



ANNUAL REPORT

Alabama Special Education Advisory Panel
(SEAP)

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Introduction

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) requires that each state establish and maintain an advisory panel to advise the state education agency (SEA) about the education of eligible children with disabilities.

The Alabama Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) is comprised of parents, persons with disabilities, educators, and administrators, as well as representatives from public and private agencies. The SEAP advises the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), Special Education Services (SES) Section on the unmet needs related to the education of children with disabilities within the State and provides feedback on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding special education. The SEAP is a critical partner in developing the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) for Alabama. The SEAP also advises the State Director on the improvement activities that need to be developed and implemented to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Each year, members review data on the improvement activities included in the SPP and APR and suggest updates to the activities and targets.

SEAP Overview of 2022-2023

The SEAP had an obligation to meet three to four times during the year 2022-2023, and the SEAP fulfilled the obligation by meeting four times (September 2022, January 2023, April 2023, and June 2023). Two meetings were held virtually through WebEx, and two meetings were held in a hybrid mode with SEAP members in attendance in person, or on WebEx. Throughout the reporting year, training was made available for the SEAP by ALSDE staff regarding an overview of the purpose of the SEAP, membership compliance, SPP/APR, IDEA Part B Grant Application and the application process, family engagement, and the dispute resolution process.

The SES Director updated the SEAP regarding the following: the ALSDE report card; the ALSDE, SES's plan to help improve the outcomes for children with disabilities in Alabama, such as reviewing and revising written policies; establishing an increased focus on dispute resolution processes; creating a tiered intervention system for monitoring and support; increasing professional development opportunities and coaching support for general education teachers, special education teachers, special education directors, and paraprofessionals; establishing a focus on family engagement; the *Alabama Administrative Code* (AAC) regulations for Case Managers of children with disabilities; the Temporary Special Education Certification (TSEC); the legal requirements of Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) testing for students with significant cognitive disabilities; and pending changes to the AAC.

Purpose, Duties, and Responsibilities of SEAP

The purpose of the SEAP is described in the provisions of 20 USC section 1412(a)(21) and 34 CFR sections 300.164 -300.169: to advise the ALSDE, SES on issues related to special education, and to promote communication and cooperation among individuals involved with children and youth with disabilities. The following are the roles and responsibilities of the advisory panel as listed in IDEA CFR 300.169:

- Advise the SEA of unmet needs within the State in the education of children and youth with disabilities. (300.169(a))
- Comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities. (300.169(b))
- Advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary under 618. (300.169(c))
- Advise the SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports. (300.169(d))
- Advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities. (300.169(e))
- Waiver of non-supplant requirement: State must consult with the State advisory panel regarding provisions of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). (300.164(c)(4))

Status of Special Education in Alabama

The IDEA requires that the U.S. Secretary of Education make an annual determination as to whether each state meets the requirements of the statute based on the data submitted in the APR and other available information. The U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) makes annual determinations in implementing Part B of the IDEA according to the following categories: “Meets Requirements, Needs Assistance, Needs Intervention, or Needs Substantial Intervention.” This status determination is based on the totality of the state’s data and information, revised State Performance Plan, state-reported data, and other publicly available information, including the National Assessment on Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math assessments and the number of students with disabilities who exited an educational program with a regular high school diploma. Each APR submission is based on the most current available data, which includes lag year data (i.e., data from the previous school year). According to the 2023 state determination, based on the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021 APR submission, the U.S. DOE, OSEP, has determined that under the IDEA, Section 616(d)(2)(A)(i), the ALSDE meets the requirements and purposes of Part B of the IDEA.

The ALSDE, SES, will continue to work to improve outcomes for students with disabilities by receiving technical assistance (TA) from several national centers. The collaboration with the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) to improve our general supervision system will be maintained. The ALSDE, SES, is reviewing and revising processes and guidance documentation to ensure the effective implementation of IDEA. The focus of this work includes the processes for IDEA Section 616 and 618 data collection, dispute resolution, LEA monitoring and accountability, and TA and professional development.

The ALSDE, SES staff participates in TA calls with NCSI and routinely accesses tools and resources (e.g., fiscal support team; MTSS; and State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)). Targeted TA regarding general supervision guidance and stakeholder engagement continues to be accessed.

