

Study of Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process and the Adequate Funding Level for Students with Disabilities in Maryland

RFP No. R00B9400010

Services, Study of Individualized Education Program Process

**Submitted to:
Maryland State Department of Education**

Attn: June Dwyer
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

**Submitted by:
WestEd
1350 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 201
Washington, DC 17096-2033**

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**Due date:
October 1, 2018**

Tab A-1: Claim of Confidentiality

The Technical Proposal and Financial Proposal does not contain confidential and/or proprietary information.

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September 24, 2018

Ms. June Dwyer
Procurement Officer
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

RE: Study of Individualized Education Program Process Solicitation #: R00B9400010

Dear Ms. Dwyer,

On behalf of Project Directors Cecelia Dodge and Jason Willis, WestEd is please to submit this proposal in response to the Maryland State Department of Education.

WestEd is a preeminent educational research, development, and service organization with over 700 employees and 14 offices nationwide. WestEd has been a leader in moving research into practice by conducting research and development (R&D) programs, projects and evaluation; by providing training and technical assistance; and by working with policy makers and practioners at state and local levels to carry out large scale school improvement and innovative change efforts. In developing and applying the best available resources toward these goals, WestEd has built solid working relationships with educational community organizations, playing key roles in facilitation of these efforts of others and in initiating important new improvement ventures. We have a long standing commitment to the field of education at all levels and a combined experience base of 50 years of educational leadership. Additionally, we have substantial qualifications in the technical areas called for in a project of this scope, and we bring to this effort our understanding, sensitivity, and commitment.

WestEd is a result of a Joint Powers Agreement between Far West Laboratories for Educational Research (FWL) and Development and Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) dated December 1, 1995. Both parent agencies were originally formed under JPAs in 1966. Both FWL and SWRL come under the signature authority of the states of California, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah. As a Joint Powers Agency, WestEd has been determined by the IRS to be a public agency exempt from income taxes under Section 115 (1) of the Internal Revenue code of 1954, (EIN-943233542).

WestEd acknowledges receipt of all (amendments 1-4) addenda to this RFP. If you have any technical questions regarding this proposed work, please contact Dr. Paula Burdette at 703.424.1781 or via email at pburdet@wested.org. For contractual questions, please contact the Contracts Management Department at 415.615.313 or email at contracts@wested.org.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Virgilio F. Tinio, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Virgilio F. Tinio, Jr.
Contracts Manager

Appendix 2. Bidder/Offeror Information Sheet

Bidder / Offeror

Company Name: WestEd

Street Address: 730 Harrison Street

City, State, Zip Code: San Francisco, CA 94107

Contractor Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN): 94-3233542

Contractor eMM ID Number:

As of the Bid/Proposal submission date, are you registered to do business within the state of Maryland?
Yes

SBE/MBE/VSBE Certification

SBE

Number: NA

Expiration Date:

VSBE

Number: NA

Expiration Date:

MBE

Number: NA

Expiration Date:

Categories to be applied to this solicitation (dual certified firms must choose only one category)

Bidder/Offeror Primary Contact

Name: Virgilio F. Tinio Jr.

Title: Contracts Manager

Office Telephone Number (with area codes): 415-615-3136

Cell Telephone Number (with are codes): 415-565-3012

E-mail address: contract@wested.org

Authorized Bid/Proposal Signatory

Name: Virgilio F. Tinio Jr.

Title: Contracts Manager

Office Telephone Number (with area codes): 415-615-3136

Cell Telephone Number (with are codes): 415-565-3012

E-mail address: contract@wested.org

Tab C: Executive Summary

Our Understanding

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has asked for proposals to conduct a comprehensive study yielding recommendations regarding the individualized education program (IEP) process in the state, as well as, the adequate funding level for students with disabilities in Maryland.

We believe that the questions Maryland seeks to answer with this study are interconnected; each element is like one organism in an ecosystem. For the ecosystem to function optimally – in this case – to provide specially designed instruction and related services to Maryland’s children and youth with disabilities, the relative health of each organism (each aspect of the special education system, at the state and local level) determines the ultimate health of the ecosystem (special education in Maryland). Ultimately the ecosystem is the source of results, or educational benefit, for children and youth with disabilities. WestEd sees the desire for educational benefit as the overarching connection between these tasks.

Our Conceptual Frame

The conceptual frame from which we are approaching this work is one of educational benefit. The Endrew F. Supreme Court case raises the question of measuring appropriate progress or educational benefit. Individualized programs for students with disabilities must be designed to provide educational benefit, which has been defined as present levels of performance from various sources, linked to goals and objectives, accommodations that address the student’s disability, and specially designed instruction beyond what all students receive (Yell & Bateman, 2017). Special education funding and services do not happen in separate vacuums. Data suggests that Maryland can be more efficient in its funding of special education. Freed up funds can translate into additional staff. Study of best practices can yield to improved practices. And the education of students with disabilities happens within the larger context of the education of all students in schools, Local School Systems (LSSs), communities, and the state.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) recently released a framework to convey their roles and responsibilities.¹

They place a high value on rethinking special education. In particular they articulate their commitment to partner with children and families, their desire to be flexible and defer to states whenever possible within the law, and to support states and school districts in the provision of special education. We commend Maryland for issuing this timely RFP; and we are humbly proposing to conduct a comprehensive study that should give Maryland the information it needs to leverage the opportunities in the emerging federal context. Most importantly, access, equity and progress will be at the heart of our work.

