

SYNTHESIS OF DISCUSSIONS ABOUT OSEP REVIEW AND DISSEMINATION PROCESS

WORK GROUP: MEETING SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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OSEP REVIEW AND DISSEMINATION WORK GROUP MEETING REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the deliberations of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) *Review and Dissemination Work Group* meeting. The Work Group met in Washington, D.C. on March 23, 2001. Both discussions among Work Group members, as well as their recommendations for consideration by OSEP policymakers, have been synthesized and documented.

Background

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - Part D* (IDEA-Part D: National Programs), administered by OSEP's *Research to Practice Division* (RTP), supports the development and use of products and practices to improve results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities.

In an effort to promote local use of IDEA-Part D products and practices by practitioners, families, and policy makers, RTP policymakers charged a Work Group to examine the feasibility and utility of instituting a review and dissemination process at OSEP. The review and dissemination process would consist of both a *mechanism* for identifying effective products and practices that are associated with IDEA-Part D supported research, model demonstration and outreach programs, and a *strategy* for disseminating information about effective, IDEA-Part D products and practices, at the local level, to a target audience of practitioners, families, and policy makers.

In particular, members of the Review and Dissemination Work Group were asked by RTP to respond to the following questions:

- What are the benefits and challenges associated with instituting a review and dissemination process at OSEP aimed at increasing local use of IDEA-Part D supported products and practices?

- What is the appropriate Federal role in review and dissemination? Should OSEP undertake such an endeavor?
- If so, what could such a process look like?

RTP policymakers are considering the deliberations and the recommendations of this Work Group as part of the agency's strategic planning to support the widespread use of IDEA-Part D products and practices to improve results for children and families in states and localities across the country.

Outline of the Report

This report summarizes the process of the meeting and presents the Work Group members' responses to the policy questions posed by RTP. The next section describes the procedures involved in facilitating the meeting, including a list of participants, the meeting agenda, a description of the group process, and a listing of supporting materials reviewed by the group. The third section overviews the Work Group's discussion about the benefits and challenges of an OSEP-initiated review and dissemination process for IDEA-Part D products and practices. The concluding section presents a series of "next steps" or short-term activities recommended by the group for consideration, as appropriate, by RTP policymakers.

PROCEDURES

The Work Group meeting was designed to elicit informed commentary regarding the feasibility and utility of an OSEP-sponsored process to identify and disseminate effective products and practices developed with IDEA-Part D support.

Lizanne DeStefano (University of Illinois), assisted RTP in arranging the meeting, including recruitment of the participants and developing the meeting agenda in conjunction with Lou Danielson and Renee Bradley of OSEP. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) hosted the meeting, handled logistical arrangements, and assisted in the preparation of this report.

The procedures that were used to facilitate the meeting and achieve RTP's goal for meeting participant interactions and commentary are described below.

Composition of the Work Group

The members of the Work Group were nationally recognized experts who were knowledgeable about review and dissemination practices. These experts, collectively, had previous experience with Federal review and dissemination mechanisms, knowledge of effective IDEA-Part D products and practices, research expertise, and familiarity with dissemination to local audiences. The Work Group consisted of seven external members and six from OSEP.

External participants and their institutional affiliations are listed below:

- Don Bailey, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill,
- Don Deshler, University of Kansas,
- Lizanne DeStefano, University of Illinois,
- Doug Fuchs, Vanderbilt University,
- James Hamilton, American Institutes for Research,
- Carl Jensema, Institute for Disabilities Research and Training
- Margaret McLaughlin, University of Maryland, and
- Michael Wehmeyer, University of Kansas.

The following representatives from RTP/ OSEP also attended the meeting:

- Lou Danielson, Director, RTP (OSEP),
- Renee Bradley,
- Scott Brown,
- Gail Houle,
- Ray Miner, and
- Marlene Simon.

Attachment A contains contact information for both the Federal and non-Federal members of the Work Group.

