

Purpose

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) is inviting innovative proposals from organizations, parent groups, individuals, and other qualified interested parties to conduct activities that result in: 1) increased numbers of people actively engaged in systems change regarding inclusive education, and 2) lasting reform to Maryland's local education systems, demonstrated by an increase in the number of students with disabilities educated in the least restrictive environment. This systems change initiative is in direct alignment with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which requires that:

- To the maximum extent appropriate for each child, children with disabilities must be educated with children without disabilities and in the schools they would be educated in were they not disabled.

Background

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the primary federal law governing the education of students with disabilities, requires the provision of a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment in which a student's needs can be met. Least restrictive environment means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, school districts must educate students with disabilities in the regular classroom with appropriate aids and supports along with their nondisabled peers in the school they would attend if not disabled, unless a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) requires some other arrangement.

In 2001, the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) found that Maryland was noncompliant with federal law because students with disabilities were unnecessarily removed from the least restrictive environment and placed into more segregated settings to receive their education.¹

- The most recent data from OSEP reports that 7.3% of students with individualized education programs in Maryland are served in separate special education schools;²
- This is more than double the national average of 3.74%.
- Maryland serves more students with disabilities in separate special education schools than every state and U.S. territory except New Jersey and Washington, DC.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has recently taken a number of steps to increase placement of students in the least restrictive environment, including offering incentive grants, operating a systems change grant, and establishing least restrictive environment as a priority in its discretionary and capacity building grants. Although the placement rate of students with disabilities into general education classrooms has steadily increased, Maryland currently serves only 57% of those students in the general education setting.

¹ OSEP Monitoring Report, 2001.

² Data based on the December 1, 2007 count, updated as of July 15, 2008. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System.

The Council recognizes that parents and family members are particularly meaningful advocates for students with disabilities and play a critical role in facilitating systemic change to local school system policies and procedures and improving school practices.

Through this request for proposals, the Council continues its commitment to identifying and supporting strategies that promote lasting systems change, support advocacy and improve school practices so many more students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment.

Scope of Work

The Council is seeking proposals to develop coordinated, sustained, effective advocacy among parents, family members and other concerned individuals and organizations that brings about lasting reform to local school systems and builds their capacity to educate all students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Through the provision of leadership, advocacy, training, technical assistance, and other activities the initiative(s) funded by the Council through this RFP will impact and influence practices, policies and decisions at the local and state levels to increase the number of students with developmental disabilities who are educated in general education classrooms with appropriate supports and services.

Projects may focus on a specific county or more than one county. The geographic scope of proposals will be reflected in accompanying budget requests.

Toward this end, the proposals must include the following components:

- Develop, educate, support, and sustain an active group of parents, family members and other concerned individuals and advocates to impact decisions at the local level about the education of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.
- Provide training to educate the group of parents, family members and other individuals and advocates about state and federal law, advocacy strategies and skills, and Maryland's educational system to raise competency levels of people advocating on behalf of students with disabilities.
- Assist and enable the group to master information and negotiate systems in order to help secure the inclusive educational opportunities that are a civil right and legal mandate for students with disabilities.

The focus of this initiative is on systemic educational reform and while a variety of strategies and activities should be used, any individual advocacy work must be directly linked to system change activities and outcomes.

- Develop effective long-standing relationships between parents and other advocates, the local school system, including but not limited to the Director of Special Education, county Board of Education, and educators that result in sustained systemic change measured by: 1) an increase in the number of students with disabilities educated in the least restrictive environment, and 2) a change in policies and practices that support this.

- Be available to support advocacy at the state level, including the state legislature, on the issue of least restrictive environment.

What Proposals Must Include (In this order)

Needs Assessment Information (15 points)

Identify the needs or barriers within the targeted local school system(s) to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and demonstrate how those barriers will be addressed within the framework of this project.

Approach (50 points)

- 1) The Target Group:
 - a. Name the specific county or counties and describe the group(s) of parents, family members, and any other individuals and organizations you will involve.
 - b. Specify how the target group will be identified and recruited for this initiative, including any existing interested parties or groups.
- 2) Project Goals: Specific year one goals, activities and measurable outcomes. Be certain to relate activities to specific goals and outcomes, rather than listing activities separately. **The goals and activities must demonstrate how you will address all of the bulleted components listed in the Scope of Work section.** Activities should include plans for delivering education, training, technical assistance, and ongoing support to sustain the group and its activities.
- 3) Project Timelines: Project timeline showing start and completion dates of all major project activities and tasks for one year.
- 4) Projected Future Activities: Brief summary of major project activities for year two and three.
- 5) Systemic Change: Describe the relationship of project activities to expected systemic change.
- 6) Sustainability: Describe any plans to sustain the project activities beyond the Council's 3 year funding period.
- 7) Evaluation plan. (Maximum of two pages). How will you determine that the project goals have been met? How will you determine the impact or effect the project has upon the individuals served and jurisdiction(s) in which you will focus? The evaluation plan should specify how the local efforts will measure:
 - a. Group commitment to sustained work.
 - b. Individual or group knowledge regarding leadership, advocacy, federal and state laws,
 - c. Individual or group confidence in advocating for changes in educational systems,

- d. Individual and group advocacy efforts within Maryland systems that result in increased numbers of students being served in least restrictive environments or changes in policies or practices, and
- e. How the local efforts are linked to support state-level legislative and policy efforts that support education in the least restrictive environment.