¹ Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2018). *OSERS Framework* [Brochure]. Author. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/framework/osers-framework-9-20-2018.pdf>

Our Methods

The mixed methods approach we are proposing is based in our understanding of the best ways to answer MSDE's study questions. We will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to understand special education in each of Maryland's 24 local school systems and other identified schools. We will access pertinent data and documentation to inform our work. As you will see detailed in section 2.3.6, we propose to conduct a cost-function analysis. We believe that this analysis will be informative to the other examinations outlined in this RFP. We do not believe most states, or even countries, have really studied specific costs in setting their weights but have instead set weights in more of a policy making mode. So, it makes sense to buttress the weights review with a specific cost study.

This RFP reflects the importance of input from families and other stakeholders in the education of children and youth with disabilities. WestEd intends to seek input on the topics of this RFP from the stakeholder committee convened by MSDE. WestEd has demonstrated expertise and commitment to facilitating stakeholder engagement and input to the IEP process. We respect and value the role of families and other stakeholders in the success of this study; and our methods demonstrate this.

We will conduct interviews, focus groups and surveys to uncover details and common themes. We will conduct a small number of case studies that will bring program and cost findings to life, illustrating real stories of children in Maryland and their special education services. Parent surveys will be translated into multiple languages. We will host a user-friendly website throughout the life of the project where stakeholders can go to learn about the project, read current updates, provide input and pose questions and complete online surveys.

WestEd proposes to use a number of evaluation techniques designed to address multiple requirements of this RFP. To respond to this RFP, we have chosen to provide a full description of each technique once, where it first appears in a responsibility or task. In each subsequent responsibility or task where the evaluation technique will be used, we will name it; but we will not repeat the entire description. For readability we have provided icons to represent each evaluation technique. These will be included at the start of each section where they will be employed. Finally, we have included a table following section 2.3.5 that organizes the tasks, responsibilities, and methods, including number of staff.

Contract Exceptions

WestEd requests the following deviations to the terms and conditions included in Attachment M, Sample Contract, of Solicitation # R00B9400010.

10. Indemnification and Notification of Legal Requests

WestEd would like to delete Section 10.1 in its entirety and replace it with the following:

“Each party agrees that it will be responsible for its own acts and the results thereof and shall not be responsible for the acts of the other party and the results thereof. Each party therefore agrees that it will assume all risk and liability to itself, its agents or employees for any injury to persons or property resulting in any manner from the conduct of its own operations and the operations of its agents or employees under this Contract, and for any loss, cost, or damage caused thereby during the performance of this Contract.”

Section 39. Liquidated Damages for MBE

WestEd, as an agency policy, does not agree to liquidated damages. As such, we request this section be deleted in its entirety.

Tab D: Minimum Qualifications

Not applicable.

Tab E: Technical Response to RFP Requirements and Proposed Workplan

Section 2.3 Responsibilities and Tasks

Section 2.3.1 Response

The purpose of this study is to look at how the spending on special education services is associated with outcomes for children receiving special education services. Maryland is interested in this topic because it is interested in improving outcomes for students with disabilities and understanding best practices and cost-effective practices to do so. WestEd envisions working in partnership with Maryland to get the best data for the most accurate results - to review and assess how all Maryland local school systems (LSSs) and other identified schools (including Maryland School for the Blind, Maryland School for the Deaf, SEED School, and Juvenile Services Education Program) spend their special education funds and allocate their teaching and family support services staff.

The analyses described in Sections 2.3.6 and 2.3.7 are intended to provide the best estimates of how spending on special education services is associated with outcomes for children with disabilities, while controlling for a variety of relevant factors and taking into account spending efficiency. However, to truly understand how these results impact particular LSSs it is necessary to first analyze current special education spending across Maryland. The level of detail such an analysis will be able to achieve will depend on the data available to the research team. In particular, it is important to capture *all resources* expended for special education services, ideally at the school-level. In order to conduct this study effectively WestEd will work closely with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to analyze current special education funding across the state. To the extent that resources are provided beyond what is captured in the available expenditure data, the research team would need to understand the scope of these additional resources and their allocation, and ultimately identify an appropriate method for estimating them.

Another important aspect of this analysis is an examination of the various *types* of spending on special education services and the allocation of those services. The largest proportion of funds will likely be for staff, but it is important to understand allocation across the various staff positions (e.g. special education teachers, family support services staff, related service providers, and paraprofessionals). In addition, any instructional materials, technological resources, staff training, and other expenses associated with the provision of special education and related services would ideally be disaggregated in the provided data.

Ultimately the costing out studies will provide information about “how much” funding it takes to achieve outcomes that are expected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), outlined in MSDE’s strategic plan, *Our Plan to Narrow the Gap — Special Education and Early Intervention Services*, and reflected in the recent court ruling, *Endrew F. vs. Douglas County* (2017). This analysis of current spending would allow for these estimates to be compared to business as usual, and otherwise enable the estimates to be contextualized.

Work completed under this task will inform the development of Deliverable 2.4.4.2.

