

Blueprint Special Education Workgroup Updates

Division Of Special Education

October 27, 2025

PRESENTED BY

Liz Zogby and Carmen Brown



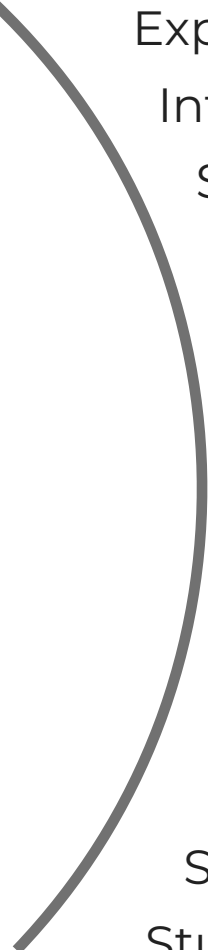
Presentation Outline

1. From Recommendations to Priorities
2. Standard for Developing IEPs to Narrow or Close Academic Performance Gaps
3. Independent Special Education Funding Study
4. PreK Systems Analysis Workgroup
5. Alternate Pathway to Diploma
6. CTE (career connected learning, sunseting CRD)
7. Alternate Assessment Eligibility

Blueprint Special Education Workgroup

- In December 2022, the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) charged the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) with convening a Special Education Workgroup to discuss and make recommendations on instruction, services, and funding for students with disabilities.
- Diverse workgroup membership: 50 members including school administrators, special education and general education teachers, parents, advocates and attorneys, community partners, special education directors, physicians, and others from across Maryland.
- 16 monthly meetings between August 2023 and January 2025.
- Pre-reading on each topic and other materials are available on the Workgroup website: <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/special-education-workgroup/>
- Meetings were livestreamed. Recordings are available on MSDE YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@msdetv6068>

Arc of Topics



State of Students with Disabilities in Maryland
Expectations for Students with Disabilities
Integration of General and Special Education
Specially Designed Instruction
Effective IEP Implementation
Teacher Qualifications, Recruitment, and Retention
Staffing and Service Delivery
Funding
Least Restrictive Environment
Significant Disproportionality
Early Childhood/Infants and Toddlers
Authentic Family-School Partnerships
Secondary Transition
Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities
Behavior & Discipline

Recommendations

Standards and Expectations Under IDEA for SWDs to Achieve, Including Ambitious IEP Goals

- Recommendation 1: Standards and Expectations
- Recommendation 2: Monitoring
- Recommendation 3: Comprehensive Early Literacy Plan

Specially Designed Instruction

- Recommendation 4: State-Level Capacity and Guidance on Specially Designed Instruction

IEP Implementation

- Recommendation 5: Effective Implementation of IEPs

Monitoring, Data Collection, and Technical Assistance

- Recommendation 6: Review of MOIEP

Teacher Qualifications, Recruitment, and Retention

- Recommendation 7: Knowledge, Skills, and Expertise
- Recommendation 8: Recruitment & Retention of Educators

Recommendations

Capacity and Resources

- Recommendation 9: Staffing and Service Delivery

Funding

- Recommendation 10: Adequacy Study
- Recommendation 11: Minimum School Funding
- Recommendation 12: Prevention of Supplantation

IEP Implementation

- Recommendation 5: Effective Implementation of IEPs

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

- Recommendation 13: Previous Recommendations and LRE
- Recommendation 14: Plan for Least Restrictive Environment

Recommendations

Significant Disproportionality

- Recommendation 15: Previous Recommendations and Disproportionality
- Recommendation 16: Plan to Address Significant Disproportionality

Early Childhood

- Recommendation 17: Access to High Quality Pre-Kindergarten Programs
- Recommendation 18: Plan for High-Quality Childcare
- Recommendation 19: Plan to Improve State Support for LITPs

Authentic Family-School Partnership

- Recommendation 20: Plan to Strengthen Family-School Partnership
- Recommendation 21: Changes to Special Education Processes

Secondary Transition

- Recommendation 22: Explicit Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Pillar 3
- Recommendation 23: Plan to Improve Secondary Transition

Recommendations

Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

- Recommendation 24: Plan to Limit Participation in Alternate Assessments to Only Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities
- Recommendation 25: Plan to Improve Educational Experiences and Outcomes of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Behavior and Discipline

- Recommendation 26: Plan to Reduce More Restrictive Placements for Students with Disabilities
- Recommendation 27: Educator Preparation Programs

