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June, 2010

Dear Citizens of Missouri:

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) requires that each state education agency establish a committee to provide advice regarding programs and services for children with disabilities. The Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) serves in that capacity for the Special Education Division of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MoDESE).

The Special Education Advisory Panel plays an important role in representing the various constituencies who are impacted by or have an interest in special education in Missouri. This letter is intended to provide an overview of the responsibilities and activities of the SEAP during the 2009-2010 school year.

Membership on state advisory committees is intended to represent stakeholders who have specific knowledge of and interest in special education. Membership categories are defined in *IDEA*. They include parents of children with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, public school teachers and administrators, representatives of charter and private schools, and representatives from various state agencies or organizations.

The duties and responsibilities of the SEAP are authorized by *IDEA*. The primary function of the panel is to advise MoDESE about special education and related services for children with disabilities. The panel accomplishes this charge by advising MoDESE about unmet needs, offering comments on proposed rules and regulations, advising state officials regarding reports provided to and received from the U.S. Department of Education, and other special education issues brought to the attention of the panel.

The work of the SEAP occurs at regularly scheduled meetings of the entire panel, as well as through a number of sub-committees (evaluation, rules and regulations, monitoring, programs, nominations, and public comment). The SEAP meets at least four times each year and meeting dates are posted on the MoDESE website. SEAP meetings are open to the public and time is allocated at each meeting to receive comments from the public. In addition, the SEAP has a dedicated e-mail address that enables individuals to communicate their thoughts or concerns about special education matters. Comments received in this manner are presented to the SEAP by the chairperson of the public comment sub-committee.

The meetings and activities of the SEAP are documented on the Special Education section of the MoDESE website. Meeting agendas and minutes are posted in a timely manner, along with other pertinent information and documents. The dates, times, and locations of SEAP meetings are also posted on the website, to facilitate attendance by members of the public.

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The SEAP and the Division of Special Education had a busy school year. Here are a few highlights of SEAP activities:

- Two representatives of the SEAP, along with MoDESE officials, attended the annual OSEP Leadership Conference in Washington DC in August. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan addressed the conference and dozens of information sessions were available to the attendees.
- In September, a monitoring team from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) spent a week with MoDESE officials. In preparation for the monitoring visit, SEAP members responded to an OSEP survey about their role as panel members and the SEAP relationship with MoDESE. Following the team visit, Assistant Commissioner for Special Education, Heidi Atkins Lieberman, reported to the SEAP about the results of that visit.
- Significant time during two SEAP meetings was devoted to discussion regarding concerns about the practices of seclusion or restraint of special education students in Missouri. The discussion occurred as the result of newspaper articles on the practices and particular interest in the issue on the part of several panel members. Similar deliberations have been occurring at the federal level, and legislation to regulate these practices are pending in Congress.
- Panel meetings have also included presentations, reports, and discussions on various initiatives to improve the quality and consistency of special education services around the state. These have included: a review and discussion of due process hearings and findings; development of an on-line Individualized Education Program (IEP) reporting system and plans to pilot the program in 2010-2011; a model to improve transition services for students exiting K-12 education; the *Missouri Integrated Model* directed at increasing student achievement and transforming school culture; and, the *Missouri School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SW PBS)* program aimed at providing students with skills for success in the school setting.
- On behalf of the SEAP, a letter was sent to Commissioner of Education Chris Nicastro regarding the importance of school improvement initiatives funded by the Division of Special Education (e.g. SW PBS), suggested scale-up of those initiatives, and requesting their consideration as part of Missouri's application for federal *Race to the Top* funding. Subsequent to that letter, a representative of the SEAP participated in the initial planning for Missouri's RTTT application.

Being aware of the fiscal constraints faced by our state, the SEAP determined it should do its part. Consequently, the SEAP authorized this summary letter be written to replace the printed annual report. For more complete information about the SEAP and its activities, members of the public are encouraged to visit the Special Education section of the MoDESE website (<http://dese.mo.gov/divspeced>). Website pages include a complete list of membership categories and the current SEAP members, a full description of duties of the SEAP, and minutes of this year's panel meetings.

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Individuals with concerns about special education are encouraged to communicate to the SEAP through the dedicated e-mail address or to attend regularly scheduled SEAP meetings. For those who might want greater involvement, review panel requirements and the nominations process and consider an application for SEAP membership.

Finally, a word of appreciation is owed to Heidi Atkins Lieberman and her staff for their dedicated service to Missouri's children with disabilities. Her support and collaboration with the SEAP and that of her assistant, Lina Browner, contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the panel.

Sincerely,

Raymond E. Wicks, Ph.D.
Chairperson, 2009-2010