Meeting Agenda

Renee Bradley of RTP (OSEP) facilitated the work group meeting. The agenda consisted of the following principal activities:

- *Introductory comments and charge* to the Work Group, by Lou Danielson;
- *Synthesis of information* on JDRP and other Federal efforts to identify effective practices, by Lizanne DeStefano;
- *Reflections of the Work Group Members* on experiences with JDRP or similar processes;
- *Discussion of benefits and challenges* associated with implementing a review and dissemination process at OSEP;
- *Work Group recommendations* on whether OSEP should proceed with its efforts to develop a system for review and dissemination;
- *Definition of salient dimensions* of a review and dissemination process;
- *Discussion of the specific components* of the review and dissemination process; and
- *Generation of next steps* for the Work Group.

The Work Group meeting closed with the members agreeing to respond to a draft summary report and participate in a session on this topic at OSEP's *Research Project Director's Meeting* in July (2001).

Supporting Materials and Services

Prior to the meeting, Lizanne DeStefano, (University of Illinois), and Don Dailey, (AIR), conducted a thorough review of the literature on Federal efforts to identify effective practices in education and the Federal role in dissemination. Based on an extensive review of the literature, they created a briefing booklet of the most relevant documents for use at the meeting. In addition,

members of the work group were sent, in advance of the meeting, a set of five papers. These papers were:

- Ralph, J. & Dwyer, M.C. (1988). *Making the Case: Evidence of Program Effectiveness in Schools and Classrooms: Criteria and Guidelines for the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel*. U. S. Government: Washington, D.C.
- Tallmadge, G.K. (1977). *The Joint Dissemination and Review Panel IDEABOOK*. U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, National Institute of Education, and U.S. Office of Education: Washington, D.C.
- Department of Education (1991). *Guidelines for Preparation and Review of Submissions for Revalidation by the Program Effectiveness Panel*.
- McIntyre, D.H. (April, 1981). *The National Diffusion Network: A Network Assisting Schools to Adopt Exemplary Programs*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles, CA.
- Reed, Linda (1981). *The Search for Quality Control in Dissemination of Educational Products and Practices: A Look at the Literature and Major Issues*. CEMREL: St. Louis, MO.

Work Group Members were also sent a memorandum restating the charge to the group and providing a framework for analysis and synthesis of the readings. Attachment B contains the full list of citations compiled for review at the meeting and contained in the briefing book.

SUMMARY OF THE WORK GROUP DISCUSSION

After an introductory session in which Lou Danielson set the context for the work of the group and reiterated their charge, the members began their discussion of the feasibility and advisability of OSEP sponsoring a review and dissemination process for IDEA-Part D products and practices. Three guiding questions were posed by RTP and used to organize the discussion and commentary of the Work Group. (see side bar: *Guiding Questions for Work Group Discussions*).

Guiding Questions for Work Group Discussions

- What are the benefits and challenges associated with instituting a review and dissemination process at OSEP aimed at increasing local use of IDEA-Part D supported products and practices?
- What is the appropriate Federal role in review and dissemination?
- Should OSEP undertake such an endeavor?

Lizanne DeStefano presented a synthesis of information on Federal efforts to identify best practice in education over the last 30 years. A summary of these Federal initiatives is presented below, followed by an overview of the Work Group discussions regarding the benefits and challenges of OSEP considering such a review and dissemination process for IDEA-Part D products and practices. This section concludes with a review of the Work Group discussion of an appropriate role for OSEP in developing a new review and dissemination process.

Selected Federal Initiatives

There have been several major national initiatives, sponsored by various Federal agencies, to identify and disseminate effective practices, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. These Federal initiatives shared several distinguishing characteristics. For example, each of them was:

- Aimed at *promoting local adoption or adaptation* of research-based practices;
- Geared toward *illustrating the impact* of Federal R&D support; and
- *Institutionalized*, at least for some period of time.

The Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP) and its successor, the Program Effectiveness Panel (PEP), and their related dissemination structure, the National Diffusion Network (NDN), were clearly the most recognized and longstanding efforts of this kind.

