

## Part 2 – Recommendations

Several key factors were considered when developing our recommendations, including, the financial constraints facing the state and school districts; increasing costs of special education services, including out placements, as districts face declining enrollments; changes in the types of services needed by eligible students; replicating successful programs and/or systems that are already being implemented on a smaller scale in certain areas of the state; the varying relationships between RESCs and their member districts, and our shared responsibility to help all students be college and career ready at graduation. Our recommendations emphasize how the RESCs can and should act as a partner with districts in the continuum of the delivery of special education services for students. As regional entities they offer opportunities for districts to stretch resources to meet more students' educational needs within their home district or in close proximity. This gives parents the opportunity to be more involved in their child's education and the child to be more engaged and integrated with their home school community.

In response to making a recommendation on how the RESCs can access additional revenue we are proposing that the RESCs work with districts to access additional reimbursements for services provided to Medicaid eligible children. Outlined below for your consideration are the groups' specific recommendations.

1. Better educate districts around the role RESCs can play as district partners in the continuum of delivery of special education services including, but not limited to, the following areas.
  - a. Transportation:
    - i. Develop and maintain an on-line system for districts to report out-of-district transportation runs. Utilize this information to enable districts to collaborate on bus routes to achieve economies of scale when providing out-of-district transportation for special education placements.
    - ii. Provide professional development and training for aides on buses and vans.
    - iii. Have RESCs conduct an assessment of current runs to determine route efficiency.
    - iv. Have RESCs negotiate fuel rates for district transportation vendors to access.
  - b. Cooperative partnerships: Assist districts with the creation of cooperative partnerships to provide required specialized programming that might otherwise

lead to a student being out-placement. With declining enrollment many districts have space that could be repurposed to provide students with an appropriate education in close proximity to their home district or within their home district through these partnerships.

- c. Create in-district programming: Operate, in partnership with districts, specialized programs within the district that can be modified over time as the needs of the student population changes. Similar to “b” this will allow districts to serve their students in district and ensure opportunities for integrated access to the curriculum and activities with their peers.
- d. Educate districts on availability of RESC operated special education programs, the educational outcomes of the students in these programs, and the numbers of students successfully transitioned back to the district from these programs. Emphasis again on the RESC being a partner with the district in meeting a child’s educational needs.
- e. Assist in addressing the shortage of specialists in speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral services by:
  - i. Collaborating with the department and higher education institutions to increase the applicants to these types of teaching specialist programs.
  - ii. Sponsoring ARC programs in identified shortage areas such as low incidence disability, special education, bilingual special education, and teachers of hearing and visually impaired students.
  - iii. Assisting districts with retention strategies for specialists in these areas.
  - iv. Creating a pool in each region of specialists districts may access for services for coverage during leave of absences or until a position can be filled after a person leaves or retires.
- f. Assist districts in containing the cost of Independent Educational Evaluations.
  - i. Work with SDE to define the components of a comprehensive evaluation for in-district evaluations.
  - ii. RESCs could maintain a list of verified evaluators that districts may use when they need an independent evaluation. Vendors on the list must meet the qualifications, agree to terms of evaluation criteria and process, and agree to set rates for evaluations.

2. Medicaid Reimbursement:

- a. Establish capacity within each RESC to provide regional centralized administration of Medicaid billing for districts that lack the internal capacity and/or resources for administering the billing themselves.
- b. Assist districts in educating families of Medicaid eligible children of the benefits to their child of allowing districts to access Medicaid reimbursements for eligible services provided to their child at school. Parents must give permission to the district for the district to claim reimbursement.

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