



Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

— Making a positive difference through education and service —

M E M O R A N D U M

DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

January 5, 2009

TO: The First Steps Community

FROM: Pam Thomas, Coordinator for Early Intervention Services

RE: First Steps Program Update

In the past two years, Missouri's Early Intervention program, First Steps, has taken numerous steps towards improving intervention in natural environments for families and children with developmental disabilities or delays.

In the spring of 2007, Dr. Robin McWilliam conducted three workshops on "A Five-Component Approach to Early Intervention in Natural Environments" throughout the state. Over 800 providers attended, including physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, special instructors, and service coordinators. The workshop focused on five key practices:

- understanding the family ecology
- functional intervention planning
- transdisciplinary service delivery
- effective home visits
- collaborative consultation to child care

The response from those attending the workshops was overwhelmingly positive and many providers volunteered to try these activities in their regions.

In April 2007, a stakeholder group, convened at the request of the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC), began statewide discussions regarding the challenges Missouri faces related to availability of service providers in all regions of the state. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contacted NECTAC, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, to assist the state with information on various early intervention service models used by other states and to facilitate a meeting of stakeholders to discuss possible improvements to Missouri's current system.

Dr. McWilliam revisited Missouri in March 2008 to conduct a fourth workshop on “Early Intervention in Natural Environments” where the focus of the workshop was collaborating and consulting as early intervention teams. The participants represented all ten System Point of Entry (SPOE) regions in the state and included First Steps service coordinators, SPOE directors and evaluators. Those who attended this workshop were in various stages of practicing early intervention teams throughout the state.

Since the last workshop, several technical assistance and guidance documents about developing and implementing early intervention teams have been crafted. As new early intervention materials are developed they will be posted to the First Steps website. Statewide messages will be sent to notify the field that new documents have been posted.

To date there are approximately 18 teams implementing early intervention teaming in rural and urban areas throughout the state of Missouri. First Steps Area Directors have been working with the ten SPOE regions to develop and implement early intervention teams. It is the intent of DESE that all regions move forward with implementing early intervention teams as the method of service delivery in Missouri. The Area Directors will provide continued guidance and mentoring to assist in achieving this goal.