

TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools 

DATE: May 21, 2024

SUBJECT: Blueprint Special Education Workgroup - Update

Purpose

To provide a progress update on the Blueprint Special Education Workgroup, adopted in its Initial Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan by the Blueprint Accountability and Implementation Board.

Background

On December 1, 2022, the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) adopted its Initial Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan outlined recommendations for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to convene a Blueprint Special Education Workgroup to discuss and make recommendations on instruction and services for students with disabilities across the State of Maryland.

The Blueprint Special Education Workgroup is co-chaired by State Superintendent Dr. Carey M. Wright and Ms. Liz Zogby of the Maryland Down Syndrome Special Education Policy & Advocacy Project. The Workgroup has held eight (8) meetings since August 2023. There are approximately 50 members appointed to the Workgroup, with representatives from MSDE, school administrators, special education and general education teachers, parents, advocates and attorneys, community partners, special education directors, physicians, and others.

Executive Summary

The presentation provides information and updates on the following:

- Blueprint Special Education Workgroup Overview
- Meeting Topics
- Recommendations to Date
- Current Work and Next Steps
- Appendix: Organizing the Special Education Workgroup and AIB Comprehensive Implementation Plan Requirements

Action

No action is required; this information is for discussion only.

Attachments

SEW State BOE Presentation May 21, 2024.pptx

Office of Teaching and Learning

Blueprint for Maryland's Future: Special Education Workgroup Update

May 21, 2024

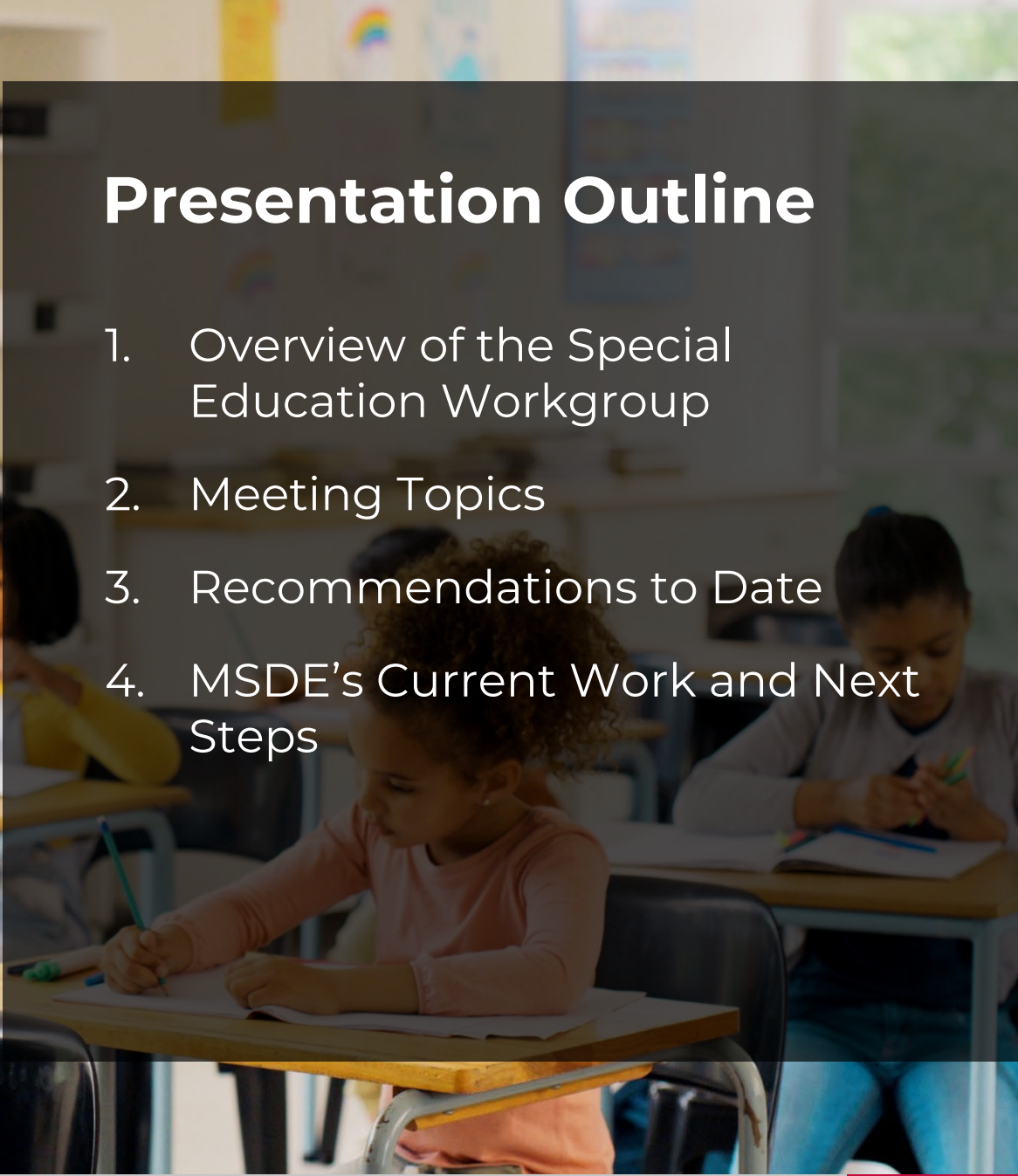
Presented By | Dr. Deann Collins, Deputy Superintendent, Office of Teaching and Learning
Dr. Antoine Hickman, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Early Intervention and
Special Education Services