The Work Group Members actively discussed the organization, function, and impact of the JDRP, PEP and NDN, relying on personal experiences, the readings, and Dr. DeStefano's presentation to inform the discussion. Topics were wide ranging and included (a) an analysis of changes in the political and practical context from the 1970s to present, (b) the types of entities eligible for review and qualifications of reviewers, (c) the criteria used to judge effectiveness and the composition and function of the JDRP, (d) the structure and function of the NDN, (e) perceived impact of the JDRP, PEP, and NDN, and (f) reasons for their demise. These analyses of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the JDRP, PEP, and NDN initiatives set the context for the

Work Group members to generate a number of possible benefits and challenges that seem likely to result from a development of a review and dissemination process initiated at OSEP.

Possible Benefits for OSEP

Work Group members cited a number of possible benefits for OSEP (see side bar: *Benefits of*

a Review and Dissemination

Process). For example, they cited the benefit of explicit criteria for demonstrating effectiveness as useful to the field, independent of the role they play in the review process, because they represent a reaffirmation of respect for an evidentiary practice base and make public the high standards established for effective practice. The criteria would serve as a statement of

Benefits of a Review and Dissemination Process

- Explicit criteria for demonstrating effectiveness represent a reaffirmation of respect for an evidentiary base and make public the standards for effective practice.
- A list of Federally-endorsed effective practices strengthens the capacity of local educators, family members, and policy makers to make informed decisions about practices to employ.
- A review and dissemination process strengthens the linkages among IDEA-Part D supported research and innovation, technical assistance and dissemination, and local improvement.
- The publication of a set of federally endorsed effective practices makes a powerful statement about the impact of IDEA-Part D supported research and innovation projects and OSEP's role in facilitating excellence in science and product development.
- A review and dissemination process creates a market for carefully, competently and creatively conducted research and product development. This, in turn, will act as an incentive for more researchers to undertake this kind of challenging intervention work.

professional values and standards for the field, and communicate expectations.

The presence of a list of Federally-endorsed effective practices strengthens the capacity of local educators, family members, and policy makers to make informed decisions about practices that improve the quality of schooling and outcomes for students with disabilities. Members expressed concern that, currently, local educators and families do not have an easily accessible base of information from which they can make decisions as informed consumers. As a result, there is a strong sense among the members that opportunities exist for programs lacking evidence of effectiveness to be successful in marketing their products. Equally frustrating to members is that

effective practices are not reviewed, endorsed, and promoted in a systematic way that distinguishes them from ineffective practices.

The Work Group believes a review and dissemination process has potential for strengthening the linkages among IDEA-Part D supported research and innovation, technical assistance and dissemination, and local improvement. Members talked about how OSEP has developed a wide range of technical assistance and dissemination programs that could be used for transmitting useful information about validated practices to local educators and families in friendly language. The problem is that too often the connection is not made between the research community and those responsible for TA/dissemination. A review and dissemination process could serve as a focal point for building this capacity and focusing dissemination on research-validated practices which schools desperately need.

The publication of a set of Federally-endorsed products and practices makes a powerful statement about the impact of IDEA-Part D supported research and innovation projects and underscores the importance of Federal support for research and development. Implicit in a review and dissemination process, with its emphasis on positive changes in student outcomes, is an affirmation of the principal of accountability, which, of course, is a major focus of today's policy discussions and initiatives. Efficient and effective use of resources is a continuing issue of concern among policymakers, citizens, and parents. It is important to demonstrate the impact resources have on helping schools become better equipped to improve learning and other outcomes for students with disabilities.