Section 2.3.2 Response

MSDE conducts an annual survey of Maryland's parents of children with disabilities. In its FFY 2016 APR, submitted in February 2018, MSDE reported that 83% of parents of preschool-age children and 70% of parents of school-age children agreed that their school facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for students (MSDE, 2018). The goal of family support services is greater family engagement not only in the IEP process but in all aspects of their child's education. Research is clear that family engagement is one of the most powerful indicators of academic success for students with disabilities (Garbacz, et.al., 2018; Wood & Bauman, 2017; Anguiano, 2004; Epstein, 2001). Further study is needed to determine whether special education family support services translate into improved educational achievement of special education students.

To review and assess the effectiveness of the special education family support services, WestEd proposes to better understand the family support services in Maryland's LSS's through reviewing available documents, including job descriptions, service logs, and training records of district family support coordinators, and discussions with relevant LSS staff, parents and advocates, including the stakeholder committee. Annual parent survey data from the State Performance Plans/Annual Performance Reports (SPP/APR) submission will be used to help inform further collection of qualitative and quantitative data. To supplement existing data from these parent surveys about their satisfaction, we will collect data about available services, how families are informed about those services, and how, to whom, and where the services are provided.

Information needed to triangulate data described above may be gathered through the comprehensive parent survey WestEd will conduct as part of this study and available through a dedicated website WestEd will develop for this project. All available data on this topic will be used to prepare for a series of parent focus groups to further assess how parents use available information, the level of support they receive, whether they view themselves as partners in the IEP process, and reasons for this view. As background, we understand that MSDE oversees early intervention for infants and toddlers (Part C of IDEA) and the unique advantages that provides for effective transition into early childhood special education and for measuring early childhood outcomes and progress for young children. Families are the primary recipients of services under Part C.

With a focus on the IEP process, we will identify staff who are responsible for assisting families of students with disabilities with understanding and engaging in the IEP process. We will survey LSS family support coordinators to learn more about their roles and functions. We will conduct on-site or virtual interviews with LSS family support coordinators to better assess their roles, training they receive on family support and the IEP process, and the level of support they provide. We will also scan the data family support coordinators have about parents' inquiries to them to identify the prevalence of comments about the effectiveness of family support services.

Finally, to assess the effectiveness and value of those special education family support services, we will analyze all collected and reviewed data on family support services, aggregated by age groups within districts (e.g. preschool, elementary, middle and high school) for any correlations between the provision of special education family support services and improved outcomes for special education students. This includes looking specifically at changes in graduation and dropout rates, early childhood outcomes, performance on statewide assessments, and post-school

outcomes.

Document Review

Existing documents provide an opportunity to learn about policies and procedures that will enable us to develop more focused protocols and surveys. To understand family support services, initially, we will study the MSDE website and the websites of the LSSs and other identified schools to identify information that is available to parents and guardians about family support services, including and beyond Maryland Learning Links. We will work to understand the ease of finding such information and the structure of the information. We will use a similar process to understand the IEP process by reviewing policies and procedures. For document reviews related to each task we will summarize our findings and use them to help construct protocols and surveys.

Interviews

We plan to conduct interviews at the state and LSS levels. At both levels we will interview staff to address questions related to family support. We anticipate conducting up to 10 interviews at the state level. At the LSS level, we will interview LSS directors of special education and other staff to understand family support technical assistance provided by the state. In determining the number of LSS staff interviews, we will consider the size and location of the school systems. We will also group LSSs based on whether state staff consider parents to be generally well informed or less informed. We will conduct at least two of these interviews in each region (Southern, Central, Capital, Upper Eastern Shore, Lower Eastern Shore, and Western). In the interviews we will also ask to see any documentation district staff maintain to monitor their services and establish priorities related to improving family engagement. A two-person team will conduct all interviews. One person will lead the discussion and the other will take notes. Only evaluation team members will have access to the notes. We will not identify any individuals in our report. Prior to concluding the interview, we will ask staff about important documents that we may not have had access to but that are related to the interview questions.

Prior to conducting any state or LSS interviews, we will develop protocols and share them with the stakeholder committee for comments and suggestions. We will also make necessary revisions to the protocols. After conducting the interviews, we will code and analyze the notes using ATLAS.ti or similar qualitative analysis software to identify themes and patterns.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are an efficient method for gaining the perspectives of several individuals at once and for gaining information from a richer discussion where individuals build upon each other's ideas. We plan to conduct one teacher focus group in each LSS selected for IEP case studies. The focus groups will provide participants with an opportunity to discuss family support services (2.3.2), support they receive to assist parents (2.3.3), teacher retention (2.3.4), and the IEP process (2.3.5). To enable all participants an opportunity to participate we will limit each focus group to 10 participants with approximately half of them being special education teachers and the other half regular classroom teachers. We will collaborate with the school system director of special education to identify participants and arrange a meeting location.

Prior to conducting the focus group sessions, we will develop a protocol using the same collaborative approach described for the interviews. Two WestEd staff will participate in each focus group. One person will lead the discussion; the other will primarily take notes. We will code and analyze the notes using ATLAS.ti or similar qualitative analysis software to identify themes and patterns.

We will use the same methodology to develop the parent focus group protocol, then identify participants, conduct the focus groups, and analyze the data. Parent participation will be voluntary. When an interpreter is needed for any parent, we will locate an agency to provide interpretation. The main topics for the parent focus groups will include information and knowledge about support services, (2.3.2) the IEP process (2.3.3), and parents' levels of participation in the IEP process (2.3.5). The family focus groups will be catered.

