

Iowa
**SPECIAL EDUCATION
ADVISORY PANEL**
Annual Report 2011-2012



VISION STATEMENT

All children in Iowa, as members of communities, shall receive opportunities and needed supports for meaningful lives and quality education experiences.

State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 E. 14th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel serves as a resource to advise the Iowa Department of Education on behalf of all children with special needs and their families. This Panel engages in dialogue regarding philosophies and policies, including best practices and special education compliance that result in successful outcomes for persons with disabilities. (2007)

PURPOSE:

“The purpose of the Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel is to provide policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities.”

DUTIES:

- a) Advise state education agency on unmet needs;
- b) Comment publicly on any rules and regulations proposed by the state;
- c) Advise State Education Agency (SEA) in developing evaluations and reporting data to the U.S. Department of Education Secretary under section 618 of the Act;
- d) Advise SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under Part B of this Act;
- e) Advise SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services.

34 C.F.R. §300.169 (2006)

2011-2012 MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Panel consists of representatives from both public and private sectors who, by virtue of their position, interest, and training, can contribute to the education of children with disabilities. A majority (51%) of the members of the Panel must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. The Director of the Iowa Department of Education (DE) appoints members to the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP).

Executive Committee:

Paul Greene – Chair
 Kelly Von Lehmden – Vice-Chair
 Marty Ikeda – Bureau Chief, Student and Family Support Services
 Eric Neessen – Panel Facilitator

Bureau Staff:

Amy Williamson – Administrative Consultant (DE)
 Frank Forcucci – Administrative Consultant (DE)
 Steve Crew – Administrative Consultant (DE)
 Beth Buehler-Sapp and Mary Bartlow – Panel Secretaries (DE)

Panel Members

NOTE: Of the 26 members, 15 members are individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities (= 58%). Parents are designated with a (*) in the table below.

	Panel Member	Home or Organization City	Representation	Term Ending
1	Ruth Allison	Des Moines	Vocational Rehab Services	2013 2 nd Term
2	Alyson Beytien*	Dubuque	Parent of child with a disability	2014 1 st Term
3	Kurtis Broeg	Parnell	Special Education Teacher	2014 1 st Term
4	Lucy Evans*	Waterloo	Parent of child with a disability Administrator	2012 2 nd Term
5	Joe Giangreco	Sidney	Administrator of programs for children with disabilities	2014 1 st Term
6	Jennifer Gomez*	Sioux City	Parent of child with a disability High School guidance counselor	2013 2 nd Term

	Panel Member	Home or Organization City	Representation	Term Ending
7	Diana Gonzalez	Urbandale	State Board of Regents	2010 appointed
8	Vicki Goshon*	Cedar Falls	Parent of child with a disability Special Education Teacher	2012 2 nd Term
9	Paul Greene* (Chair)	Waterloo	Parent of child with a disability	2012 2 nd Term
10	Lynn Helmke	Dubuque	Urban Education Network	2013 1 st Term
11	Dawn Jacobsen*	Fayette	Parent of child with a disability Higher education preparing special education personnel	2012 1 st Term
12	Jane Kinney	West Des Moines	Private school representative	2014 2 nd Term
13	Ron Koch*	Sioux City	Parent of child with a disability Administrator of programs for children with disabilities	2013 1 st Term
14	Andy Lawler*	Marshalltown	Parent of child with a disability AEA 267 PEC	2013 1 st Term
15	Amy Liddell*	Elliott	Parent of child with a disability Green Hills AEA PEC	2014 1 st Term
16	John O'Brien	Fort Dodge	Juvenile Corrections	2014 2 nd Term
17	Doug Penno	Elkader	Director of Special Education Keystone AEA 1	2012 1 st Term
18	Keri Osterhaus	Des Moines	Department for the Blind	2009 appointed
19	Beth Rydberg*	Des Moines	Parent of child with a disability Protection & Advocacy	2011 appointed
20	Sandra Smith	Des Moines	Adult Correctional Facility	2014 2 nd Term