Possible Challenges for OSEP

Work Group members also talked about possible challenges for OSEP (see side bar: *Challenges of a Review and Dissemination Process*). For example, they discussed complications involved in disseminating the results of reviews. The audiences and mechanisms for dissemination in

special education have changed since JDRP. More students are being educated in general education classrooms by general educators. Reaching these audiences will require a different set of strategies than traditionally used for communicating with special educators. Furthermore, the dissemination structure for reaching special educators has changed. For example, NDN used a system of state contacts that helped schools to implement approved products and practices. This is no longer in

Challenges of a Review and Dissemination Process

- The audiences and mechanisms for dissemination in special education have changed.
- Current practice in the field emphasizes the idea of “program” as the entity to be reviewed, though this may be misleading and may affect the usefulness of the results.
- The cost of operating a review and dissemination process may exceed its benefits or the level of support that OSEP can provide.
- The current length of funding for a research or model demonstration project may not be sufficient to get to the level needed to validate effective practice.
- There may not be sufficient motivation for developers to apply for approval. The incentive system for doing so is not clear.
- The review system would have to be sensitive to a wide array of research paradigms.
- A review process that is based on obtaining significant group effects may be antithetical to special education, which has always espoused individual progress.
- Measurement issues and the creation of reasonable controls are intensified with a special education population.

place. The current technical assistance and dissemination structure has great potential for reaching diverse audiences, but it is complex. Using it for this purpose could be expensive.

Members raised the issue of how the field continues to model improvement through programs, yet the idea of “program” as the entity to be reviewed may be misleading and may affect the usefulness of the results. It is more frequent that smaller units such as practices or interventions are transported, rather than entire programs. The review process could be used to identify best practices within programs, though the structure and methodology for accomplishing this has not been discussed.

The Work Group expressed concern about resources. One issue of critical concern is that the cost of operating a review and dissemination process may exceed its benefits or the level of support that OSEP can provide. Members talked about the challenge of conducting the full range of activities

involved in both review and dissemination. Some expressed support for starting slowly and splitting different aspects of the process in critical areas. Related to this issue, members discussed how the current length of funding for a research or model demonstration project is not sufficient for getting to the level needed to validate effective practice. The nature of most projects is such that more time is needed to produce sufficient evidence of effectiveness.

Another issue of concern is motivation among developers. There may not be sufficient motivation for developers to apply for approval. The incentive system for doing so is unclear. In response, some members cited the need for marketing the process through a public relations campaign. They talked about the need for building momentum for the review process and thinking of ways to stimulate momentum. If endorsement for the review gained momentum and prestige in the field, especially among schools and practitioners, this would provide sufficient incentive for involvement.

Members also discussed how the review system would have to reflect inclusiveness when it comes to recognizing legitimate research paradigms. To promote its integrity and clarity of purpose, the system would also need to identify paradigms that are not appropriate. A strongly focussed review process would have to publicize both exemplars and non-exemplars of legitimate paradigms.

Another challenge cited by members is that a review process based on obtaining significant group effects may be antithetical to special education, which has always espoused individual progress. This creates a potential lack of fit between the review process and the cognitive theories on which several interventions are designed. To the extent a review process does not adequately account for the impact of an intervention on students with disabilities individually, it may encourage approval for practices with significant group effects where problems occurring with individual students are masked. In turn, interventions making progress with individual students may be undervalued if they do not combine this with significant group results. In a related vein, measurement issues and the creation of reasonable controls and comparison groups are intensified

with a special education population. Although these concerns present considerable challenges, they should not necessarily be viewed as reasons to abort the initiative.

Appropriate Role for OSEP

The Work Group strongly supported the view that Federal agencies, such as OSEP, can play a critical role in identifying effective products and practices. They believe Federal agencies support research and evaluation that can validate the effectiveness of different products and practices. According to the Work Group, these agencies should be playing an increased leadership role in advocating for more widespread use of proven products and practices that can be used to improve educational results for children of different ages and with different special needs.

Members of the Work Group, however, expressed concern about the Federal role in dissemination, with particular concern about the cost of widespread dissemination. Developing a comprehensive dissemination system is not perceived by some of the members the group as currently feasible. Target audiences are diverse, and unifying the existing technical assistance and dissemination structure around best practices endorsed by the review process would be challenging. Despite these concerns, other members believe marketing the review process and linking its endorsements to assistance and dissemination is at the core of research to practice, and fundamental to achieving the benefits cited earlier about the review process such as increasing information available to schools as consumers. Still, members of the Work Group are cognizant of the time needed to accomplish this, and the level of financial resources needed is a critical reality.