Presentation Outline

1. Overview of the Special Education Workgroup
2. Meeting Topics
3. Recommendations to Date
4. MSDE's Current Work and Next Steps



Overview of the Special Education Workgroup

- On December 1, 2022, the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) adopted its Initial Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan outlines recommendations for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to convene a Blueprint Special Education Workgroup to discuss and make recommendations on instruction and services for students with disabilities.
- Dr. Carey M. Wright, State Superintendent and Ms. Liz Zogby, Maryland Down Syndrome Special Education Policy & Advocacy Project serve as Co-chairs of the Workgroup
- There are approximately 50 members on the Workgroup, with representatives from MSDE, school administrators, special education and general education teachers, parents, advocates and attorneys, community partners, special education directors, physicians, and others. Each member has an equal voice in contributing and making recommendations.
 - A detailed list of workgroup members can be found at <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/special-education-workgroup/>
- There is an opportunity for public comment at the beginning of each session, and an opportunity to listen to the Workgroup sessions via YouTube.
- The Workgroup meets monthly, with the final report due in December 2024.

Blueprint Special Education Workgroup Session Topics

- Existing Standards and Expectations
- Integration of Built-In Supports for ALL Students
- Teacher Quality/Inservice and Teacher Prep
- Monitoring, Accountability, and Data Collection
- IEP Development of Specially Designed Instruction
- Teacher Quality: Preparation Programs, Certification, and Professional Learning
- Service Delivery, Staffing, and Working Conditions
- Adequate Funding
- Least Restrictive Environment
- Significant Disproportionality
- Parent and Family Partnerships
- Early Childhood/Infants & Toddlers
- Exclusionary Discipline, Behavior, and Emotional Disability
- Secondary Transition

<https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/special-education-workgroup/>

Workgroup Recommendations (1 of 5)

Recommendation #1: COMAR and MSDE guidance should be revised to explicitly provide:

- 1) Students without significant cognitive disabilities are legally entitled to IEP goals and services that enable them to meet grade-level standards. When these students are behind grade-level standards, they should receive IEP goals/services that enable them to close or narrow the gap between standards and their performance levels.
- 2) Students with significant cognitive disabilities are legally entitled to IEP goals/services that enable them to have access to grade-level content standards (i.e., the general education curriculum) and to meet alternate grade-level standards. Goals should be based on evidence-based instructional practices, related services, and LRE principles that maximize their potential.

Recommendation #2: Review State monitoring tools and compliance protocols to ensure that IEP goals narrow or close the gap between present levels of achievement and grade-level standards, and that, based upon research and professional judgement, IEP services are reasonably calculated to enable the goals to be achieved.

Recommendation #3: A comprehensive early literacy plan. MSDE should develop a comprehensive early literacy plan to ensure that all students in general education receive evidence-based instruction, including high-dosage tutoring, within an MTSS/RTI framework in general education, with the highest priority in grades K-3.