Work completed under this task will inform the development of Deliverable 2.4.4.2.

Online Surveys

To provide all school staff, parents, and students with an opportunity to contribute their perspectives on relevant areas of inquiry we will conduct online surveys, accessed through our dedicated project website. We will survey district family support coordinators, identified through the MSDE *Directory of Local Family Support Services*, about the training they receive, how they view their own effectiveness, and about which parents receive family support services and how parents access these services (2.3.2). We will survey teachers to learn about family support (2.3.2), technical assistance from MSDE (2.3.3), teacher retention (2.3.4), and the IEP process (2.3.5). We will survey parents to learn about their perceptions of family support (2.3.2) and the IEP process (2.3.5). The surveys will include parallel items to make comparisons between different respondents. In addition, the parent survey will include items for the parents to ask their students. We will also develop parent surveys in English, Spanish, and two other languages that are prevalent among Maryland parents.

Similar to all interviews and focus group protocols, we will follow a collaborative approach to develop all surveys that gives the stakeholder committee an opportunity to provide comments and suggestions that we will incorporate to improve the surveys. To administer the surveys, we will make a link available on the website we create for this project. To make teachers and parents aware of the surveys we will ask LSS staff to use their usual information distribution mechanisms. Each survey will be available for two weeks. After we close the surveys we will download the data and conduct descriptive statistics using SPSS, STATA, or similar commercially available statistical analysis software.

Section 2.3.3 Response

Parents, and sometimes other family members, are critical members of IEP teams and instrumental in their child's school success overall. As noted in Section 2.3.2, research shows that family engagement in their child's education is a strong factor in the success of students with disabilities. This study is aimed at the review and assessment of LSS's use of technical assistance provided by MSDE to assist parents of preschool and school age students with disabilities in understanding their rights and responsibilities. Parents' understanding of their rights and responsibilities allows them to be meaningfully engaged in their child's education and be effective collaborators on IEP teams.

To assist with this understanding, MSDE has provided technical assistance to the local school systems, much of which is developed specifically for use by families and is available publicly on the MSDE website. The need for this type of technical assistance can vary between school systems, where some may need more assistance and others may need less. WestEd proposes to assess the utilization of technical assistance through a review of policies, documents, data, interviews, focus groups, and case studies to ensure that we understand the perspectives of those involved in the process. Our assessment design will allow us to measure quantity and quality of technical assistance relative to parents' awareness of the IEP process.

Initially, we will seek input from the stakeholder committee about strengths and challenges, and review available documents including state policies, records, and information that identify the process and types of technical assistance provided to LSSs to assist parents in understanding their rights and responsibilities. For example, we will review available data, such as the SPP/APR Indicator 8 parent survey data (including open ended questions); redacted complaint, mediation and hearing data; and the data that our partner —The Parents' Place of Maryland, the state's Parent Training and Information center (PTI) —has compiled, regarding this topic. WestEd will also interview staff from Parents' Place of Maryland and examine their data to understand more about their experiences with LSS staff knowledge of the IEP process and parent engagement.

We will interview relevant state staff to understand how they identify technical assistance needs and how they provide technical assistance; and conduct an analysis of the MSDE and Maryland Learning Links websites regarding publicly available technical assistance. We will also seek input from the stakeholder group and PTI on their perceptions of LSS use of MSDE's technical assistance.

Once we understand technical assistance from the state and PTI perspectives, these data will be used to inform interviews in LSSs including how we select families for focus groups and interviews in outlier LSSs where, based on parent satisfaction and dispute resolution data, they appear to either utilize or not utilize technical assistance provided by MSDE to assist families. These virtual and in-person interviews with LSS staff will help us understand what they learned from the technical assistance and how it helped them better assist parents. Family focus groups will explore their perceptions of: 1) parent rights and responsibilities; 2) assistance available to help them understand; and 3) any additional needed information and support. Interviews and family focus groups will be used to confirm findings and uncover any additional issues.

WestEd will conduct two family focus groups in person in each region (Southern, Central, Capital, Upper Eastern Shore, Lower Eastern Shore, and Western) for a total of 12 family focus groups. To make the process efficient and family-friendly we will conduct focus groups both during school hours and in the evenings and provide interpreters when needed.

Based on this data collection and a literature review about best practices in IEP processes, WestEd will provide an assessment of how LSSs use the technical assistance provided by MSDE, how LSSs have supported parents to understand their rights and responsibilities and will identify and highlight best practices currently utilized across the state. WestEd will provide commendations and recommendations for clarifying and simplifying the IEP process to support student outcomes and families' engagement in the process and for modifying current administrative goals, strategies, policies, and practices for teachers and IEP teams.

