



Action Alert #2 - SEAP on November 16th

November 14, 2016

The **Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)** will meet Wednesday, November 16, 2016 to consider significant issues related to students with disabilities:

- [Update on aligning standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities \(LAA-1\)](#)
- [Recommendations to improve SEAP by the Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs](#)
- **Update on supporting unique communication needs of students**

How to Take Action

If any of these issues are important to you:

- Contact the SEAP Co-Chair [Patsy White](#) and let her know how you feel about these issues.
- Attend the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) meeting:

When: **Wednesday, November 16, 2016**
9:30 am

Where: **Claiborne Building**
Iowa Room (1-153)
1201 N. Third Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

The agenda for this meeting can be found [here](#). Additional information on agenda items of particular interest can be found below.

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Confirm Your Action

Don't forget to let us know that you took action! Reply to this email or notify your [LaCAN Leader](#) to confirm your action.

Why confirm your action? This helps the Council know how important these issues are to you and allows us to better work together in advocating for educational policies and practices that improve services and outcomes of students with disabilities.

Additional Information

Alignment of Standards for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

The La. Department of Education (LDOE) is seeking input on the proposed "Louisiana Connectors" which are the core academic content standards in English and Math. These Connectors align the curriculum to offer access for students with significant cognitive disabilities. According to the LDOE these connectors "identify essential knowledge and skills that students with significant cognitive disabilities must master in order to be prepared for a successful life after high school."

To review and provide feedback on the Louisiana Connectors please:

1. Review the [overview document](#) outlining the process for developing the standards
2. Review the Louisiana Connectors for [English](#) and [Math](#)
3. Complete the [LDOE feedback survey](#) by November 18, 2016

How are Louisiana Connectors used and why are they important?

In short, performance on these connectors only matters for school and district performance scores. There should not be any significant impact on student level decisions (i.e., grade promotion or graduation).

School Accountability and Louisiana Connectors.

The critical question to ask is how will performance on the Louisiana Connectors impact school performance scores and subsequently factor into decisions administrators make regarding use of resources for and the prioritization of those resources for students with the most significant disabilities. There is no mention of how the performance of students with significant disabilities factor into the draft framework proposed for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) by the LDOE:

- [Click here](#) to read the draft framework for Louisiana's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- [Click here](#) for more information on ESSA.

It is imagined student performance on the Louisiana Connectors will be used similarly to how the scores on LAA-1 were used for school performance. Unfortunately, there is still a high correlation between students with significant disabilities and performance on tests. Thus, if the new accountability system works like the current one, schools not serving students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will tend to score higher than schools that serve a lot of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

The charts below show most students with a severe intellectual disability did not score 'proficient' on the LAA-1. In contrast, most students identified with a mild or moderate intellectual disability scored proficient. Since schools significantly increased the number of students assessed on LAA-1 two years ago, there will be many more students with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities taking this alternative assessment (now the Louisiana Connectors).

2013-14 LAA-1 ELA Proficiency

Grade Level	3	4	5	6	7	8	10
Primary Exceptionality	% Proficient						
Intellectual Disability - Mild	88%	91%	94%	97%	100%	93%	94%

Intellectual Disability - Moderate	82%	89%	78%	88%	88%	91%	85%
Intellectual Disability - Severe	50%	30%	17%	21%	30%	34%	27%

2013-14 LAA-1 Math Proficiency

Grade Level	3	4	5	6	7	8	10
Primary Exceptionality	% Proficient						
Intellectual Disability - Mild	84%	84%	97%	92%	93%	97%	88%
Intellectual Disability - Moderate	78%	87%	82%	89%	80%	80%	69%
Intellectual Disability - Severe	41%	21%	14%	29%	16%	23%	9%

So the important question related to the Louisiana Connectors is more than whether they just align with the English and Math Standards (and there are more standards than those; i.e., Science, Social Studies, etc.). The important questions seem to be:

1. How will student performance on these Louisiana Connectors be used in the school accountability system?
2. Will all students, regardless of the severity of their disability, have the same probability of earning points for a school as another student?

If the answer to the second question is "No," the accountability system may discourage school administrators from expending valuable resources on students with more significant cognitive disabilities, or avoid serving these students altogether.

Student Level Decisions.

With Act 833 of 2014 offering students with disabilities alternative pathways to earn a diploma, it is expected that some IEP teams have incorporated performance on LAA-1 into the requirements for some students to graduate with a diploma. Since there are no data available on the number of students accessing this alternative pathway to a diploma, it is not clear how many students taking the LAA-1, if any, graduated with a diploma, or if their performance on the LAA-1 factored into their IEP teams' decision. The LDOE indicates the revised LAA-1, called the Louisiana Connectors, will "identify essential knowledge and skills that students with significant cognitive disabilities must master in order to be prepared for a successful life after high school." While this statement suggests students assessed on these connectors must pass all of the standards to graduate, that is not true for students whose IEP teams can determine an alternative pathway to graduate with a diploma. Although the new federal law does express that diplomas of students on these connectors will not count in school performance scores.

Improving SEAP

The Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs (GACDA) made the following recommendations to improve the Special Education Advisory Panel:

1. GACDA recommends that SEAP By-Laws be changed to increase membership on the Panel to ensure that no members serve dual roles (e.g., a Panel member serving both as a Parent of a Student with a

Disability and as a School Administrator). Such an increase in membership would expand authentic stakeholder knowledge, expertise, and input into policy guidance.

2. GACDA recommends that SEAP By-Laws be changed to increase meeting time to day-long meetings. Such an increase in time would allow for adequate stakeholder input and discussion of important topics on which SEAP is charged to provide policy guidance.
3. GACDA recommends that SEAP By-Laws be changed to encourage Public Comment and reflect an openness and responsiveness to such contributions by Louisiana Citizens.
4. GACDA recommends that SEAP By-Laws be changed to establish Task Forces to address substantive issues, such as IDEA budget priorities. It is recommended that such Task Forces consist of both SEAP and non-SEAP members, and that non-SEAP members be appointed by stakeholder groups and professional organizations with knowledge of the needs of students with disabilities.

Do you agree with the recommendations by GACDA? Let SEAP members know if you believe changes should be made to improve SEAP.

Communication Plans for Students

Increased attention has been brought to improving communication needs of students over the past couple of years. A recent meeting of a task force was held at the end of October. Updates on recommendations from this task force are expected to be presented.

Contact Us

LaCAN is an initiative of the LA Developmental Disabilities Council. If there are any questions about the information in this email, contact the Council by replying to this email, or calling the toll free number listed below:

Phone: 1-800-450-8108

Email: info@laddc.org

Website: www.lacanadvocates.org

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