	Panel Member	Home or Organization City	Representation	Term Ending
21	Ruth Stieff*	Clive	Parent of child with a disability Representative of a community organization	2014 2 nd Term
22	Karen Thompson*	Johnston	Parent of child with a disability PTI	2013 1 st Term
23	Ramona Valencia*	West Des Moines	Parent of child with a disability	2012 1 st Term
24	Kelly Von Lehmden* (Vice Chair)	Cedar Rapids	Parent of child with a disability	2012 1 st Term
25	Lisa Woiwood*	West Des Moines	Parent of child with a disability	2014 2 nd Term
26	Doug Wolfe	Des Moines	State Child Welfare Agency responsible for Foster Care	2014 1 st Term

MEETING DATES

The meetings were split between the West Des Moines Learning Center and the Grimes State Building. The January meeting was held via conference call due to inclement weather.

September 15, 2011
September 16, 2011
October 21, 2011
December 2, 2011
January 20, 2012
March 30, 2012
May 25, 2012

MAJOR TOPICS

The main theme of this year was “eliminating the achievement gap by 2020” between students with disabilities and those without disabilities. This challenge was proposed by Marty Ikeda and embraced by the SEAP members. The meetings throughout the year centered on this theme. Each meeting’s agenda included time for “nuts and bolts,” capacity building, and problem solving.

Improving Special Education

Marty presented a PowerPoint message titled, “Making Special Education More Effective: Step 2.” The purpose of this message was to outline the issues in eliminating the achievement gap between students with disabilities and those without disabilities. The suggestions made by Marty were related to the State Board of Education’s goals:

- All children will enter school ready to learn.
- All children will learn in a safe and caring environment.
- All children will leave school ready for life.

Prioritizing Needs

The following themes surfaced and were prioritized via a survey that was sent out to all members. The results are in order as follows:

1. Having good data to make better decisions
2. Identifying challenges in the system
3. Clarifying our message of eliminating the achievement gap
4. Preparing students for post-secondary
5. Recognizing the need for standardization and consistency statewide
6. Navigating the post-secondary possibilities and opportunities
7. Promoting innovation
8. Promoting a positive attitude in preparation of a long-term effort

Organizing Workgroups

SEAP leadership suggested that workgroups be formed to work on specific focus areas. These workgroups developed recommendations and brought those back to the larger SEAP for further discussion. The workgroups and their subsequent recommendations are as follows:

Post-Secondary Skills	
Description	Names
<p>It is a priority for SEAP to improve the post-secondary readiness level of students with IEPs. Students need to be educationally prepared and transitionally prepared to meet their next challenge of continued education and/or career. This should be a choice. The choice should be well-established and communicated in the IEP.</p>	Barb Guy (DE consultant)
	Ruth Allison
	John O'Brien
	Andy Lawler
	Ron Koch
	Keri Osterhaus
	Kurtis Broeg
	Jennifer Gomez
	Lisa Woiwood
	Lynn Helmke
Beth Rydberg	
Recommendations:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase student self-determination skills, including self-awareness, self-advocacy and goal setting. (Previous sentence would be an outcome.) Re-administer the student interview study to determine current baseline. Implement specific strategies and continue to probe student abilities throughout a 10-year process. 2. Increase quality and relevance of information and supports provided to parents of youth in transition, statewide to promote community paid work experience for all youth with IEPs. 3. Increase early and meaningful involvement of community and agency partners to promote community paid work experience for all youth with IEPs, including the identification of system measures that will reflect the abilities of youth with disabilities to be employed rather than exclude them from potential employment. 	

IEPs	
Description	Names
<p>An IEP is a tool used to create a student's plan for success. The likelihood of success depends, in part, on the effectiveness of the tool itself and also on the effective use of the tool. It is a priority for SEAP that the IEP be used in a consistent, effective manner across the state. The IEP should be data-based. The IEP should set high expectations. The IEP should truly be individualized. The IEP should monitor progress. SEAP will create a Work Group to investigate current situations and obstacles and make recommendations.</p>	David Happe (DE)
	Ruth Stieff
	Vicki Goshon
	Ron Koch
	Paul Greene
	Jennifer Gomez
	Keri Osterhaus
	Amy Liddell
	Kurtis Broeg
Recommendations:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Standardize professional development across the State in pre-service programs with competency in writing IEPs mandatory for conditional licensure in Special Education. 2. Implement a statewide approach to address staff turn-over, including recruiting students to the field, recruiting and hiring qualified applicants, retaining special educators, and, when necessary for an individual with a conditional license, providing high-quality school district and AEA support. 	

