

- The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is federally mandated.
- The SEAC meets monthly to learn about, discuss, and offer advice to the state education agency on issues affecting students with disabilities.
- The SEAC members are a diverse group of 33 stakeholders appointed by the State Board of Education (SBE), and membership is defined by both state and federal statute.
- SEAC meetings include public participation.

## Glossary of Terms

**At-large members:** The eight members appointed to the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) by the State Board of Education (SBE). These members do not represent the organizational interests of any of the 25 organizations represented in the SEAC.

**Action:** The decision arrived at by the majority vote of the SEAC.

**State Performance Plan (SPP):** In 2004, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) reauthorization mandated the establishment of a six-year State Performance Plan (SPP) for each state's special education and early intervention programs. The SPP summarizes the state's outline for progress toward state- and federally-established goals. The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) identified 20 performance indicators to be monitored in the SPP.

## Resources

**Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Web Site**  
<http://seac.cenmi.org>

**Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE-EIS) State Performance Plan (SPP) Information**  
[http://michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530\\_6598\\_31834---,00.html](http://michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_6598_31834---,00.html)

**Understanding Michigan's State Performance Plan (SPP), Annual Performance Report (APR), and Public Reporting: *FOCUS on Results* 2007-2008, Volume #6, Issue #3, Packet #12, Article 1**  
[www.cenmi.org/Documents/FocusonResults/FocusonResultsDetails/tabid/79/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/75/Understanding-Michigans-State-Performance-Plan-SPP-Annual-Performance-Report-APR-and-Public-Reporting.aspx](http://www.cenmi.org/Documents/FocusonResults/FocusonResultsDetails/tabid/79/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/75/Understanding-Michigans-State-Performance-Plan-SPP-Annual-Performance-Report-APR-and-Public-Reporting.aspx)