Workgroup Recommendations (2 of 5)

Recommendation #4: MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with tasks and timelines within 60 days. The plan for a plan should include:

- 1) MSDE should increase its capacity (staff positions, knowledge base, and/or means) to provide sufficient guidance and TA.
- 2) Guidance and TA to LEAs, including review of current TABs and creation of more accessible guidance for educators and staff, to increase understanding that SDI requires evidence-based specially designed instruction as part of services that are reasonably calculated to enable each student's goals to be achieved.
- 3) Dissemination of a menu of evidence-based best practices that LEAs must select from (subject to waivers); availability of TA on the evidence-based best practices based on ongoing needs assessments and monitoring; and guidance on factoring in, where appropriate, IEP Team judgment.
- 4) The relationship between RTI and SDI (a continuation of the discussion of MTSS/RTI under the Topic of Integration.)

Workgroup Recommendations (3 of 5)

Recommendation #5: MSDE should develop a plan for a plan to address effective implementation of IEPs, including technical assistance, uniform data collection and monitoring, within 60 days. The plan should cover:

- 1) Technical assistance, including more direct support and coaching for IEP Teams and LEAs from MSDE; clear, achievable standards linked to available resources; menus of evidence-based best practices (instruction and interventions); accessible differentiated guidance documents for educators; and professional development.
- 2) Uniform data collection, including the need for review and revision of current data elements and technical assistance for collection and analysis of the data.
- 3) Monitoring: Clear communication of the monitoring requirements and the criteria used to determine compliance, a balance between support and enforcement, and review of composition of Monitoring teams.

Recommendation #6: MSDE should review the Maryland Online IEP (MOIEP), including data collection, reporting capabilities, user experience, and current mechanisms for feedback and revision, and report on suggested improvements and/or alternatives within six months.

Workgroup Recommendations (4 of 5)

Recommendation #7: MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with tasks and timelines within 60 days to ensure that general and special educators have the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed to effectively teach students with disabilities (as compiled by the Workgroup). The plan should consider:

- 1) A review and revision of COMAR to align standards and competencies, clinical experiences, and entrance and exit requirements for educator preparation programs (EPPs) and the requirements for initial licensure and renewal of licensure for educators and administrators with the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed to effectively teach students with disabilities.
- 2) A review in collaboration with IHEs of current EPPs (traditional and alternative), focusing on the development of general and special education teacher candidates who can effectively teach students with disabilities.
- 3) Developing standards in collaboration with LEAs and IHEs for systemic support of early career teachers (e.g., IHE faculty in schools as coaches).
- 4) Developing standards in collaboration with LEAs for professional learning and ongoing support, coaching, and mentoring of general and special education teachers and related service providers to effectively teach students with disabilities.

Workgroup Recommendations (5 of 5)

Recommendation #8: MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with tasks and timelines within 60 days to enhance supply and encourage retention of general and special educators. The plan should consider:

- 1) Development of innovative recruitment proposals in collaboration with MHEC/IHEs and LEAs (e.g., dual certification programs; programs for general educators to add special education licensure; School to Teacher pipeline/recruitment of HS students, Grow Your Own programs, paid student teaching, and loan forgiveness).
- 2) Developing a rebranding strategy for special education.
- 3) Developing teacher career ladders in collaboration with LEAs that provide adequate co-planning and noninstructional time, provide equal opportunity to special education teachers, and consider innovative proposals for additional training (e.g., teacher sabbaticals; paid summer training programs).
- 4) Determining if paperwork can be reduced for teachers and related service providers.
- 5) Developing professional learning for principals in collaboration with LEAs on developing inclusive mindsets and high expectations in school communities, and improving school culture, including more respect and support for educators.

MSDE's Current Work

Preschool Inclusive Practices

- Increasing access to regular early childhood settings with typical peers for all young children, including those with significant support needs

Legislative Updates

- Developing guidance and providing support to address recent legislation to reduce the impact on students with disabilities and LEAs

Effective Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

- Providing professional learning resources on effective IEP goals and functional IFSP outcomes
- Providing direct support to LEAs to assist with Part C (birth through age 3) to Part B (ages 3 through 21) transition planning

Grant Opportunities

- Providing grants to LEAs to focus on inclusive practices, building staff capacity (including general educators, paraeducators, etc.), and creating integrated and seamless Birth - 5 systems

Alternate Framework

- Implementing an action plan with LEAs to address the overrepresentation of students taking the alternate assessment.