3. Investigate and develop a common understanding and practice related to accommodations and modifications provided to students with disabilities.
4. Work to enhance our ability to teach students to apply accommodations independently and to provide the tools (e.g., assistive technology) necessary to do that.
5. Provide more inclusion of assistive technology in general education settings.
6. Teachers need support and PD to learn more about the assistive technology options out there.
7. Consistent, standardized IEP progress monitoring that is aligned with RtI measures.
8. Improve preparation for teachers and other service providers who manage the multiple purposes of the IEP process (facilitating dialogue; planning, including the careful consideration of a child's needs and making clear commitments to address those needs; clearly expressing decisions and commitments through the IEP documentation and other communication processes; etc.). Specific recommendations are to provide an IEP draft to parents in advance as a best practice and/or provide a text option in the Meeting Notice to allow teachers and service providers to give detail regarding the meeting purpose & potential content of the new IEP.

Communication	
Description	Names
<p>Many of our discussions in SEAP have identified communication as being a determining factor. The trickle-down model of information distribution doesn't seem to be effective, i.e. State > AEAs > Districts > Local Schools > Teachers. How do we ensure teachers and administrators at the local level are receiving both the information and the intent of the information? Another discussion point has been the <i>achievement gap</i> itself. What does it mean? Who knows about it? Maybe more important, who doesn't know about it? What are the misunderstandings surrounding it? Why does it seem to be perceived as "someone else's problem?" SEAP has identified as priority the need to have the <i>achievement gap</i> understood thoroughly and consistently across the state. Endeavors addressing how the achievement gap will be eliminated will probably not be taken to heart until we reach an adequate level of understanding. SEAP will create a Work Group to investigate current situations and obstacles and make recommendations.</p>	Jim Flansburg (DE)
	Dawn Jacobsen
	Joe Giangreco
	Kelly Von Lehmden
	Paul Greene
	Jane Kinney
	Lucy Evans
	Vicki Goshon
	Sandra Smith
Recommendations:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create/maintain an Iowa Education Directory and Listserv that includes all Iowa Department of Education, AEA, and local School District staff, specifically educators and administrators, and make the directory easily accessible to all those listed. 2. That SFSS moves into new media, including Facebook and an interactive and accessible web site. 	

State Report Card	
Description	Names
<p>There are already many Indicators that provide insight as to the status of our collective educational efforts in Iowa. The Bureau has indicated a desire to have SEAP create an expanded "Report Card" for the status of education in the State. SEAP will create a Work Group and work with the Bureau support team to develop feasible, meaningful indicators to measure progress and effectiveness of the collective educational effort in Iowa.</p>	Marty Ikeda (DE)
	Lynn Helmke
	Dawn Jacobsen
	Kelly Von Lehmden
	Karen Thompson
	Jane Kinney
	Joe Giangreco
Recommendations:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collect parent involvement/family engagement survey data, similar to the data collected for Indicator 8, on ALL children (rather than just those with IEPs), and include the results in the Bureau of SFSS report card as well as other departmental dashboard documents (i.e. report cards for the full department and/or other bureaus). 2. Develop data dashboards for RtI including a State Report Card for Special Education performance tied to concepts such as: kindergarten readiness and achievement, 3rd grade proficiency in reading, growth, parent involvement, evidence-based practices, and IEP goal rigor and data-based decision making. 	