Literature Review

WestEd staff have a strong history of conducting high quality literature reviews. Key steps in the literature review process include the following, in this order:

1. ***Identifying relevant literature and practices:*** In the beginning of the process, relevant journals, organizations, and experts will be identified. To ensure we have a broad enough search effort, we will also solicit input from relevant content experts. Core sources and additional topic-specific sources identified by members of the WestEd team will be searched, and the entire process will be fully documented. Sources of research include the following:
 - a. Electronic databases: A set of keywords and search terms used in a variety of electronic databases for relevant studies, including ERIC, PsycINFO, and Education Full Text.
 - b. Conference proceedings: The review team will search the conference proceedings of topic-relevant associations (e.g., Association for Education Finance and Policy, American Educational Research Association), and contact individuals with potentially relevant presentations to request their papers.
 - c. State Guidelines: We will collect state guidelines or recommendations for staffing or caseloads, workload analysis, and IEP processes.
 - d. Website searches: Website searches will be particularly important to identify practices in other states and districts.
 - e. Extensive Outreach: Topic experts and relevant organizations will be contacted to request publications or reports and to request recommendations for other people and organizations that may be able to provide studies.
2. ***Screening literature:*** The study team will conduct a *relevance screen* during this phase. Reviewers will read the title and abstract of a study to screen out literature that is clearly not relevant. Reviewers will be instructed to err on the side of over-inclusion. Thus, if the research team is unsure about the relevance of a publication based on the review of the title and abstract, the publication will be included for full-text review. At the end of this phase the Lead Reviewer will create a final list of studies.
3. ***Reviewing and organizing literature:*** All literature that passes the phase 2 screening will be reviewed, and a summary of each publication/study will be presented in a table format that summarizes key information. Since the purpose of literature review and leading practices is to inform IEP process best practices in Maryland, we will explicitly describe information specific to current processes in Maryland as well as study design and other information typically presented in a literature review.
4. ***Identification of best practices in IEP processes:*** WestEd has expertise in many areas of work that will be a strength to this project in Maryland and supplement key staff's experience working with Maryland. In particular, we can draw on early childhood, transition, pedagogy, and data use experts to establish a common understanding of IEP processes.

Work completed under this task will inform the development of Deliverable 2.4.4.3.

Section 2.3.4 Response

Teacher shortages have been steadily increasing across the nation for decades, particularly in the

field of special education. According to analyses conducted by the COPSSE, (now the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center [CEEDAR]), reasons for this are that veteran special educators are retiring at a faster rate than new teachers are being prepared. Moreover, attrition rates among new special education teachers are extremely high; they are frequently leaving the field after only one or two years in the classroom. More recently, researchers have seen a new trend of special education teachers leaving prior to completion of their first year (Redding & Henry, 2018).

There is a body of literature about recruiting and retaining quality special education teachers in high needs areas such as rural or urban and how funding, hiring, assignment practices, and other systems issues influence special educator retention. Though special education teachers across the country are leaving the classroom at higher rates than their general education peers, the problem extends beyond inherent challenges like the wide variety of student needs, parent issues, and voluminous amounts of paperwork (Dewey et al., 2017). States across the country are currently experiencing teacher shortages. In the 2015-16 school year, 48 states, including Maryland, reported shortages in special education staff. In a 2014-2015 educator supply and demand survey, all special education subgroups were listed as severe shortage areas, comprising more than half of all severe shortage areas (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, Carver-Thomas, 2016). Johns Hopkins University, a partner in this proposal, has operated a program in Maryland since 1994 to “grow your own special educator,” helping paraprofessionals to become licensed special education teachers. Data kept by Johns Hopkins regarding this program will inform our work.

The WestEd team will conduct a thorough literature review to synthesize available research publications, over the last decade, on retention of special education teachers, paying particular attention to any studies using teachers or programs in Maryland. For each publication in the review, we will identify the primary research questions addressed by each study, the retention strategies, research methodology, and results in order to develop a comprehensive review of best practices under specific circumstances. Whenever possible, the results from individual studies will be statistically combined into a meta-analysis in which the data are weighted and pooled to produce an estimate of effect, identifying the strategies most highly recommended for replication in Maryland LSSs.

We will also study retention in Maryland LSSs with available statistics on teacher retention and any related practices addressing hiring and retention of special education teachers, analyzing data to identify possible correlations between current practices and increased retention. We will work with MSDE to determine the best way to get LSS data on the numbers of new, continuing, and departing special education teachers for the three most recently completed school years. Based on our analysis of the available districts’ data, we will identify districts with low and high retention rates to interview. In selecting districts, we will consider the size and location of the districts. As part of regular engagement with the stakeholder committee, we will seek their input on the Maryland-specific nuances of special education teacher retention. Within the special education teacher survey, we will gather data about supports they receive and need, such as induction and mentoring, to improve their retention to help better understand this issue. Furthermore, we will survey district directors of special education and human resources staff and conduct a small number of virtual and in-person interviews to learn about their hiring strategies, insights about teacher retention and turnover, and to identify successful practices. These discussions will also provide insight into the supports and barriers related to positive or negative retention. Once these data are collected and aggregated, WestEd will provide a summary of

research-based practices and Maryland-specific reasons for attrition to inform recommendations. Work completed under this task will inform the development of Deliverable 2.4.4.2.

Section 2.3.5 Response

The IEP is the heart of the education of a student with disabilities. It is designed to consider student strengths and needs, to establish goals and objectives, support progress in the general education curriculum, guide placement decisions, and be reviewed/revised with a team at least annually to review progress and plan for student growth. Support for districts and teachers to design high quality IEPs often begins at the state level. In 2017, the Supreme Court came to a monumental, unanimous decision that “the adequacy of a given IEP turns on the unique circumstances of the child for whom it was created” (Endrew F. vs. Douglas County 2017). The court also noted that school authorities should be able to explain how the IEP is reasonably calculated to enable the child to make progress. This has been defined as “educational benefit” (Bourassa, 2017).

