



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

Honorable Linda McCulloch  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Montana Office of Public Instruction  
1227 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Helena, MT 59620-2501

JUN 15 2007

Dear Superintendent McCulloch:

Thank you for the timely submission of Montana's Annual Performance Report (APR) and revised State Performance Plan (SPP) under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 2004.

As you know, under IDEA section 616, each State has an SPP that evaluates the State's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of Part B of the IDEA and describes how the State will improve its implementation of Part B. In the revised SPP due by February 1, 2007, States were required to provide information on: (1) specific new indicators; and (2) correction of any deficiencies identified in the Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP's) SPP response letter sent to your State last year. States were also required to submit by February 1, 2007, an APR for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2005 that describes the State's: (1) progress or slippage in meeting the measurable and rigorous targets established in the SPP; and (2) any revisions to the State's targets, improvement activities, timelines or resources in the SPP and a justification for the revisions. We appreciate the State's efforts in preparing the FFY 2005 APR and revised SPP.

The Department has reviewed the information provided in Montana's FFY 2005 APR and revised SPP, other State-reported data, information obtained through monitoring visits, and other public information and has determined that, under IDEA section 616(d), Montana needs assistance in meeting the requirements of Part B of the IDEA. The State should review IDEA section 616(e) regarding the potential future impact of the Department's determination.

The Department's determination is based on the totality of the State's data in its SPP/APR and other publicly available information, including any compliance issues. The factors in States' FFY 2005 APR and February 1, 2007 SPP submissions that affected the Department's determinations were whether the State: (1) provided valid and reliable FFY 2005 data that reflect the measurement for each indicator, and if not, whether the State provided a plan to collect the missing or deficient data; and (2) for each compliance indicator (a) demonstrated compliance or timely corrected noncompliance, and (b) in instances where it did not demonstrate compliance, had nonetheless made progress in ensuring compliance over prior performance in that area. We also considered whether the State had other IDEA compliance issues that were identified previously through the Department's monitoring, audit or other activities, and the State's progress in resolving those problems.

The specific factor affecting OSEP's determination of needs assistance for Montana is that the data provided by the State for Indicator 12, while partially responsive, was not valid and reliable.

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The State reported that it reviewed a sample of student records from 75 entities to determine if children referred by a Part C service provider agency have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in place at the age of three, and identified no instances of noncompliance.

While OSEP appreciates the effort made by the State, the State was required to report for Indicator 12 the percent of children referred by Part C prior to age 3, who are found eligible for Part B, and who have an IEP *implemented* by their third birthdays. The measurement for this indicator required the State to report: (1) the number of children who have been served in Part C and referred to Part B for eligibility determination; (2) the number of those referred determined not eligible and whose eligibilities were determined prior to their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthdays; (3) the number found eligible who have an IEP developed and implemented by their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthdays; and (4) the number of children for whom parental refusal to provide consent caused delays in evaluation or initial services. Absent more thorough data for this compliance indicator, we were unable to determine that your State met requirements under section 616(d). Balancing this factor were areas reflecting a high level of performance, which include that the State reported 100% compliance for Indicator 16 and a high rate of compliance for Indicator 15. We hope that the State will be able to demonstrate that it meets requirements in its next APR.

The Table attached to this letter provides OSEP's analysis of Montana's FFY 2005 APR and revised SPP and identifies, by indicator, OSEP's review and acceptance of any revisions made by the State to its targets, improvement activities (timelines and resources) and baseline data in the State's SPP. It also identifies, by indicator, the State's status in meeting its target, and whether the State's data reflect progress or slippage, and whether the State corrected noncompliance and provided valid and reliable data. The table also lists, by indicator, any additional information the State must include in the FFY 2006 APR or, as needed, the SPP due February 1, 2008, to address the problems OSEP identified in the revised SPP or FFY 2005 APR. The State must provide this required information.

As you know, your State must report annually to the public on the performance of each local educational agency (LEA) located in the State on the targets in the SPP under IDEA section 616(b)(2)(C)(ii)(I). The requirement for public reporting on LEA performance is a critical provision in ensuring accountability and focusing on improved results for children with disabilities. Please have your staff notify your OSEP State Contact when and where your State makes available its public report on LEA performance. In addition, States must review LEA performance against targets in the State's SPP, especially the compliance indicators, determine if each LEA meets the requirements of the IDEA and inform each LEA of its determination. For further information regarding these requirements, see SPP/APR Guidance Materials at <http://www.rfcnetwork.org/>.

We hope that the State found helpful, and was able to benefit from, the monthly technical assistance conference calls conducted by this Office, ongoing consultation with OSEP State Contacts and OSEP-funded Technical Assistance Center staff, materials found on the IDEA 2004 website, and attendance at OSEP-sponsored conferences. OSEP will continue to provide

technical assistance opportunities to assist your State as it works to improve performance under Part B. If you have any feedback on our past technical assistance efforts or the needs of States for guidance, we would be happy to hear from you as we work to develop further mechanisms to support State improvement activities.

OSEP is committed to supporting Montana's efforts to improve results for children with disabilities and looks forward to working with your State over the next year. If you have any questions, would like to discuss this further, or want to request technical assistance, please do not hesitate to call Ken Kienas, your OSEP State Contact, at 202-245-7621.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia J. Guard".

Patricia J. Guard  
Acting Director  
Office of Special Education Programs

Enclosure

cc: State Director of Special Education