State Achievement Gap	
Description	Names
<p>Review the NAEP results over the past few years and investigate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Which states have small special ed. achievement gaps? 2) Which states have narrowed that gap in recent years? 3) What is causing Iowa's large, unacceptable achievement gap? 4) What are other states doing that we are not currently doing? 	Eric Neessen (DE)
	Alyson Beytien
	Lucy Evans
	Paul Greene
	Kelly Von Lehmden
	Karen Thompson
	Kurtis Broeg
	Andy Lawler
	Jennifer Gomez
	Lisa Woiwood
Vicki Goshon	
Recommendations:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and revise the structure that allows the Iowa Department of Education to direct specific policies/procedures and required measurements to AEAs and LEAs. Specifically review and revise the authority and accountability structure of the AEAs and LEAs. 2. Develop a program to update, standardize, and maintain education-based curriculum in Institutes of Higher Education (IHE), specifically those directly related to state-based education programs, policies, procedures. 3. Create a database of special education teacher candidates, mandate the listing of special education position openings on a state-maintained website and review legislation covering hiring practices to ensure school districts hire the most highly qualified candidate for special education positions. 4. Devote staff time and resources in a collaborative effort with SEAP and other stakeholders (i.e. parent groups, school administrators, and educators) to further explore existing 	

information and research that show the most effective impact in schools for closing the achievement gap.

5. Progress monitoring of students receiving special education services, through IEP goals, should be measured regularly in comparison to typical peers to ensure that accelerated progress is being made.

PRESENTATIONS TO THE PANEL

During the year, DE staff and others involved with specific programs or projects were invited to present to the SEAP. Members were frequently asked to provide feedback or make recommendations on discussion topics. The following is a brief synopsis of the presentations and topics discussed during this past year.

Legal Issues - Thomas Mayes (DE legal consultant)

- *Joint Policy Statement: Iowa Departments of Human Services and Education* – This joint statement resolves the occasional differences in policy interpretations between DHS social workers and educators when children placed in foster care are eligible for services under IDEA.
- *Eligibility Standards Update*- This document will be going out for public comments in the near future. Many changes are based on the comments SEAP members made in the spring.
- *Part C Regs* - Final regulations for Part C were released in 2011. They made the transition rules from C to B more robust.

Governor's Education Blueprint - Byron Darnall (Special Assistant to the Director of Education)

- *One Unshakable Vision: Governor's Education Blueprint* was presented by Byron Darnall with SEAP members in October. This publication is in response to Governor Branstad's question: "What would it take to have world-class schools in Iowa?" The proposal focuses on three areas:
 - Great teachers and leaders
 - High expectations and fair measures
 - Spirit of innovation

Discussion with the Director - Jason Glass (State Director of Education)

Director Glass expressed his appreciation of the work of this group. Many items were shared and discussed with the group, including:

- Eligibility
 - School districts are either resistant to or not fully informed of the eligibility process.
 - Parents need more information on this issue.
 - Special education students aren't always being staffed out at the appropriate time because of funding and/or results on testing scores. Guidelines need to be strengthened.
- Response to Intervention
 - Not many schools are doing it. If done correctly, it would be beneficial.
 - It is not understood that this involves both general education and special education.

- If properly implemented, RtI would provide a better allocation of our resources.
- Much confusion around when special education can be involved. Right now, the understanding is a student must be identified before a special education teacher can work with a student.
- Will require strong communication to all aspects of the field.
- Non-categorical State
 - Urged caution in using a medical model for education. We need to focus on functional skills rather than looking at a diagnosis.
 - Should consider a different tool to identify the real issues.
 - Labels often pigeonhole students.
 - Need research and data to support the practice in the area of non-categorical.
 - We require students to have a medical diagnosis to receive services in higher education.
 - Students need to understand their disability and know the specific services they need.
- Achievement Gap
 - Discrepancy in special education on the number of people needing support and the number of people receiving support.
 - Expected cuts from Washington may make this worse.
 - If RtI is done correctly, it may help focus support.
- Communication
 - Practitioners don't always get the necessary information or resources in a timely manner.
 - Be sure all partners get information (including higher ed.).
 - Identify communication needs at all levels: state, AEA, and LEA.
- Other
 - Many students spend most of the day in the general education classroom. Gen ed. teachers have had limited training on how to serve those students.
 - We need to teach to the student; differentiated teaching.
 - We need to get a small group of teachers talking about effective teaching and then share with other teachers.
 - Support services across the AEAs vary; the structure is a barrier.
 - Explore how to involve families and get better cooperation in school districts.
 - Identify priorities each year and then use the Department of Education to push these issues.