Overall, Work Group members strongly supported a Federal role in identification of effective products and practices. They unanimously recommended that OSEP continue to explore the feasibility of establishing a review process for IDEA-Part D products and practices and urged the agency to move quickly in response. President Bush and his Secretary of Education have gone on

record repeatedly as valuing research-validated practices in education. A review and dissemination process is a timely response to the President's agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Work Group developed a series of policy recommendations, for consideration by RTP policymakers, as appropriate, to support a process for reviewing IDEA-Part D products and practices. The Work Group endorsed many aspects of the former JDRP process and suggested that it serve as the basis for design of the new system. However, they made a number of suggestions to correct some of the weaknesses of the former JDRP system and to adapt it to the current educational and political context. Because of limited time and lack of consensus regarding the Federal role in dissemination, the majority of recommendations apply to the review process.

Summary of Work Group Suggestions

The Work Group recommendations generally involve suggestions for (a) identifying the distinguishing characteristics of an OSEP-sponsored review process, (b) communicating information about the review process and its outcomes to IDEA stakeholders, and (c) establishing operational procedures to support the initiation of the review process internally within RTP, OSEP, and ED. Exhibit 1 contains a summary of these Work Group recommendations, each of which is then discussed next.

Characteristics of the Review Process

Members believed the review process should focus on interventions as well as programs. In some cases interventions may be more likely to be adopted than a multi-faceted program. When complex interventions are reviewed, the developer should identify the critical aspects of the intervention.

Members also recommended that in addition to approving individual practices or interventions, the review process should also identify common elements across approaches and deemed effective highlight commonalties and differences in effectiveness across interventions. Data on approved interventions may also be used to identify areas where more research is needed for use in OSEP planning.

Face-to-face reviews add cost to the process, but members familiar with the JDRP process believed something was lost when they moved away from face-to-face reviews. The face-to-face aspect of review seems important to several members, especially in the initial trials of the review process.

EXHIBIT 1: Work Group Recommendations

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REVIEW PROCESS
The review process should not focus solely on programs, but should also consider interventions, which may be more likely to be adopted than a multi-faceted program.
The review process should identify common elements across approaches and highlight commonalties and differences in effectiveness across interventions.
Though it adds cost to the process, the face-to-face aspect of review seems important, especially in the initial trials of the review process.
The JDRP/PEP criteria and their emphasis on outcomes should be considered as part of the new system, but they should be expanded to include evidence of effectiveness with diverse students in diverse settings and determining what type of support is necessary to ensure treatment effectiveness.
COMMUNICATION WITH IDEA STAKEHOLDERS
Because of the need to publicize the impact of IDEA-Part D supported activities, the review should be limited to interventions that have received IDEA support at some stage of their development.
The printed materials describing the JDRP/PEP process were very well done and extremely valuable to the field. Any new review process should endeavor to provide the same clarity and breadth in its description of criteria and process.
The publication and dissemination of the successor to “Educational Programs that Work” should be high profile and intense. An attempt should be made to reach every SEA, LEA, and parent group in the country.
Publishers’ role in the validation process either as consumers or developers should be explored along with other entities such as educator unions, professional associations, parent groups, and technical assistance providers.

EXHIBIT 1: Work Group Recommendations (Continued)

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES AT OSEP
OSEP should begin the process of developing an internal review system and concurrently pursue the Department's interest in an agency-wide effort.
There is a need to create cohesion around effective practices in all IDEA-Part D activities. OSEP's model demonstration and outreach competitions should be reconfigured to support the validation process. Likewise, Federal technical assistance, personnel preparation, state improvement grants, and monitoring activities should reflect the importance of including research-validated practices in training and improvement efforts.
There must be different types of expertise and different membership on the review panel to accommodate the variety of research paradigms that the system must handle.
There is the possibility of a public/private partnership between the agency and private foundations to fund a review and dissemination activity.

