Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

# Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

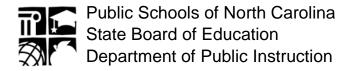## DPI Student/Improve Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

*Session Law 2015-241 (HB 97)*

*Section 8.3#*

**Date Due:   November 15, 2016**
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DPI Chronological Schedule, 2016-2017

Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
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# NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
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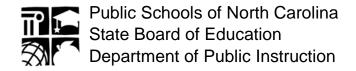
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This report is submitted to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee to comply with the requirement of DPI shall report on the progress of developing and implementing policy changes on (i) IEP reforms, (ii) transition planning policies, (iii) increased access to Future-Ready Core Course of Study for students with disabilities, and (iv) model programs for use by local school administrative units to improve graduation rates and school performance of students with disabilities.
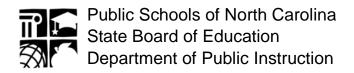
## Part I: IEP Reforms

1. Monitoring: Program Compliance Review

The Policy, Monitoring and Audit section revised and implemented the revision of the Program Compliance Review. This activity is conducted on a five-year cycle to ensure local education programs for students with disabilities are compliant according to federal regulations, state public education law and the *NC Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities*. This process broadened the scope of this monitoring activity beyond the requirements to include technical assistance opportunities more directly related to student outcomes. Key revisions include a significant expansion from the student record review to staff interviews regarding exceptional children process; student service verification; related service verification; LEA resources for parents; and licensure. Monitoring and technical assistance recommendations are then made based on the findings of the monitoring activity when compared to the student profiles (attendance, discipline, grades, results of state mandated assessments) of the student sample used to conduct the activity. The goal is to provide more direct, student-centered corrective action and technical assistance to more meaningful student outcomes rather than compliance in isolation. Additionally, all monitoring tools, resources and training are provided to LEAs two years in advance of the year in which it is to be monitored and repeated during the summer of the school year in which the monitoring will occur. This procedure provides an opportunity to engage in local self-assessment relative to the monitoring process and initiate improvement in advance of the required monitoring conducted by the state.

2. Monitoring: Class Size/Caseload Waivers

The process for submitting and reviewing requests for class size/caseload waivers has been revised for the 2016-2017 school year. Revisions include streamlining the process in an effort to reduce paperwork, specifically, LEAs in compliance with class size/caseload requirements no longer have an additional reporting requirement to verify compliance. Compliance with the policy is expected; therefore, the only reporting requirement is the submission of a class

size/caseload waiver request for the class or caseload that exceeds the policy. Additionally, the request for waiver has streamlined the essential factors that must be considered when determining whether or not a waiver will be granted. For example, the class composition (course of study, grade level, level of need, eligibility category, unique needs) and the number of staff available to support those needs are considered. The goal is that the waiver itself provides problem-solving information that could potentially render the request unnecessary as it is reviewed for approval locally by the Principal, EC Director/Coordinator and Superintendent/Lead Administrator.
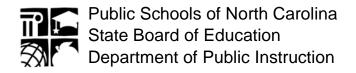
3. Policy: Specific Learning Disabilities

A proposal for eliminating the use of the discrepancy method for the identification of a specific learning disability was approved by the State Board of Education in February 2016. This amendment ensured that eligibility decisions were made using multiple sources of data gathered through formal evaluations and by problem-solving teams within a multi-tiered system of support. This change in policy ensured that appropriate data were considered when determining eligibility for special education and related services and enhanced the IEP team's ability to develop specially-designed instruction with precision based on a student's unique needs.

4. Documentation/Paperwork Reduction: New IEP Forms/ECATS

The EC Division initiated a revision to the forms used to document a student's individualized education program (IEP). Emphasis was placed on following a cohesive process of reviewing data from multiple sources, identifying the student's unique needs, and documenting the progression of the development of goals; accommodations and modifications; and specially designed instruction. Consideration was given for the logical progression of IEP Team meetings relative to particular processes (initial evaluation, reevaluation, etc.) and the need to ensure meaningful parent participation.

Additionally, with the legislative requirement of a Uniform Education Reporting System (UERS), the EC Division now has the unique opportunity to secure a sole-source vendor for the software used to manage special education paperwork (ECATS – Exceptional Children Accountability Tracking System). The Request for Purchase (RFP) has now entered the Best and Final Offer (BAFO) stage with the goal of having a new vendor in place by the 2017-2018 school year.

Two of the benefits of the revisions to the IEP forms and the new ECATS system include the opportunity for increased compliance with EC processes through the use of state-required forms, and seamless transitions for students between LEAs, preventing prolonged interruptions in receiving services required by the IEP, often caused by the transfer of student records.