Special Education - Marty Ikeda (Bureau Chief)

Ongoing updates were provided throughout the year and included the following topics:

- Legislative
- AEA/DE Collaborative
- Division of Learning and Results
- Autism Council
- ESEA Waiver
- Response to Intervention
- Mega-Conference

Annual Performance Report Part B Indicators – Amy Williamson (Administrative Consultant)

SEAP members were provided information on each indicator associated with the Annual Performance Report (APR). It was suggested that in the future it would be helpful, when looking at the APR data, to know the “why” behind it. She suggested that perhaps the consultants assigned to each indicator could be present at the meetings to answer questions.

Success Stories – Frank Forcucci (Administrative Consultant)

Frank shared a success story of a young lady in Independence, Iowa, with a disability who started a coffee shop in her town. (www.emandjerris.com)

Iowa Coalition for Integrated Employment – Barb Guy (Consultant, Post-Secondary Transition)

The Department of Education is one of the core partners in the Iowa Coalition for Integrated Employment (ICIE) in partnership with Iowa Vocational Rehab Services. The activities will center on developing six pilot sites to improve the employment preparation of youth with disabilities.

State Special Ed Survey Results – Amy Williamson (Administrative Consultant)

A statewide survey was sent out to teachers, parents, and other educators. There were 2,181 respondents to the survey. Over half were special education teachers, 20 percent were AEA staff people, and 13 percent were district and building administrators.

The biggest issues identified:

- no faith in the data on what contributed to the education gap
- no tiered system
- the system is reactive
- parents not appropriately involved in education
- sufficient resources not in place

Legislative Update – Mike Cormack (DE Legislative Liaison)

The SEAP members were provided with updates on the legislative bills related to education twice during the spring meetings. The Education Reform bill was the main topic of conversation because it contained many relevant issues.

Common Core Essential Elements – Emily Thatcher (Consultant, Alternate Assessment)

Students with significant disabilities require curriculum that is adapted and appropriate for their cognitive abilities, while maintaining alignment to age and grade-level expectations. Emily discussed the work of the Dynamic Learning Maps Assessment Consortium to develop the Iowa Core Essential Elements as well as the Expanded Core (which focuses on adaptive behavior skills, vision, and hearing). Additionally, the Significant Disabilities State Leadership Team, which includes representatives from AEAs, LEAs, and IHEs, is leading this work and providing input on the creation of a statewide system of integrated supports that includes equity of access to professional development.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

This section outlines ongoing professional development opportunities for panel members related to special education issues and the work members are asked to do as part of their duties.

Conference/Workshop Attendance

Panel members were invited to attend conferences and workshops held in Iowa that offered opportunities for them to learn about specific topics related to special education. Expenses for travel, lodging and registrations were reimbursed. These conferences included:

- Tri-State Regional Special Education Law Conference – Omaha
- Indicator 13 and 14 Performance Review and Planning Meeting – Ames
- Special Education Mega Conference – Des Moines

Acronyms/Terms

AEA – Area Education Agency

ALJ - Administrative Law Judge

APR – Annual Performance Report (as related to a state’s “State Performance Plan”)

ARRA – American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress

DE – Iowa Department of Education

District – school district (also referred to as Local Educational Agency or LEA)

FFY – Federal Fiscal Year

HQT – Highly Qualified Teacher

IDEA, IDEA’04 or IDEA 2004 – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004

IEP – Individualized Educational Program

IMS – Information Management System

I-STAR – Iowa System to Achieve Results

ITBS/ITED – Iowa Test of Basic Skills / Iowa Test of Educational Development

IEP – Individualized Education Program

LEA – Local Educational Agency (referred to as school district or district)

NAEP – National Assessment of Education Progress (national standardized assessment)

NCLB – No Child Left Behind, a federal education law

OSEP – Office of Special Education Programs (Washington, D.C.)