MSDE has issued a call to action in its *Strategic Plan to Narrow the Gap – Special Education & Early Intervention Services*, to narrow opportunity and achievement gaps, with “three action imperatives” of early childhood; access, equity, and progress; and secondary transition (2018). WestEd understands that educational benefit for students with disabilities transpires when inclusive and culturally responsive practices are strong; students and families are part of the process; students have access to the high quality instruction in the general education curriculum, specially designed instruction, and related services; students receive needed supports early; progress is monitored and data are used to manage their instruction; and transition services focused on post-school outcomes are provided early. We believe access, equity, and progress are the heart educational benefit, and ultimately of MSDE’s goals of this study. In the strategic plan, MSDE defines access, equity, and progress as “Implementation of effective, equitable, and culturally- responsive education services will result in increased access to instruction, improved educational achievement and functional outcomes, and reduced gaps between students with and without disabilities.” We will have this focus on equity at the heart of our work.

Johns Hopkins University is a proposed subcontractor. We know that MSDE in partnership with Johns Hopkins University, provides teachers and families access to Maryland Learning Links, a set of more than 100 resources to help families, teachers, and administrators with the development and use of high quality IEPs. The resources include a set of online IEP learning modules, which support the practice of writing cohesive IEPs and engaging families in the IEP process. The modules cover the five key areas of IEPs: 1) Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance; 2) Goals and Objectives; 3) Specially Designed Instruction; 4) Progress Monitoring; and 5) Family Engagement. Data-based decision making, pedagogy, action planning, and family engagement research shows that strong IEPs in these areas link to educational benefit for students with disabilities (Lee & Rispoli, 2016; NASDSE, 2007; NCSPEM; Turnbull et al., 2011).

To identify and highlight best practices in Maryland, WestEd will first seek input from the stakeholder committee. Then, we will review a sample of IEPs from LSSs that are using the Maryland Online IEP (MOIEP), also created by Johns Hopkins University, and used by most Maryland LSSs, to assess practices used in the five key IEP areas and for addressing, in particular, the following: 1) transition from early childhood and early childhood outcomes for

children ages 3 to 5; 2) student and family participation and engagement in the IEP process; 3) access to and progress in the general education curriculum; 4) equity, such as placement in neighborhood schools or schools of choice, and equitable progress for all students, IEP determination of the least restrictive environment, and cultural responsiveness; 5) progress on IEP goals and toward outcomes including proficiency on statewide assessments and graduation; and 6) secondary transition.

Questions in parent and staff surveys, interviews, and focus groups discussed in earlier sections will be targeted towards understanding individuals' perceptions of best practices in the IEP process in their LSS or school. We will also conduct group case studies of the IEP process in which the family, teachers, administrator, and other IEP team members walk us through the IEP process. The discussion is guided by participants' simultaneous review of redacted IEPs (approximately 3 years' worth) and evaluation report (one, that falls in the same time period as the IEPs) to further inform our ability to highlight best practices. For context, WestEd will conduct a thorough literature review of best practices in the IEP process. WestEd will examine documentation pertinent to early childhood, family participation, access, equity, and secondary transition across the state.

IEP Review

WestEd uses a process for IEP reviews called the "Educational Benefit Review Process." The process guides us in examination of the quality of IEPs to improve educational achievement for students with disabilities, or the "educational benefit." This process was developed through a collaboration with the California Department of Education and WestEd in the early 2000s and has been revised to mirror many other states' IEP forms. We have used it in the completion of at least one Maryland LSS special education review.

The IEP review protocol will be developed in collaboration with the stakeholder committee and MSDE staff. WestEd's structured process enables evaluators to examine characteristics of IEPs that increase student access to, participation in, and progress in general education. The purpose of the Educational Benefit Review Process is to determine whether the design of the IEP was reasonably calculated for the student to receive an educational benefit. With this process, a representative sample of IEPs are selected. IEPs are reviewed across key areas that include Maryland's five training module areas and extend to how the disability impacts progress in the general education curriculum, service provision, year to year progress, and placement.

To conduct IEP reviews WestEd will review a sample of up to 120 IEPs. In order to have access to similar data across LSSs, we will select up to 10 LSSs that use the MOIEP. If this review reveals missing variables such as grade levels, disability categories, English language status, or the special schools, we will strategically select other LSSs in which we will conduct IEP reviews. For each of those sites we will request access to the dashboard and a random sample of IEPs that vary across age/grade level, disability area, and school. We will select the sample of IEPs using a random number generator.

Prior to conducting any reviews, all reviewers will be trained and will complete one to three practice reviews to develop and evaluate inter-rater reliability. Each reviewer will use a protocol to record their findings. The WestEd IEP review protocol will be revised, in collaboration with MSDE, to include indicators of educational benefit, as outlined above, and tailored to answer study questions that cannot be answered using the MOIEP dashboard (process described below).

We will then create a database and analyze the data.

Maryland Online IEP Data Dashboard

To help identify and highlight best practices currently used by LSS staff as part of the IEP process, particularly in the areas of 1) early childhood, 2) access, equity and progress, and 3) secondary transition, WestEd will access reports and data through the MOIEP dashboard. We will examine reports, such as progress reports and total minutes of special education services by personnel type and instructional setting. Finally, to assess the effectiveness and value of those special education services, we will analyze all collected and reviewed data on special education services, aggregated by age groups within districts (e.g. preschool, elementary, middle and high school) for any correlations between the provision of special education services and improved outcomes for students. This includes looking specifically at changes in graduation and dropout rates, early childhood outcomes, performance on statewide assessments, and post-school outcomes.

