

APPENDIX B

ACTIVITIES OF THE REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTERS

The Regional Resource and Federal Center Program assists State education agencies (SEAs) in building their capacity to improve services for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. The role of the six Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) is to provide advice and technical assistance to administrators and educators in SEAs, local education agencies, and other appropriate public agencies. Information related to the activities conducted by the RRCs is included in each Annual Report.

Regional Resource and Federal Center Network

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) provides assistance to States implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) through its Regional Resource and Federal Center (RRFC) Network. This national program of technical assistance and information dissemination is designed to help State education agencies (SEAs) improve their systems of early intervention, special education, and transition services through the development and implementation of policies, programs, and practices focused on enhancing educational results for children and youth with disabilities. The Network is composed of six Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) and the Federal Resource Center (FRC). The six RRCs have been funded to help States clarify and respond to emerging issues; to provide information on research-based practices to address those issues; and to provide consultation, planning, and other technical assistance to support States on those issues. The FRC supports RRC work in States by coordinating information and activities across regions and by serving as a key connection with other technical assistance and dissemination projects funded by OSEP.

The emphasis in the reauthorization of IDEA was on the system--on effecting positive outcomes for children with disabilities through accountable programs. Close connections between the RRCs and States, and between the RRFC Network and OSEP, with its array of programs, inform and support the critical interplay among Federal initiatives and regional structures to promote local effects. A recent highlight of this effective collaboration has been the Network's support of OSEP's leadership in its Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. RRC Network services may be characterized as (1) coordinated regional responses and (2) collaborative nationwide responses.

Coordinated Regional Responses to States

Beyond working with OSEP staff, SEAs view the RRCs as their primary source of assistance. Soon after the IDEA Amendments of 1997 were enacted, States sought RRC assistance in making changes in policies, procedures, formats, and systems that would help them come into compliance and improve performance for all children. States turn to the Network to provide them with the best available information and technical assistance and are often interested in benefiting from other States' experiences and practices. RRC assistance capitalizes on Network capacity to ensure a cohesive approach, consistent nationwide access to the best available practice, and a comprehensive response to States in their implementation of requirements for OSEP and SEA monitoring. The RRCs have responded to hundreds of requests for

information, convened regional workgroups, provided numerous consultation and training events, and facilitated meetings and work groups in specific States region-wide and at the national level. RRCs have designed information modules, web pages, and other up-to-date, accessible resources to support States involved in OSEP's Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process and in the redesign of their own monitoring systems. Maintaining currency and quality across the Network, the RRCs collaborate with each other and with other Department of Education and OSEP-funded projects to make timely and effective information available to all States.

Collaborative Nationwide Responses

The primary coordinating body for RRC monitoring efforts nationwide is the RRFC Monitoring Work Group, which includes representatives from each of the RRCs, the FRC, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NECTAS), the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), and OSEP. This work group coordinates and links; as issues arise in one region, that RRC brings them to the work group to gather ideas and information on strategies that may have been tried with other States and in other regions. The RRC-NECTAS connection ensures that the common issues and strategies for Parts C and B are kept visible across States and modeled through cooperative ventures of the two technical assistance systems. RRCs keep each other informed of activities in their regions that might be accessed by States in other regions. The work group also provides a timely vehicle whereby OSEP and NASDSE representatives can alert RRCs and, through them, their States to national activities and emerging issues.

This group provides the impetus and guidance for the National Monitoring Conference, intended for individuals involved in supervising, designing, or implementing monitoring programs under Parts B and C of IDEA. With reauthorization came increased expectations in accountability and results; high stakes assessments, graduation and curriculum standards, and other accountability indices drive accreditation and funding. There are also increased expectations for collaboration between State and local service providers, across Part C, Section 619, and school-aged Part B, and between higher education and State departments in their State improvement plans and grants. These all contribute to the importance of the national conference, where State staff, technical assistance providers, parents, and others hear nationally recognized experts and State practitioners present effective practices and engage in networking and facilitated discussions of common issues. The 1999 conference included over 230 participants from all 50 States, in sessions focused on how States are planning for and meeting increased expectations in accountability and results with data systems that are keyed to discipline, standards, and student outcomes. Sessions also focused on how States are developing comprehensive and effective systems that ensure both compliance with the letter of the law and with the quality intents of the law.

State monitoring developments and practices are informed and supported routinely through a variety of Network strategies:

- A collaborative listserv enables individual Centers to request information from every other region and to convey consolidated information to a State in need of immediate response;
- Information modules, regionally designed but nationally available, address specific issues in monitoring raised by one or more States;
- A national profile helps RRCs respond to State questions about other States' practices;
- The National State Policy Database provides a single site for collecting, accessing, and researching State policies nationwide (launched by NASDSE's Project FORUM, the database is now housed at the Great Lakes RRC); and
- The recently created National Monitoring and Promising Practices web site offers an important national information resource for highlighting effective monitoring practices (an OSEP initiative, the Mountain Plains RRC led the design team composed of staff from OSEP, RRC, NECTAS, and NASDSE).

RRC partnerships with OSEP, NECTAS, NASDSE, and other technical assistance and development programs unify and strengthen assistance to States improving their monitoring systems, in turn improving outcomes for children. These partnerships also model for States how collaboration among agencies yields long-term and effective results.

The enduring alliance among OSEP, the SEAs, and the RRCs demonstrates critical interactions of Federal, State, and local policy and resources which affect local practices. OSEP's Continuous Improvement Monitoring System has renewed partnerships in Federal, State, and local arenas; increased stakeholder involvement; enhanced Federal compliance monitoring; and raised expectations nationally for achieving positive results for students with disabilities. RRCs are often integrally involved in OSEP monitoring visits, assisting State leadership in the self-assessment and planning processes, designating and including critical stakeholders, etc. RRCs have worked with OSEP in its effort to refine its own monitoring process: conducting consumer satisfaction interviews with State staff during the pilot year, providing input on the Monitoring Manual, and most recently creating with OSEP and technical assistance and development colleagues the National Monitoring and Promising Practices website. The RRFC Network, its activities, and partnerships continue to help States make improvements in their monitoring systems and

procedures which support their compliance with IDEA and promote change leading to improved results for children and youth with disabilities.