



## Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) Annual Report July 2020-June 2021

### Preface

The annual report of the Minnesota Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) is respectfully submitted to the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). The reporting period is July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021. The annual report is a summary of the panel activities and recommendations during the reporting period. SEAP provides a broad base of input to MDE staff regarding policies, practices and issues related to the education of children and youth with disabilities ages birth through 21, and advises MDE's Division of Special Education and Division of Assistance and Compliance on the education of children and youth with disabilities.

### Special Education Director's Letter

Dear Colleagues:

It is an honor to present the 2020-21 Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) Annual Report.

SEAP is a federally-mandated committee that advises the Minnesota Department of Education on students with disabilities and their families. While reviewing and commenting on Special Education policy updates and data reports is the primary focus, the work does not stop there. Our time together results in conversations focused on the meaningful and tangible improvement of education in Minnesota for all students.

The 2020-21 school year was unprecedented, to say the least, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, SEAP played a vital role in the department's approach to providing services to students with disabilities as we navigated the nuance of distance learning and hybrid learning models. Throughout the year, SEAP reviewed and gave input on Minnesota's [Safe Learning Plan](#) and MDE's [Guide to Addressing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Students with Disabilities](#). These documents were crucial to the education of students with disabilities, and SEAP's thoughtful conversations contributed to the effectiveness of our approach.

We are pleased to highlight all of the work from the last year in this report. The strength of our work is reflected in the strength of our collaboration with stakeholders. MDE extends a genuine thanks to every panel member for advising us in our work to serve Minnesota's students.

Sincerely,  
Robyn Widley  
Director, Special Education Division  
Minnesota Department of Education

## **SEAP Chair Reflections**

It has been an honor to serve as the chair of MDE's Special Education Advisory Panel. It has been a challenging year due to COVID-19 and I have been continually impressed by the members of the panel and MDE staff for their dedication, passion, and collaboration on behalf of students with disabilities in our great state of Minnesota, especially given the circumstances of the pandemic.

The SEAP met virtually on Zoom for all of our meetings this year. Topics that we covered during our meetings included the School Year 2021 Safe Learning Plan; postsecondary transition trends and supports; State Performance Plan (SPP); Annual Performance Report (APR); autism trends, supports and resources; Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) updates; legislative updates; and the [Guide to Addressing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Students with Disabilities](#). SEAP members were provided with opportunities to give updates, asked to provide feedback, and advise on each topic covered.

A special thank you to Robyn Widley, Barbie Hogan, Holly Andersen, and all of the MDE staff for your preparation for and participation in the SEAP meetings. This work could not be done without your support, leadership and encouragement.

I thank the 2020-21 SEAP members for their willingness to volunteer and serve on behalf of not only the communities they come from, but all students with disabilities in Minnesota. With gratitude, on behalf of the Minnesota Special Education Advisory Panel, I present this SEAP Annual Report.

Erin Hoffman, Chair  
Special Education Advisory Panel

## 2020-21 SEAP Members

Name	Represents	Term Ends
Kimberly Baker	Parent Representative	2021
Milena Bates	Parent Representative	2023
Tricia Brisbine	Parent Representative	2023
Christy Marie Caez Claudio	Parent Representative	2022
Amy Delgado	Parent Representative	2022
Michael Deschneau	Higher Education Representative	2023
Korto Dixon	School/Related Service Personnel	2022
Shannon Erickson	Vocational Representative	2021
Satasha Green-Stephen	Higher Education Representative	2023
Erin Hoffman, Chair	School Administrator	2021
Kelly Kausel	Parent Representative	2021
Rebecca Kottke	Student Representative	2022
Melanie Kray	School Administrator	2021
Kim Lemcke	Interagency Representative, Foster Care Services	2023
Amber Madoll	Parent Representative	2023
Georgia Miller-Kamara	School/Related Service Personnel	2023
Maleenia Mohabir	Parent Representative	2021
Patty Popp	Interagency Representative, Juvenile Corrections	2019
Tony Porter	Parent Representative	2021
Roberto Reyes	McKinney-Vento Homeless Advocate	N/A
Lynette Rigsby	Parent Representative	2021
Leann Shore	School/Related Service Personnel	2022
Jennifer Steinberg	Parent Representative	2023
Sadie Tollman	Parent Representative	2023
Megan Ulrich	School/Related Service Personnel	2021

## Duties

As established in accordance with 34 CFR 300.167-300.169 (2006), the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) of the state of Minnesota must:

1. Advise the State Educational Agency (SEA) of unmet needs within the state in the education of children with disabilities.
2. Comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the state regarding the education of children with disabilities.
3. Advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary under section 618 of the Act.
4. Advise the SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under Part B of the Act.

5. Advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.
6. The SEA, after deleting personally identifiable information, must provide SEAP with the due process hearing findings and decisions and make those findings and decisions available to the public (34 CFR 300.513(d) and 300.514(c)).

## Acknowledgements

MDE acknowledges and thanks the following staff for their contribution to this report and the work of the SEAP:

- Robyn Widley, Director, Special Education Division
- Erin Hoffman, SEAP Chair, 2020–21
- Holly Andersen, SEAP Coordinator
- Barbara Hess, Administrative Support
- Doug Gray, Communications Specialist

The SEAP is funded by federal funds obtained by MDE through Special Education — Grants to States CFDA 84-027A of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) and amendments thereto.

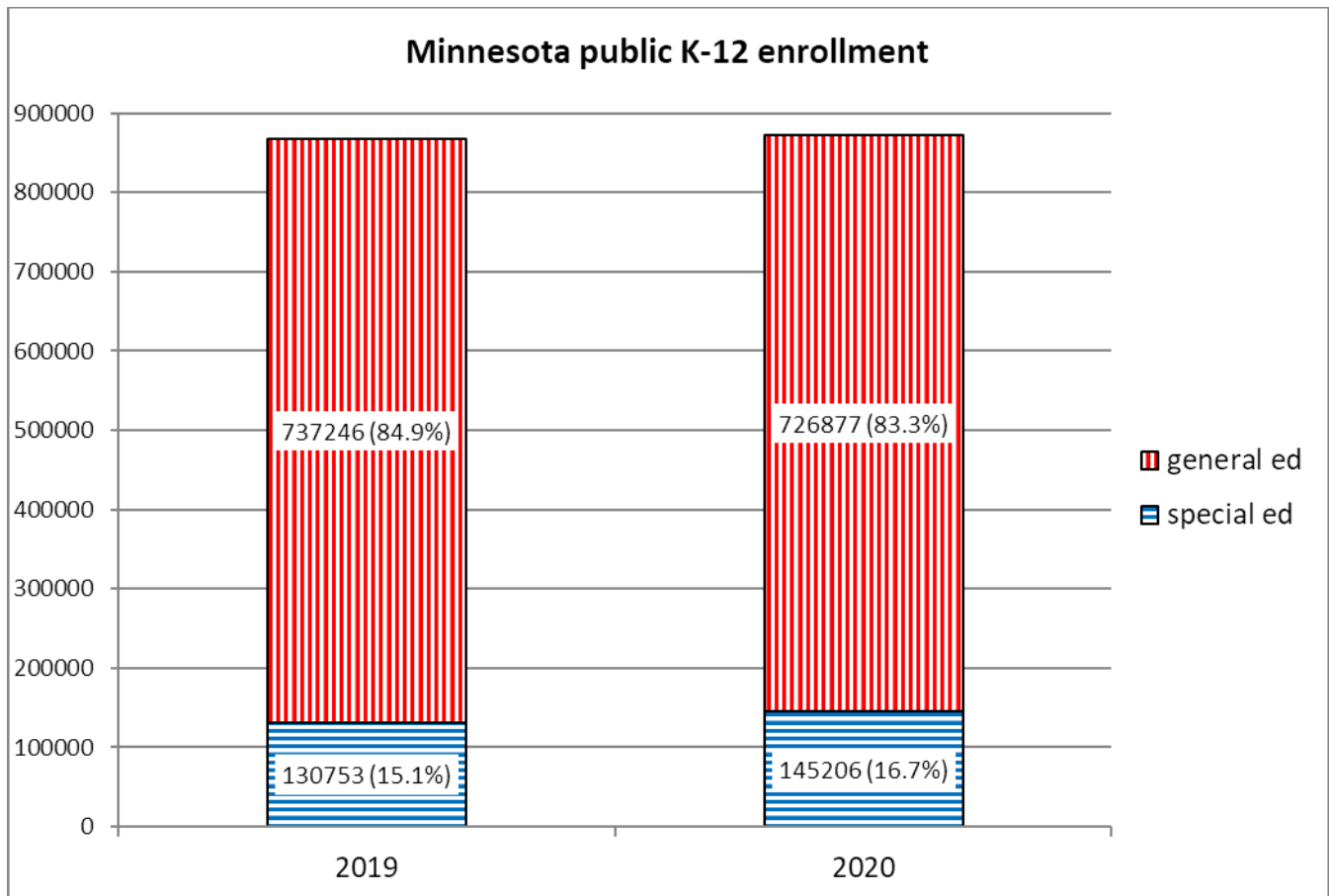
## Overview

SEAP provides policy guidance for MDE’s divisions of Special Education Policy and Compliance and Assistance with respect to special education and related services for children and youth with disabilities in Minnesota. IDEA and state law establish SEAP and outline its duties. SEAP members are appointed by the Commissioner of Education as the governor’s designee. SEAP members include parents, individuals with disabilities, educators, teacher trainers, advocates, special education directors and staff from MDE and other state agencies, bringing their diverse perspectives together to make recommendations on special education issues

## Special Education in Minnesota

By federal law, public schools must provide individualized special education and related services to eligible children with disabilities. Special education is specially designed instruction, provided at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. It may include instruction in the classroom, home, hospitals, institutions and other settings.

“SEAP provides a platform for people to partner and advocate for the needs of people with disabilities from rural to metro Minnesota.” — SEAP member



On December 1, 2020, 149,382 Minnesota children and youth from birth to 21 years old received special education services. This represents a decrease of 1.7 percent from the 152,016 Minnesota children receiving special education services in 2019-20. Of those, 145,206 were enrolled in grades K-12 in Minnesota public schools, 16.7 percent of the total statewide public school K-12 enrollment of 872,083. The number of Minnesota children and youth from birth to 21 years old in each of the 14 disability categories either decreased or remained approximately the same compared to December 1, 2019.

## Policy Areas of Interest

### Minnesota’s Safe Learning Plan

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MDE, working closely with the Minnesota Department of Health and other partners, [produced the Minnesota Safe Learning Plan and made it available on the MDE website](#). The Safe Learning Plan implemented a localized, data-driven approach to providing educational services for Minnesota students in both special and general education programs. It prioritized safety for students as well as flexibility for local schools and districts.

