

March 1, 2013

Proposed Changes to MFP Will Not Fix Funding Inequities

The Louisiana Department of Education has proposed changes to how traditional public school systems will receive funding for students with disabilities. This proposal is in response to [SCR 124](#) of 2012 that “requires BESE to study and determine the most equitable method of funding methodology to appropriately address the individual needs of children with special needs with the Minimum Foundation Program (state funding) formula and to incorporate such methodology into the formula as expeditiously as possible.” Unfortunately, numerous stakeholder groups do not believe the proposed changes address the main issues creating inequities in funding across school systems. The Council recommends that the state not move forward with the proposed changes but convene a task force of stakeholders to study funding issues and make recommendations for possible changes next year.

What Causes Funding Inequities for Schools?

The major reason for funding inequities for children with disabilities is the use of different funding formulas for traditional public schools than for school choice programs and differences in the number of students with severe disabilities enrolled in each school system. Louisiana’s state funding formula, the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP), provides more funding for traditional public schools for students with disabilities than for students without disabilities. However, the MFP uses an average per student amount to fund school choice programs (i.e., Type II charter schools, scholarship, and course choice). Using an average amount for any student is problematic considering students with disabilities make up 12.5 percent of traditional public schools but only eight (8) percent of charter schools and three (3) percent of private schools. Even more problematic is that in many cases students with disabilities enrolled in school choice programs do not have the most severe, and costly, disabilities. So more funds leave the traditional public school systems than the MFP formula indicates the school systems should have based on the students enrolled in their schools. The funds removed from those schools left serving students with disabilities are either: 1) provided to the school choice program or, 2) in the case of the scholarship, the state claims an inflated amount of funding as savings. The result, when all transactions are complete, is that schools serving higher percentages of students with disabilities, particularly students with severe disabilities, tend to have less funding than expected according to the state funding formula (MFP).

For a video explanation of proposed funding changes and what creates funding inequities for students with disabilities across school systems, click the link below:

[Why is My Student's Money Following Your Student?](#)

[Click here](#) to see the Department of Education’s proposal to change the Minimum Foundation Program. Since the proposal only addresses funding distributions within the traditional public school system it does not address the main issue causing funding inequities (i.e., the use of different funding formulas for school choice programs) across school systems based on student needs.

March 1, 2013

The proposal is to shift from using a single weight based solely on whether a student has a disability to using three main areas of funding, each with three levels to weight funding amounts. The three main areas proposed are 1) disability type or classification, 2) environment or setting, and 3) student performance. Points to consider regarding specifics within the proposed plan can be found at this link: [State Funding Proposed Changes: Analysis and Concerns.](#)

Stakeholder Recommendations

Multiple stakeholders have repeatedly expressed their concerns with the proposed plan. **Five Louisiana stakeholder groups familiar with the proposal and knowledgeable about special education have recommended to not move forward with this proposal. These groups include the Special Education Advisory Panel, the Louisiana Association of Special Education Administrators, the Superintendent's Advisory Committee, Louisiana Together Educating All Children (LaTEACH) and the Council.** None of these groups recommended nor agreed with phasing in the proposed changes. Most stakeholders agree with considering changes to the funding formula but do not agree that the proposed changes would be an improvement nor result in better decisions and outcomes for students with disabilities. Considering the proposal does not seem to address the core issue of schools enrolling students with more profound disabilities receiving proportionately fewer resources (funds) to address their needs, **the Council recommends that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education not move forward with these proposed changes.** A task force of stakeholders should be convened to study funding issues and make recommendations for possible changes next year.