

Background

The Minnesota Legislature in 2014 passed a bill that initiated a request for proposals to deploy a single system for the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) process for students with disabilities in the state. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has executed an RFP for this single system.

Challenges & Considerations

While a single system would promote complete statewide portability, it poses a series of challenges as it is presently designed, including:

- **Paperwork load unchanged:** About 40 percent of a special education teacher's time on average is spent on paperwork and due process. The Legislature approved this new process to reduce undue paperwork and allow special education teachers to spend more time in the classroom where they are trained to be. The IED process as outlined in the RFP does not achieve that.
- **Violating data privacy:** Under the proposed system, MDE would own the personal data of every student with disabilities in the state. This raises concern about data privacy and a potential federal violation of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- **Focus shifts away from students:** As owner of the system, the MDE becomes the customer, rather than the special education teachers who use it. This affects how the system is developed and places an imbalanced emphasis on compliance. The result is measuring technical compliance in paperwork rather than the purpose of IEPs – student progress. This could exacerbate the special education staff shortage, particularly in rural areas.
- **High training costs:** The move to this new system would cost school districts an estimated \$5.2 million in training and take special education teachers away from students for an additional 320 hours per district on average for additional training and not deliver additional functionality.
- **Incomplete system:** Teachers also would need to be trained on and use two different systems since the proposed statewide system would not cover all parts of the required IEP process. It only serves ages 3 to 21 and another private vendor will need to interface for children from birth to age 3.

“This will require special education teachers’ focus to switch from student centered to compliance centered. Special education teachers realize the importance of compliance with due process standards; however the focus needs to remain on the student, so that they can become a successful individual. The passing of House File 804 and Senate File 740 is essential to special education student success.”

- Julie Menage, Special Ed Teacher
Springfield Public Schools

Next Steps

Currently 85 percent of school districts in Minnesota use the same system for IEPs. Greater Minnesota educators, administrators and cooperatives recommend the passing of HF 804 and SF 740, which requires districts to contract with vendors for seamless transference of records, and repeals 125A.085 the 2014 law requiring MDE to contract for one vendor.

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