Maryland Online IEP (MOIEP)

- Working directly with Johns Hopkins to upgrade the system to address concerns presented by the end-user

Disproportionality

- Providing direct support to LEAs who must develop Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervention Services plans to address significant disproportionality in evaluation, placement, and discipline

Family and Student Engagement

- Engaging students and families in the secondary transition process to increase graduation rates and reduce drop-outs.

Next Steps

- Meetings
 - Continue collaboration to set agendas, develop pre-reading materials, obtain workgroup feedback, and develop recommendations
- Reports
 - Obtain Workgroup feedback on the draft interim report, address feedback, and submit interim report to the AIB Board by July 1, 2024
 - Finalize and submit final report no later than December 1, 2024
- Implementation
 - Review each recommendation, assess feasibility (staffing, resources, intent), prioritize recommendations, and draft plans for implementation with anticipated due dates

Appendix

AIB Comprehensive Implementation Plan Requirements (1 of 3)

Task ID	Requirement
4.3.2	MSDE shall establish a workgroup to collect student data and review instructional methods provided to students who receive special education services.
4.3.2(a)	<p>The workgroup shall collect data on the number and percent of students receiving special education services at each P-12 school, the services available to them, and the accessibility of P-12 teachers, administrators, and staff to these students and their families.</p> <p>MSDE and AIB shall identify workgroup members representing various special education interests who demonstrate commitment to diversity, equity, and expertise.</p> <p>The workgroup shall share its work plan with the AIB and provide regular updates on its progress.</p>

AIB Comprehensive Implementation Plan Requirements (2 of 3)

Task ID	Requirement
4.3.2(b)	<p>The workgroup shall review methods of teaching for students who receive special education services in public P-12 schools in the State.</p> <p>The workgroup’s review shall include methods used in the State and other states and other countries, including addressing learning loss related to COVID-19, in addition to recruiting special education teachers and staff.</p> <p>The workgroup may expand the scope of its review based on recommendations of its members and/or AIB and MSDE to include topics like the impact of teacher shortages on special education and resulting quality or services provided; supports provided to special educators; co-teaching models and supporting general educators in implementing co-teaching models as well as supporting special education students when a special educator is not providing services; increasing family involvement and collaboration in special education programming; and how top-performing systems structure the school day to effectively provide remediation and special education services.</p>
4.3.2(c)	<p>The workgroup shall make recommendations on improving the education of students receiving special education services in P-12 schools in the State, including whether additional funding is needed and addressing learning loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The workgroup may make other recommendations related to additional topics studied by the workgroup.</p>

AIB Comprehensive Implementation Plan Requirements (3 of 3)

Task ID	Requirement
4.3.3	The workgroup submits a final report with its findings and recommendations , including addressing learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
4.3.3(a)	AIB shall incorporate the workgroup’s findings and recommendations into the updated Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan. The workgroup shall submit an initial report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by 12/1/23, an interim report by 7/1/24, and a final report by 12/1/24.
4.3.3(b)	MSDE and LEAs shall implement the workgroup’s recommendations to improve the education of students receiving special education services in Maryland P-12 schools.

Organizing the Special Education Workgroup (1 of 3)

Preparation

- Convened a series of listening sessions
 - Statewide with Breakout Sessions of no more than 10 individuals
 - Stakeholders: Advocates, Directors of Student Support Services and Directors of Special Education, and Principals and Teachers, Special Education State Advisory Committee
 - Collected themes and sub-themes for planning Workgroup session topics

Workgroup Planning

- Co-Chairs with MSDE Leadership
 - Identification of session topics
 - Selection of guest speakers (as needed)
 - Selection of prereading(s)
 - Development of meeting summaries/takeaways

Organizing the Special Education Workgroup (2 of 3)

Standard Flow of Meetings

- Welcome/Introductions
- Public Comment
- Recap of Previous Meetings and Recommendations
- Guiding Question
- Expert Presentation (as relevant)
- Summary Information on Maryland and/or National Practices
- Data Summary (as relevant)
- Small Group Breakout Sessions
- Large Group Report Out
- Exit Ticket

Organizing the Special Education Workgroup (3 of 3)

Information Sharing and Workgroup Input

- Post all documents on webpage:
<https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/special-education-workgroup/>
- Share meeting takeaways
- Use input and breakout session feedback to draft potential recommendations
- Distribute pre-reading and guided questions for input on session development
- Create and post agenda on webpage
- Seek public comment
- Livestream and posting of each livestreamed meeting