Group Case Studies

From within the LSSs for which we review IEPs, we will conduct 10-15 case studies, selecting cases from reviewed IEPs and requesting families and school staff to volunteer. The range of students selected will include students who receive from minimal to substantial services. Case studies are an informative approach to understand how processes work by discussing one specific student with a group of educational staff and parents (i.e., the student's IEP team) and reviewing three years of IEPs and evaluation and supporting documents. Next, parents and school staff will participate in deep interviews separately to review how the IEP process has worked for the student over the past three years. The case studies will address early childhood services, school-age services, accommodations, access, equity, instruction, evaluation and identification, transition services, and IEP processes in general. To select student cases for study WestEd will collaborate with LSS staff to identify a representative sample from the IEPs reviewed based on variables such as type of service, disability category, school, grade level, and English language status. The goal is to review enough cases from different LSSs and schools to develop a sense about the extent to which procedures are being implemented. The selection process will also include students whose parent or guardian speaks a language other than English. We will collaborate with MSDE staff to finalize the selection process. All individual student and family information will be kept confidential. When reporting on individual student case studies, IEP teams and LSSs will not be identified. Examining and discussing individual student records is expected to produce valuable responses that when analyzed across all cases will generate an understanding about the processes and when considered individually will produce powerful stories that can be used to inform stakeholder groups including the General Assembly as policy is set.

To facilitate the discussions and collect comparable information from the case studies, WestEd will collaborate with MSDE representatives to develop a checklist for participants to use during the case study sessions and a protocol to facilitate the discussions. WestEd teams comprised of a facilitator and a note taker, will conduct the sessions. Each session (team interview and separate parent/school staff interview) will last for approximately two hours depending on the complexity of the cases reviewed. To look for patterns and themes in the session notes, we will code and analyze the notes using a qualitative analysis program such as ATLAS.ti. We will enter checklist

data into a database and analyze it with statistical analysis software such as SPSS or STATA to generate frequencies and percentages.

Prior to case study sessions, as part of the interviews and focus groups described earlier, the WestEd evaluation team will collect information about what practices MSDE staff believe are the most effective for supporting local staff to develop high quality IEPs. During group case study sessions, WestEd will probe into how the MSDE, local staff, and parents have built their IEP teams' current knowledge about IEP development; time commitments; best practices utilized in the IEP process; what MSDE supports and services local staff believe have been supportive for their own development and for helping them to inform parents; and what MSDE supports parents have found most beneficial. We will code all responses using a list of pre-determined categories.

Work completed under this task will inform the development of Deliverable 2.4.4.3. The group case studies may inform other tasks and deliverables, as well.

Section 2.3.6 Response

The study of state finance of special education generally includes two areas of focus: 1) the resources adequate to provide required services to students with disabilities; and 2) the appropriate funding system used to allocate these resources. The first of these topics is under-explored in large part because of a lack of available financial data on current costs to educate students with a broad spectrum of disabilities and educational needs.

To begin with, simply taking account of the current special education costs is far from simple. The most recent comprehensive, national collection of special education cost data was the Special Education Expenditure Project (SEEP) over 15 years ago (Chambers, Shkolnik, & Perez, 2002). While these data may still provide valuable insights, it is reasonable to be concerned that costs, spending patterns, and rates of identification of specific disability categories have changed since then. At the state level, comprehensive cost data can also be difficult to come by, and when these data are available they often do not provide a sufficient level of detail or comprehensiveness (Griffith, 2015). As a result, determining the current costs of providing special education services to children with a wide variety of disabilities and levels of severity cannot be directly measured with a high level of precision. Any method used to answer this question therefore requires a degree of estimation and statistical inference.

Setting aside the limitations in available financial data, estimating the resources adequate to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities also requires appropriate measures that demonstrate required services have been sufficiently provided to achieve the intended outcomes. Identifying such outcome measures is not a simple matter for the general education population, and is only more complex, and contested within the special education student population. Given the nature of disabilities and the mandated individualization of educational objectives and plans, many students requiring special education are less able to show what they have learned through standardized assessments than typical students. This fact gave rise to debates about multiple measures to determine student outcomes in the late 1990s and into the 2000s. Some felt that growth measures (measuring the growth on the same assessment for the same group of students from one year to the next) were a more palatable way to look at standardized assessment for all students, and particularly for students with disabilities. Other measures used to determine outcomes for students with disabilities as a group were established

by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP's) State Performance Plans and Annual Performance Reports. Through those reports, Maryland and other states have reported to OSEP annually since 2005 on multiple outcome indicators: proficiency on statewide exams, graduation and drop-out rates, post-school outcomes including employment and enrollment in higher education and training programs, early childhood outcomes, and parent satisfaction with special education services and the IEP process. States also report on process outcomes including meeting the timelines outlined in IDEA for development of IEPs and transition from early intervention services as well as the numbers of mediation, complaints, and due process hearings that resolve disputes between parents and LSSs.