Organizational/Individual Profile (25 points)

Provide a description of mission and related experience.

- a. If you are an organization: a description of your mission, current program(s) and a list of board members. Include a description of the organization's values and a description of demonstrated experience and success on issues regarding inclusive education.
- b. If you are an existing group: a description of your mission, current program(s) and list of board members (if applicable). Include a description of the group's values and a description of demonstrated experience and success on issues regarding inclusive education.
- c. If you are an individual or group of individuals: a description of your related experience, knowledge and beliefs about the education of students with disabilities.

Key Staff (10 points)

Experience and qualifications of individuals directing and staffing the project that demonstrate their ability to implement the work plan successfully and achieve the identified outcomes. Provide names, positions, and general responsibilities to the proposed project, demonstrating how they relate to major activities and tasks. Also include this information for any consultants who will be utilized directly or indirectly during the project.

Budget Information (use the enclosed *Proposed Project Budget Package*)

You must provide twenty-five percent (25%) of the total cost of the project, unless your project will operate in an urban or rural poverty area, in which case ten percent (10%) of the total cost is required. For more information about Maryland's urban and rural poverty areas, go to: http://www.mdp.state.md.us/msdc/census/cen2000/SF3/sumyprof/maps/county/sf3_cntymap.htm

Proposals should not exceed 15 pages. The budget package is an addendum and not included in the page limit.

Expected Long Term Outcomes of this Initiative

- 1) Development and support of a sustainable group(s) prepared to create and maintain a groundswell of support to build capacity in local school systems so students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment.

- 2) Sustained increase in the number of students educated in general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools.
- 3) Lasting change to policies, procedures and practices at local levels and within individual schools that result in more students with disabilities educated in the least restrictive environment.
- 4) Greater coordination of advocacy activities aimed at increasing inclusive education.
- 5) Project sustainability and continued impact after Council funding ends.

Funds Available

Up to \$100,000 is available in the first year of this initiative. Grant funds can be renewed for up to three years based on performance. It is anticipated that \$100,000 per year will be available for this initiative in Year 2 and Year 3. **Funding is available January 2010, but projects can begin later. The Council may fund one or multiple proposals.**

Strong consideration will be given to proposals focused on: 1) counties where the school system has applied for the LRE and/or supplemental aides and services discretionary grants from the Maryland State Department of Education and 2) counties with the poorest data with regard to educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Who May Apply

The Council will accept proposals from:

- 1) Not-for-profit organizations;
- 2) Groups of parents and other interested parties who collaborate and designate an organization as a fiscal entity; and
- 3) Qualified individuals who can demonstrate how they will be both fiscally accountable and accountable for proposed activities.

Pre-Proposal Conference

Two pre-proposal conferences will be held. **The first pre-proposal conference will be held on September 15, 2009 at 2pm at the Oakland Mills Meeting House.** For directions, go to <http://www.themeetinghouse.org/direc.htm> or call Linda Nelson at (410) 767-3670 or 1 (800) 305-6441, ext 1.

The second pre-proposal conference will be held via a teleconference call on September 16, 2009 at 2 p.m. Please contact Rachel London at rlondon@md-council.org to register. The call in number will be sent to the registrant.

The material covered at the pre-proposal conferences will be the same. The pre-proposal conference will be the only opportunity to ask questions. Attendance, however, is not

mandatory. If special accommodations are needed, please contact the Council office by **September 8, 2009**.

Mandatory Meeting with Review Committee

All individuals and organizations submitting a proposal must be available to meet with the review committee on **October 28, 2009** in the event that you are invited to discuss your proposal. Please hold the day. The Council will confirm any such participation and schedule a specific time to meet by October 23, 2009.

When Proposals are Due

Proposals are due in the Council office by **October 9, 2009 at 3:00 p.m.** Please submit fifteen (15) copies. In addition, an electronic version (Microsoft Word) of the proposal should be submitted via email to info@md-council.org along with the hard copies.

Timeline

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| Pre-proposal conference | September 15, 2009, 2:00pm |
| Pre-proposal teleconference | September 16, 2009, 2:00pm |
| Proposals are due | October 9, 2009, 3:00pm |
| Meeting with Review Committee | October 28, 2009 (time to be determined) |
| Decisions about funding | December 2009 |
| Distribution of funds | January 2010 |