Finally, members recommended the JDRP/PEP criteria and their emphasis on outcomes should be considered as part of the new system, but they should be expanded to include evidence of effectiveness with diverse students in diverse settings. Evidence of effectiveness should also include statements concerning the type and extent of support that are needed to achieve the reported results and the contextual variables that affect implementation. When intermediate outcomes are used as evidence of effectiveness, they must be linked to long-term outcomes through a sound theoretical framework.

Suggested Communication with IDEA Stakeholders

The Work Group members recognized the need to publicize the impact of IDEA-Part D supported activities, and for this reason believe the review should be limited to interventions that have received IDEA support at some stage of their development. This includes commercially available materials.

A consistent theme among the Work Group members is the high quality and utility of the printed materials describing the JDRP/PEP process. These materials guided applicants through the process and were perceived as extremely valuable to the field. Members recommended that any new

review process should endeavor to provide the same clarity and breadth in its description of criteria and process.

The publication and dissemination of the successor to “Educational Programs that Work” should be high profile and intense. An attempt should be made to reach every SEA, LEA, and parent group in the country with this publication.

Members cited the role of publishers in the validation process either as consumers or developers as potentially valuable, and recommend that OSEP begin to explore this opportunity. They also suggest linking the new process to other entities such as educator unions, professional associations, parent groups, and technical assistance providers.

Suggested Operational Activities at OSEP

Members believed OSEP should begin the process of developing an internal review system. At the same time they encourage OSEP to concurrently pursue the Department’s interest in an agency-wide effort.

The Work Group also talked about the need to create cohesion around effective practices in all IDEA-Part D activities. They recommended OSEP reconfigure its demonstration and outreach competitions to support the validation process and create a continuum of funding to support research-based practices through development, validation, and replication. Similarly, other Federal initiatives such as technical assistance, personnel preparation, state improvement grants, and monitoring activities should reflect the priority of using research-validated practices.

The review panel will likely be involved in evaluating a variety of practices and products that provide evidence of effectiveness reflecting different research paradigms and methods. In responding to this complexity, members believed the review panel should consist of panelists representing different types of expertise to accommodate the variety of research paradigms the system will encounter.

Finally, the Task Force briefly discussed the possibility of a partnership between the agency and private foundations to fund the review and dissemination initiative. There are several foundations with distinguished track records of supporting educational activities with a disability focus. Investing in this project might give them the kind of visibility they desire. Where as there may be regulatory obstacles preventing such a partnership, it would seem that the possibility of financial support justifies an exploration of the strategy.

Next Steps for Work Group Activities

The Work Group members proposed a series of actions to be considered by the RTP and OSEP over the next few weeks and months.

First, the Work Group agreed to provide feedback on a summary report of the meeting provided to them by AIR. This report would then become a written document summarizing the Work Group deliberations and could be used by RTP policymakers, as needed, to help identify and organize subsequent Work group activities.

Second, the Work Group recommended that OSEP staff investigate resources, including Federal staff time and reviewer costs that would be needed to establish potential of a review process. A second work group, or a subgroup of the first, could be assigned to develop specifications for a pilot review process that considered criteria of effectiveness, as well as application and review procedures. OSEP staff could create an opportunity to pilot the process in a special competition for outreach or model demonstration projects, to be held in the near future.

Finally, the Work Group recommended that the Research to Practice Division consider publicizing its planned initiative for an IDEA-Part D product and practice review process. For example, as a means of obtaining input from a broader cross-section of the field, findings of the Work Group would be presented at the Research Project Directors' Meeting in July. Work group members agreed to participate in this session, as appropriate and requested by RTP.

ATTACHMENT A: MEETING PARTICIPANTS

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ATTACHMENT B: CITATIONS OF REVIEW MATERIALS

REVIEW AND DISSEMINATION WORK GROUP MARCH 23, 2001

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