In their role as special education advisors to MDE, SEAP members received early and frequent information about the Safe Learning Plan. Areas of particular interest to SEAP included masking requirements, especially for younger students; timelines and procedures for special education evaluations during the pandemic; and roles and requirements for mental health supports, social workers and personal care assistance for Minnesota students in special education.

MDE appreciates the effort and advice SEAP contributed to the Safe Learning Plan. SEAP, MDE and their partners will continue to work closely together as Minnesota transitions to providing more educational services in school buildings.

“I think that the SEAP brought up valid thoughts, ideas, and insights into the multitude of challenges faced by school districts and families across the state.” — SEAP member

### **State Performance Plan (SPP), Annual Performance Report (APR) and State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)**

In 2021, the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services released state determinations on implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B and C for fiscal year 2019. IDEA requires each state to set goals for 17 key outcomes for students with disabilities in the state’s State Performance Plan. Then states must submit an Annual Performance Report detailing progress made towards each goal. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services reviews each state’s Annual Performance Report and issues a determination of progress made: meets the requirements and purposes of IDEA, needs assistance, needs intervention, or needs substantial intervention.

Starting in 2014, ED weighted compliance and student outcome results equally in making each state’s Part B determination. Beginning in 2015, ED used both compliance and student outcome results equally for both Part B and Part C state determinations as part of a shift to a Results Driven Accountability framework. ED used multiple outcome measures that include students with disabilities’ participation in state assessments, performance in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and graduation and dropout rates. The use of student testing and other outcome measures affected many states’ standings related to their overall determination.

In fiscal year 2019, 22 states and territories met the “Meets Requirements” determination for Part B, including Minnesota. Minnesota also met the “Meets Requirements” determination for Part C, making us one of only 12 states to meet in both areas, a decrease from 14 states last year. Minnesota continues to have much to celebrate about the quality work teachers and administrators are doing across the state for students with disabilities.