Another national center the ALSDE, SES will continue to work with is the IDEA Data Center (IDC) to document Alabama's process for collecting, validating, analyzing, and submitting data. The ALSDE, SES engages in the IDC Data Process Toolkit to create protocols for all data collection that refine our process for data collection, analysis, and reporting. This also helps Alabama implement consistent practices that produce valid and reliable data, build the capacity of data stewards, and support a culture of high-quality data. Moreover, the SES staff also participates in TA calls and virtual webinars (e.g., 2022 IDC Institute; Data Quality Peer Group sessions; Significant Disproportionality Peer Group sessions) and onsite meetings (e.g., SPP/APR Summit; IDC Data Managers Summit).

The ALSDE will maintain the partnership with the Region Seven Comprehensive Center (R7CC) to expand and strengthen the state and regional literacy coaching cadre; to promote and scale up effective mathematics practices, policies, and procedures; and to improve the academic achievement of English learners (EL), which include children with disabilities.

Other TA the ALSDE, SES will continue to access:

- Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) - participate in monthly TA calls and technical/special webinars, especially those related to the Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS) 2.0 Monitoring and the new SPP/APR and SSIP package, and the 2022 OSEP Leadership Conference.
- Brusteit & Manasevit, PLLC – participate in TA calls and Bru-Man forums for training related to IDEA funding and Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR),
- The Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting (CIFR) - participate in monthly communities of practice (CoP) calls. Also, we received targeted TA from CIFR to enhance our fiscal resources and support for LEAs.
- The Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems (DaSY) - participate in TA calls related to the adoption of a new data collection instrument to gather data for Indicator 7.
- Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) - participate in TA calls related to the dispute resolution processes, especially those related to providing oversight and general supervisory responsibilities related to Written State Complaints, mediations, and due process procedures under IDEA and IEP facilitation.
- The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) - participate in routine calls and access training materials and resources related to effective dispute resolutions.

Special Education Advisory Panel Membership

The 2022-2023 SEAP members represented a wide array of knowledge, background, and opinions. The SEAP had 31 members. The SEAP membership was comprised of parents of students with disabilities and individuals with disabilities (51%), and the remaining members of the SEAP (49%) included representatives who are administrators of programs for children with disabilities, local or state juvenile and adult corrections agencies, the state director of Foster Care, representatives from institutes of higher education that prepare special education or related service personnel, State agencies involved in the financing or delivery of related services to children with disabilities, the State Director of McKinney-Vento, other state or LEA members, individuals who provided transition services, teachers, and a representative from a Charter School. There were 13 new members to the SEAP this past year.

SEAP Committees

The standing committees of the SEAP met on a continuous basis in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the full panel. Over the past year, the SEAP Committees included the following list:

- Membership
- Stakeholder and Public Engagement
- Bylaws
- Student Achievement and Performance Data

Summary of Committee Activities

Three of the SEAP committees had new committee chairs this year. The Stakeholder and Public Engagement committee did not have a dedicated chair. The SEAP state liaison held several training or work sessions to facilitate the work of each committee.

- The Student Achievement and Performance Data committee participated in training with the ALSDE, SES Data Team on the SPP/APR, and held work sessions to review data outcomes and provide public input on the SPP/APR.
- The membership committee reviewed applications and made recommendations for SEAP membership to the ALSDE Superintendent of Education. Active recruitment of new members occurred throughout the year. A recruitment flyer was created and approved for distribution to help recruit members to fill several vacancies.
- The Bylaws committee conducted an annual review of the SEAP Bylaws but did not recommend any revisions or changes to the current bylaws. The bylaws were revised in 2021, and no changes were determined at this time.
- Active recruitment of a chair to lead the Stakeholder and Public Engagement committee is ongoing.

SEAP Recommendations and Feedback

Throughout the year, the SEAP members made a concerted effort with multiple recommendations.

- Adopt a Workload vs. Caseload Model
- Review the recommendations made by the Alabama Hands and Voices organization to address the identified needs of deaf or hard-of-hearing children.
- Consider and adopt a formal compensatory educational plan to provide services.
- Assess, develop, and implement a certification made available to general education teachers serving and instructing students with disabilities in general education environments to improve their ability and further their capacity to provide FAPE through quality instruction, particularly in math and language arts.

Anticipated SEAP Vacancies

The SEAP anticipated several vacancies during this year. The term ended for some parents, an individual with a disability, the Institute of Higher Education representative, and a member of a correctional facility throughout the reporting year. A concerted effort to recruit members to fill all positions succeeded, and the SEAP met membership compliance requirements. The role of charter school or private school member had not been filled in the previous reporting year. This role was filled in January 2023, but the SEAP member changed positions at the end of the school year and was no longer able to serve on the SEAP after June 2023. Active recruitment for a new charter school or private school member is ongoing.