Other Activities:

5. Dispute Resolution: Pilot Site for Local Facilitated IEP Program
6. Parent Resources: Created and Employed a Parent Liaison Position Within the EC Division
7. Parent Resources: Revised and Published Parent Rights and Responsibilities in Special Education *Notice of Procedural Safeguards*
8. LEA Resources: Developed the Manual Special Education Surrogate Parents: *Protecting the Student Voice in the Special Education Process*
9. Initiatives: EC Division Language Access Plan
10. LEA Resources: Revised the Formal State Complaint Procedures
11. Paperwork Reduction: Eliminating Monitoring of Transportation Routes
12. LEA Resources: Developed Guidance Document *Determining When an Evaluation is Needed Within a MTSS Framework*
13. EC Program Approval – Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities
14. Participation the Results Based Accountability Collaborative (nationally)

## Part II: Transition Planning Policies

1. Continuum of Transitions (One Area of NC's State Systemic Improvement Plan):

The evidence for the work around a continuum of transitions comes primarily from the literature on factors related to dropout risk and graduation achievement. Interventions that include provision for mentoring, family outreach, academic support, attendance monitoring, additional support services, and students' participation in school-related activities, self-determination skills, social skills, and vocational skills have been documented (Wilkins & Huckabee, 2014). "Research on evidence-based components of dropout prevention suggests that schools can prevent students from dropping out, including students with Learning Disability (LD) and emotional disabilities, by using data to identify which students are most at risk for dropping out and then providing these students with access to an adult advocate who can implement academic and behavioral support in a school climate that promotes personalized and relevant instruction. The EC Division has engaged in multiple activities to develop the transition process when students enter school beginning with Pre-K.

This group of stakeholders met multiple times to generate a template for a district-level resource tool, incorporating the NTACT researched Predicators of Success, with a focus on promoting the

transition process in grades Pre-K through 12th and on setting the expectation of reaching the post-school outcomes of Education/Training, Employment, and Independent Living upon entering school in the early grades. In addition, the Exception Children Division (ECD) collaboration with North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD) and Western Carolina University (WCU)/ Roads to Learning and Earning (RTLE) grant recipient concludes in November 2016. The ECD will begin transitioning the RTLE resource website, which is primarily geared towards middle and high school, to the DPI platform in October 2016. At that time, the stakeholder group will work towards formatting that resource to include activities and resources for Pre-K through 5th grades to support the CoT Pre-K through 12th.

2. Secondary Transition

ECD has created a transition toolkit to support LEAs and charters on tools for completing secondary transition plans. The training plan consists of an identified transition for each LEA/Charter, attend State transition redelivery training. Each Transition Lead (TL) attending the training were given access to the TL Wiki containing the redelivery materials; given access to the Transition Toolkit (Livebinder) containing the Secondary Transition resources; and began development of their redelivery plan to be approved by their EC Director. There were eleven trainings held throughout the state (September 2015-present). Approximately 158 Transition Leads were trained for redelivery of the Secondary Transition IDEA requirements. Transition Topic Webinars were held May and June on the topics of: Vocational Rehabilitation, Community Colleges, CTE, and Significant Cognitive Disabilities. We are in the planning process for continued support through additional Topic Webinars and coaching.
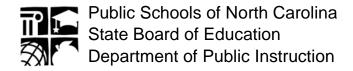
**Part III: Increased Access to Future-Ready Core Course of Study for SWD**

**Part IV: Model Programs for Use by Local Administrative Units to Improve Graduation Rates and School Performance of SWD**

Multiple initiatives and projects will work collectively to support these two focus areas. They have been combined rather than repeat each item.

1. Special Projects Funding

LEAs complete applications for Special Project fund and budgets funds so students with more significant needs can attend school and better access educational services which in turn improves school performance and graduation rates.

2. NC State Improvement Project

North Carolina was approved for another five-year $8 million State Professional Development Grant (SPDG) from OSEP. Through the three previously awarded five-year grants, Reading Foundations and Math Foundations training has been developed and delivered to teachers across the state of North Carolina. This training improves teachers' understanding and skill set to deliver strong reading and math instruction. With the new five-year grant, the focus will be on adolescent literacy, coaching and integration of the reading and math foundations in several university teacher education programs for pre-service teachers. This focus will impact students with disabilities' access to the curriculum through Future-Ready Core.

3. State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and LEA Self-Assessment

Ongoing improvement work in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) Exceptional Children Division (ECD) set the stage for Phase II of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), required by OSEP. As part of the Improvement Plan, North Carolina chose to addresses graduation rate as the state target. The work of the ECD focused on the initial implementation of the LEA Self-Assessment and improvement process (LEASA) throughout the 2015-2016 school year. This process requires Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to conduct data analysis, identify potential problem areas, determine priorities, and develop an improvement plan for the next three years. During subsequent years, LEAs will submit annual updates to the LEASA, including progress on and adjustments to their improvement plans supported by implementation and outcome data.

Infrastructure work in Phase II focused on building ECD regional support structures sufficient to support LEAs through both the LEASA process and initial implementation of improvement plans. This included opportunities for ECD staff to practice and improve their own coaching skills so that they, in turn, could support the LEAs more effectively.

The information yielded from the LEASAs statewide, along with evaluation data collected over time, will provide data on: engagement in systematic problem-solving and implementation planning; increases in academic achievement; reduction in student office referrals/decrease in suspensions/increase in attendance; successful transition at all grade spans and for post-school outcomes; increased family engagement. Based on results in these areas, the ECD will refine and improve supports to LEAs and infrastructure to provide those supports. In this way, the ECD will be able to be responsive to LEA needs, leading to improvement of the five-year cohort graduation rate for students with disabilities.