In 2014, ED’s Office of Special Education Programs’ new State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report incorporated Indicator 17, which required states to develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan focused on improving results for students with disabilities on a state-selected outcome in three phases over a six-year period. In Phase I, MDE identified six-year graduation rates for American Indian

and Black students with disabilities as its focus area for improvement. MDE's overall goal was to increase the capacity of district programs to implement, scale up and sustain evidence-based practices that would result in improved graduation rates and outcomes for students with disabilities. In 2015, the Duluth, Minneapolis, Osseo and St. Paul school districts became partners in the work and chose to implement Check & Connect at selected schools during the 2016-17 school year and beyond. MDE also designed the current State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) to support its SSIP implementation work by reducing dropouts and increasing graduation rates for American Indian students with disabilities and supporting higher education partnerships to increase the number of American Indian teachers in special education. The University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration supports Check & Connect training and coaching, while MDE's partner PACER supports family engagement.

For the past five years partner districts have completed the District Capacity Assessment (DCA), an action assessment designed to guide school district teams to align efforts and resources around practices intended to impact student outcomes. DCA results guide districts in developing individualized action plans to address areas of need while building on existing strengths. Over the past five years, all four districts have shown an increase in their capacity to implement Check & Connect.

In Phase II, MDE described its plans for department infrastructure changes, supporting district implementation of evidence-based practices, reporting progress and results and evaluating the plan. In subsequent years, MDE submitted Phase III reports describing partner district and MDE progress in infrastructure improvements as districts installed and implemented Check & Connect over time. The reports also describe the changes and infrastructure necessary to put organizational structures into place to create and install the supports needed to improve outcomes for American Indian and Black students with disabilities. OSEP feedback on Minnesota's SSIP Phase III submissions has been very positive, especially related to its collection and use of scaling data.

SEAP members learned about and provided valuable input toward MDE and local efforts to meet the challenge to increase graduation rates and meet the requirements of the SPP/APR process. Areas of particular interest included Minnesota's focus on and commitment to increasing equity in education and requirements for achievement testing for students, especially those with more severe disabilities.

## **Early Childhood**

In the early childhood education area, SEAP members focused on child find (the early identification and referral of very young children who may have disabilities) and the extension of eligibility for Developmental Delay (DD) during the COVID-19 peacetime emergency. The age limit for DD was raised to 9 years in light of decreased capacity for assessment and observation of young children with DD. Though SEAP expressed an interest in continuing this extension, it could not be done without legislative action.

“SEAP gives families of children with disabilities a broad voice in how MDE approaches and addresses educational disparities.” — SEAP member

SEAP learned that Minnesota’s child find system continued to function and provide equitable access to special education services for young children during the pandemic period. Tools such as Help Me Grow helped referrals continue to increase during the year.

## Secondary Transition

MDE staff presented detailed information to SEAP about collaboration with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and Department of Human Services (DHS), as well as Minnesota schools and districts, to improve employment and postsecondary enrollment outcomes for Minnesota students with disabilities. Resources such as [Disability Hub MN](#), state Vocational Rehabilitation Services and individualized case management services help those who want and seek to plan for future employment and higher education.

SEAP will continue its interest and involvement in these collaborative efforts in the coming year.

## Assistance and Compliance

MDE’s Assistance and Compliance Division continued to provide valuable information to SEAP members. During the pandemic emergency the division worked to keep Minnesota schools and districts informed of the latest requirements and best practices for serving students with disabilities, producing and updating a [Guide to Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Students with Disabilities that was posted to the MDE website](#). SEAP members contributed valuable comments and insights during this process. SEAP also heard information and made suggestions about the division’s special education complaint resolution process.

## Going Forward

SEAP is a broad-based constituency group that plays an active and influential role in improving the education of children and youth with disabilities in Minnesota. SEAP members participate on other state and local committees and task forces such as the special education teacher licensure task force and the MDE special education higher education forum. As a result of their membership on other groups, there is opportunity to communicate priorities and make connections. Working together helps all our efforts move forward. SEAP will continue to recommend improvements in the special education service system to improve outcomes for students.

“SEAP members have a wide range of backgrounds and are involved in the community directly, so the input is crucial for MDE to improve connection to the communities they serve.” — SEAP member



## SEAP Meeting Schedule 2020-21

Tuesday, September 15, 2020 (orientation)

Friday, September 25, 2020

Friday, November 20, 2020

Friday, January 22, 2021

Friday, April 16, 2021

Monday, June 28, 2021

SEAP held meetings for 2020-21 virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. SEAP scheduled its meetings from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For information about SEAP [visit the Advisory Council's website](#).

For questions about SEAP please contact [Holly Andersen](#) at 651-582-8668.