Foundational Priorities

1. Ensure **grade-level achievement expectations, standards, and related monitoring**.
2. Expand the **use of evidence-based practices** that enable students with disabilities to achieve grade-level standards, with a significantly larger role for **general education**, as well as address some of the root causes of **significant disproportionality** and the **overreliance on more restrictive placements** where students with disabilities have little to no access to their nondisabled peers, general education classrooms, curriculum, or teachers for students with disabilities.
3. Enhance **supply and retention of teachers** and **develop teacher capacity**, ensuring Maryland's schools have enough general and special educators, related service providers, paraprofessionals, and other critical roles, with the knowledge, skills, and expertise to effectively teach students with disabilities. These strategies employed to achieve this priority should also focus on creating **more sustainable workloads** and schools that better support educators.
4. Address **disproportionality** in the identification of students with disabilities, achievement outcomes, disciplinary action, LRE, and eligibility for participation in alternate assessments.
5. Conduct an **independent study of special education funding** and frame legislative proposals.
6. Strengthen **family and school partnerships and collaboration** with statewide and community-based organizations.

Near Term Priorities

7. Ensure LEA compliance with IDEA's **Least Restrictive Environment** requirements, including reducing the overuse of LRE-C and separate school placements, while ensuring that a broad continuum of services and supports are available.
8. Review and refine or replace the **Maryland Online Individualized Education Program (MOIEP)**.

Progress and Next Steps

- Standard for Developing IEPs to Narrow or Close Academic Performance Gaps [Priority 1]
- Alternate Assessment Eligibility [Priority 1]
- Early Literacy Policy [Priority 2]
- Special education cost study to be completed by December 2026 (RFP) [Priority 5]
- PreK Systems Analysis Workgroup
- Diploma options/alternate pathway to diploma
- *Implementation Plan due by December 2025*

Standard to Close or Narrow Academic Performance Gaps

Spring 2025: Standard Published, Special Education Leaders Trained



Summer-Fall 2025: School-Base Staff Trained

Moving Forward: 2026 Cohort Monitoring and Technical Assistance

Independent Special Education Funding Study Updates

- Submitted **request** for expedited procurement to the Board of Public Works (BPW) on 08/12/2025
- Expedited procurement **approved** by BPW 9/24/2025
- MSDE and AIB **meet to finalize** the Request for Proposal (RFP) on 10/06/2025
- Final draft of RFP **approved** on 10/07/2025
- RFP **released** on 10/08/2025
- Pre-Proposal Conference with vendors **initiated** on 10/15/2025
- RFP **closes** on 11/05/2025

Study to Improve the IFSP and IEP Processes and Systems

- **Project Goals:**

- System **Evaluation**
- Regulatory **Compliance**
- User **Experience**
- User **Feedback** Mechanisms
- System **Accessibility**
- Opportunities for Increased **Efficiency and Effectiveness**
- Comparative **Analysis**
- Recommendations for **System Improvements**
- Developed the Request for Proposal (RFP) and multiple proposals received
 - Proposals are being reviewed by procurement before programmatic specialists

PreK Systems Analysis Workgroup

Broad representative membership from the Early Childhood community and State government

MSDE leadership from Sarah Neville-Morgan, Dr. Laura Wallace, and other DEC staff

Monthly meetings began September 2025

Considering all aspects of the **mixed-delivery publicly funded PreK system**, including:

- Applications and Administration
- Family and Child Experiences
- Program Standards
- Partnerships, Financial, and Payment

Interim report by **June 1** and final report by **December 2027**

<https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/pre-k-workgroup>

State Agencies' Transition Collaboration: Diploma Pathway Subcommittee

Purpose

- To guide the work of developing a proposed diploma pathway for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Mission

- To collaboratively explore and define the foundations for a proposed diploma pathway for Maryland students with the most significant cognitive disabilities that is rigorous, meaningful, and recognized across education, employment, and community systems.

Career-Connected Learning System

Comprehensive, integrated approach that helps students **identify, develop, and practice** career skills early, so they can make **informed decisions** about the many pathways available to them after graduation

Not a single program, but a big, **connected system** that brings schools and workplaces together by:

- Starting **early**
- Flexible, **student-centered** pathways
- Blended **course options**
- Support from **career coaches**

Alternate Framework Eligibility

- Self-Assessment developed for LEAs to utilize to **self-evaluate their own practices** related to the Alternate Framework
- Audits completed for **disproportionality** and **early identification** for the Alternate Framework, with findings indicating:
 - Lack of evidence for a **cognitive disability** for **Pre-K-2nd grade** students, students eligible under a category of **Developmental Delay**, students eligible under a category of **Multiple Disabilities**
 - Missing parent signature on Appendix A for **understanding** and **consent**
- Draft Waiver Extension Request currently posted on MSDE website for public comment until **November 3, 2025**
- Justifications and Assurances required for submission by **November 15, 2025**