Panel – Special Education Advisory Panel (also referred to as SEAP)

Part B – Special Education Services for Children with Disabilities Ages 3 to 21

Part C – Services for Children Birth through Two Years

RtI – Response to Intervention

SEA – State Education Agency

SEAP – Special Education Advisory Panel (also referred to as the Panel)

SLP – Speech and Language Pathologist

SPP – State Performance Plan (sometimes called the “Six-Year Performance Plan”)

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Iowa's Special Education Advisory Panel
"Working to Improve Special Education Services for Iowa's Children"



November 7, 2011

Jason E Glass, EdD
State Director of Education
Iowa Department of Education
400 E 14th Street
Des Moines IA 50319

Re: One Unshakable Vision ... World-Class Schools for Iowa

Dear Director Glass:

The Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) is committed to maximizing the educational experience for Iowa students with differing abilities, as stated in our Vision Statement (see footer). We have re-dedicated our efforts specifically to eliminate the achievement gap by 2020.

We are truly excited about the "One Unshakable Vision" blueprint and want to be involved in taking a fine Iowa educational system to a higher, world-class level. To that end, we have reviewed the blueprint and offer the following comments. These are the points we want to be sure are considered during the creation of the Education bill being drafted for the 2012 legislative session.

Assessment should be the beginning of a process, not the end. Assessments should be designed to effectively gauge a student's progress or an educator's effectiveness, certainly. But that should only be the beginning. We should also:

- Publish results in a timely fashion
- Offer improvement options
- Expect an improvement plan and schedule

High expectations should be the standard, not the exception. Students with disabilities, like anyone else, are likely to perform to the level of expectation. Whether through misplaced sympathy, lack of understanding, or simply because it's easier, the education system too often sets the bar much too low for our students with disabilities.

SEAP Vision

All children of Iowa, as members of communities, shall receive opportunities and needed supports for meaningful lives and quality education experiences.

Iowa's Special Education Advisory Panel
"Working to Improve Special Education Services for Iowa's Children"



Don't allow "excuses" for passing a student with disabilities. A student with disabilities may need and should be granted accommodations as determined in their Individualized Education Program (IEP). However, accommodations should not include having a student automatically pass through by using his/her disabilities as an excuse for under achievement. Every student's achievements should match his/her true capabilities and be consistently challenged to determine his/her capabilities.

Retention should be specific to subject, not grade. A student should not be allowed to pass to the next level in a subject, e.g. reading, in which they have tested unsatisfactorily. However, an unsatisfactory performance in one subject should not deter progress in another subject, e.g. math, in which a student may excel. We need to build an educational structure in which we can address a student's needs while at the same time encouraging his/her strengths.

New programs must be supported by data-based evidence. Our students need an effective educational system now. We do not have the luxury of unlimited time or resources to justify a trial-and-error methodology when introducing new programs. We should build upon successful programs from around the world, but only those programs with enough cause-and-effect data to be sure of results.

Least Restrictive Environments (LRE) should be emphasized. While building our new educational structure we must enthusiastically promote maximizing the time students spend in a general educational forum. We must not allow our LRE efforts to slip backward. Students with disabilities simply perform better in community than in segregation.

Students must start school ready to learn. We encourage the State to consider a financial investment in pre-school opportunities for all students including those with disabilities. We believe the earlier the educational investment, the longer the educational payback. It is less expensive financially and emotionally for students to be prepared for school.

Set the graduation target at 100%. A target less than 100% seems to endorse the notion that it is acceptable to have some students not graduate. It isn't. Students with disabilities could too easily fall into that smaller percentage. We need to create an educational structure and expectation that includes all students in graduation planning.

Reward schools that "break the prediction". When educators are looking at individual children/youth and not prediction numbers, they are more likely to set higher expectations for themselves and the students. Predictions all too often limit our outcomes to "what's expected". If we encourage an environment where we look beyond predictions, the possibilities are limitless.

Encourage community involvement. There seems to be a disconnection between the educational system and the community, especially in post-secondary transition. There are typically community agencies and systems available to our students that are not acknowledged

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Iowa's Special Education Advisory Panel
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during transition planning. We should be sending our students into their post-secondary lives ready for their choice of school or career. This includes the resources available to ensure their success.

Encourage family involvement. There can be no doubt that involved families are typically a strong indicator of a student's chances for success in school. An educational system must be family-centered to maximize the chances for parental involvement. We must acknowledge where each family "is" and build a structure that is friendly to them. We must stop blaming the families and work toward understanding them. It's not for the families, it's for the students.

