



STATE OF LOUISIANA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
POST OFFICE BOX 94064, BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804-9064
Toll Free #: 1-877-453-2721
<http://www.louisianaschools.net>

D.D. Council Quarterly Report
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Division of Educational Improvement and Assistance

1. Autism State Team

In December 2007, the Division of Educational Improvement and Assistance (DEIA) established an the Autism State Team Committee to serve as a think tank in determining how to best foster leadership in providing services for students with autism all areas of the state, as well as how to establish the needed infrastructure of support for personnel in this field (e.g., professional development, networking opportunities). Members include school system personnel, university personnel, and family representatives. Initial priorities identified by the group were 1) needs assessment, 2) marketing, and 3) professional development.

2. Louisiana Extended Standards

The department convened groups of general and special educators to develop Extended Standards for students with significant disabilities based upon Louisiana's Grade Level Expectations. The IEPs/curriculum for students participating in alternate assessment must be aligned to the Extended Standards. These standards are now posted on the Department of Education's website.

There is a progression of specificity in the Louisiana curriculum framework. The content standards are broad statements of what students should know and be able to do, benchmarks are more specific, and GLEs state what all students should know and be able to do at the end of a given grade level. The Extended Standards, based upon the benchmarks and GLEs, have been developed for English/language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. The Extended Standards capture the essence of the GLEs and provide a way for students with significant cognitive disabilities to access the general education curriculum. Extended Standards do not represent the entire curriculum for a given grade or content area. Rather, they represent the core academic content that may be assessed on LEAP Alternate Assessment Level 1 (LAA1) at each grade span. Functional skills may still be taught to students participating in alternate assessment; however, these skills will not be assessed via LAA1.

3. Alternative Diploma Options Task Force

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) established the Task Force on Alternative Diploma Options for Students with Disabilities to make recommendations relative to students in special education programs. At the January 2008 BESE meeting, the report from the task force will be submitted with a recommendation that its findings be submitted to the High School Redesign Commission for consideration. A summary of the task force's recommendations are as follows:

1. Offer an alternative pathway to a standard high school diploma that allows students who are eligible to take the LEAP Alternate Assessment, Level 2 (LAA2) to pass LAA2 at the Approaching Basic or higher level on the required components along with the completion of the required Carnegie units to receive a standard high school diploma.
 - Students with disabilities who opt for this pathway will also be able to qualify for a LAA2 waiver similar to the Graduate Exit Examination (GEE) waiver presently available.

Note: This pathway seemed appropriate since the content of the LAA2 comes from the Grade Level Expectations (GLE) but the level of questions and the format of the test document have been revised to meet the needs of students with disabilities
2. Offer an alternative pathway to a standard high school diploma that includes passage of the Graduation Equivalency Development (GED) test and completion of the required Carnegie units to receive a standard high school diploma.
3. Offer an alternative pathway to a standard high school diploma that allows students to pursue the general education course of study with a focus on occupational skills and includes participation in state wide assessment.
4. Continue to offer the Certificate of Achievement as a non-standard diploma for students with significant cognitive disabilities participating in LAA1.

4. Low Incidence Consortium

The website for the consortium is now operational (www.lalidc.org). Spring course offerings in significant disabilities, Blind/Visually Impaired, and Deaf/hard of Hearing are not posted on the website. Financial assistance is available for participating students.

5. Monitoring/Family Member Participation

The Department of Education is responsible for ensuring local education agency (LEA) compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA guarantees the free appropriate public education (FAPE) of children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). To assist LEAs in meeting the needs of these students, the DOE uses a continuous improvement monitoring process and on-site visits to LEA's are conducted to monitor for all aspects of

IDEA. DOE monitoring teams include highly trained educators, administrators, and parents. To fulfill the parent team component, the DOE partners with Families Helping Families of Louisiana (FHF). The parent team member (FHF staff) conducts a parent focus meeting and interviews parents to collect data/information during the monitoring process on their satisfaction of the services provided to their children and their involvement in their children's program. During the 2007-2008 fiscal monitoring year, approximately 16 FHF staff members from 10 FHF centers will participate in 11 LEA monitoring trips.

6. General Education Access Guide

A taskforce consisting of general and special educators representing all grade levels, content areas (i.e., mathematics, English/language arts, science, social studies), and disability areas are working to create a repository of strategies, accommodations, modifications (LAA I), assistive technology, and testing options to improve access to the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (LCC). A joint effort among several DOE divisions will result in an electronic companion to the LCC. Pilot use at limited grade levels is expected during the 2008-09 school year.

7. Higher Education Institutes

The Louisiana Department of Education, along with the Board of Regents, sponsored three institutes this past year to gather input on the redesign of the undergraduate special education mild/moderate degree. The stakeholders (university personnel, district personnel, and state department personnel) recommendation was for an integrated program whereby teacher candidates would graduate with certification in both general education (candidates could choose from grades 1-6, 4-8, or a secondary content area) and special education mild/moderate. The proposal will be delivered to BESE in the late winter for approval.

8. Staff Changes

Susan Batson has been appointed Acting Director of the Division of Educational Improvement and Assistance. Dr. Scott Norton is the Assistant Superintendent of the Office of Student and School Performance. Gina Reedy-Lindsey (who was the contact person for Families Helping Families contracts) is no longer with the Department.