Develop state-wide standardization for measurements of priorities. Local school districts and AEAs have long enjoyed a great level of autonomy. This can be a positive attribute at the right time and in the right setting. We believe this is a time when the State needs to be moving together, in perfect synchronization. Our State priorities for education, those items most important to us, should be measured in a standard way across the State.

Increase the flexibility for credentialing educators. We believe there are a number of people who could make excellent educators, but who did not travel through the typical educational structure of an Institute of Higher Education. Their degrees are often in something other than K-12 education. We believe these people may bring fresh outlooks, new ideas, and real world experiences to our students and educational system. We must find creative ways to prepare them for and get them into the classroom.

Thank you for your consideration of these important points. We look forward to your visit to our Iowa SEAP meeting December 2.

Keeping Our Kids First,

Paul Greene, SEAP Chair

Kelly VonLehmden, SEAP Vice Chair

SEAP Vision

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Iowa's Special Education Advisory Panel
"Working to Improve Special Education Services for Iowa's Children"



June 6, 2012

Jason E Glass, EdD
State Director of Education
Iowa Department of Education
400 E 14th Street
Des Moines IA 50319

Re: Eliminating the Achievement Gap
Recommendations from SEAP

Dear Director Glass:

Earlier this school year you challenged the Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) to determine why Iowa has a large achievement gap. Your challenge, coupled with SEAP priorities based on Bureau Chief Ikeda's vision of eliminating the achievement gap in ten years, led to the formation of SEAP Work Groups. These Groups met outside the confines of our regular SEAP meetings and were each committed to a specific area of investigation.

The work of the Work Groups is not done, but today we want to share initial Recommendations to help reduce and eventually eliminate the Achievement Gap. These five Recommendations can be summarized as follows:

A1 - Observation: AEA's and LEA's seem to be functioning in a culture of "choice" making it difficult for the Department of Education to lead the State in a unified direction.

A1 - Recommendation: Review/revise the structure that allows the Department of Education to direct specific policies/procedures and required measurements to AEA's and LEA's.

A2 - Observation: The current "trickle down" method of communication within the Iowa Educational System is not effective and often acts as an obstacle.

A2 - Recommendation: Create an Iowa Education Directory and Listserv that includes all Iowa Department of Education, AEA, and LEA staff, specifically educators and administrators, and make the directory easily accessible to all those listed.

A3 - Observation: The Institutes of Higher Learning in Iowa are not aligned in the scope, content, and detail of Department of Education programs, policies, and procedures included in their curriculum, compounding the issue of inconsistent implementations across the State.

SEAP Vision

All children of Iowa, as members of communities, shall receive opportunities and needed supports for meaningful lives and quality education experiences.

Iowa's Special Education Advisory Panel
"Working to Improve Special Education Services for Iowa's Children"



A3 - Recommendation: Develop a program to update, standardize, and maintain education-based curriculum in IHEs, specifically those directly related to state-based education programs, policies, procedures.

A4 - Observation: It seems that the special education teacher hiring is not always based on his/her ability to deliver quality instruction, e.g. conditional and emergency licensures.

A4 - Recommendation: Create a database of special education teacher candidates and review legislation covering hiring practices to assure school districts hire the most highly qualified candidate for special education positions.

A5 - Observation: We do not have the parental involvement and family engagement data for students without disabilities required to investigate that aspect of the achievement gap.

A5 - Recommendation: Collect Indicator 8-type parent involvement/family engagement survey data on ALL children and include the results in applicable departmental report cards and dashboards.

SEAP is committed to maximizing the educational experience for Iowa students with differing abilities, as stated in our Vision Statement (see footer). We have re-dedicated our efforts specifically to eliminate the achievement gap by 2020. We want to be involved in taking a fine Iowa educational system to a higher, world-class level. We look forward to making that journey with you and the Iowa Department of Education.

Thank you for your consideration of these Recommendations. We look forward to future opportunities for discussion.

Keeping Our Kids First,

Paul Greene, SEAP 2011-12 Chair

Kelly VonLehmden, 2012-13 Chair

SEAP Vision

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