In addition to these data points, IEP teams are required to determine progress against each child's objectives annually, another potential measure of adequacy of services, and thus funding. In March 2017, the United States Supreme Court determined that, "[t]o meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP [individualized education program] that is reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances." The court additionally emphasized the requirement that "every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives" (Endrew F. vs. Douglas County, 2017).

The Endrew F. Supreme Court case raises the question of measuring appropriate progress or educational benefit. Individualized programs for students with disabilities must be designed to provide "educational benefit," which has been defined as present levels of performance from various sources, linked to goals and objectives, accommodations that address the student's disability, and specially designed instruction beyond what all students receive (Yell & Bateman, 2017).

The second area of focus, concerning the funding system used to allocate resources, has tended to gravitate towards two somewhat conflicting considerations. On the one hand, there is a recognition that the resources required depends on the specific population of special education students being educated. Some communities have a larger proportion of students with disabilities than others, and some disabilities require a higher level of services and thus more resources. On the other hand, there are concerns that allocating funding based on the size of the special education population creates an incentive to over-identify students for these services to secure additional funding. There are also concerns that allocating funding based on level of disability creates an incentive to mis-identify and possibly mis-place students to secure additional funding.

There are a variety of types of state systems for financing special education beyond the allocation of federal IDEA funds through subgrants to school districts (Ahearn, 2010). Some approaches, such as "resource-based" or "percentage reimbursement," support with state funding, to some degree, whatever resources are required to serve special education students. Alternatively, a "census-based" approach seeks to eliminate the incentive for over-identification by simply using broad district characteristics as the basis for distributing additional funding to cover the excess cost of educating children with disabilities. Some approaches, such as "multiple student weights" and "single student weights," provide additional funds per special education student depending on either the specific disability or level of service through either a formula or applications for additional funds for children with especially high-cost programs. Finally, some states use a combination of these various approaches, provide block grants, or provide no separate funding for special education at all. As is evident, there is substantial variation in the particular method used to determine the amount of state funds made available for special education and to allocate special education funding to school districts.

Costing Out Study Methods

Addressing the question of what level of resources are adequate to provide required special education and related services to children with disabilities, including estimating appropriate weights for calculating allocations, requires conducting an adequacy or “costing out” study. Such studies have been performed in at least 30 states as a method to estimate the cost associated with ensuring that all students have the opportunity to reach a particular level of performance based on standards set by the state. There are two common approaches for these studies, the input-based and the output-based approach.

The two prevalent input-based approaches, also classified as bottom-up approaches, rely on orienting the analysis from the lowest level of the system, e.g., classroom or school, to identify the necessary resources. The first is the professional judgment method, and the second is the evidence-based method. The professional judgment method involves convening educators and policymakers to design prototype schools that meet performance goals. For the second approach, a team of consultants design the prototype schools that meet performance goals, drawing on education practices and strategies that have proven effective. Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates has used this method as one of two approaches that it published in a study on costing out an adequate education in Maryland (APA Consulting, 2016).

A major advantage of both types of bottom-up approaches is that their methodology and results are relatively simple, transparent, and easily understood. Their practices have a foundation in on-the-ground expertise from active practitioners, and they present not only *how much* should be spent, but *how* it should be spent. This simplicity can be an advantage when conducting the cost study, but when evaluating the cost study, this tends to be a major limitation. For instance, the outcomes that an evidence-based model’s strategies are “proven” to achieve may be different than the outcome goals set by policymakers. Another disadvantage of these methods is that cost estimates tend to be based on the averages among districts, and while they do address the need for additional resources for certain demographics, they still may not accurately estimate the costs for actual districts that differ from the “typical” prototype, especially when multiple regional variables are at play. For example, in Maryland, we understand that Montgomery County is not typical of the state’s LSSs in many ways. Moreover, some specific concerns were raised by stakeholders with regard to the APA study that used this method including that the expected outcomes for children with disabilities were not high enough and that the study did not use actual expenditures.

While bottom-up approaches are resource-oriented, top-down approaches are performance-oriented. Such analyses are based on observed relationships between (a) school spending, (b) student performance, and (c) other school characteristics. There are two main approaches in this category — the successful schools method and cost function method. The successful schools method begins by identifying a set of schools with high performance outcomes in relation to the state’s performance goals. Estimates of providing a quality education are then based on the lowest level of per-student spending among these actual, high-performing schools. In the cost function method, cost and performance data are used to estimate the relationship between expenditures and other dependent and independent variables, including: school outcomes, resource prices, student needs, district size, and other relevant characteristics of districts. Once cost estimates for these relationships have been calculated, analysts can use these calculations to predict the cost of achieving a designated set of outcomes, taking into account the

aforementioned factors. The cost function methodology has been refined over several decades of empirical application, and cost function studies have been undertaken for several states.²

A major advantage of top-down approaches is their grounding in a demonstrated standard of student achievement and actual per-pupil costs. Estimates are based on the actual experiences of students in the region, and cost function analyses can provide a strong empirical foundation for their estimates of cost differentials. One disadvantage of the successful schools method, compared with other methods, is that while it directly links costs to outcomes, it generally does not describe in detail how funds ought to be used. Another disadvantage is that because its estimates are based upon only a sampling of schools, as with estimates based on prototypes, other variables may prevent these estimates from accurately reflecting the needs of schools in other contexts.

The educational cost function approach avoids many of these disadvantages. Because it establishes a cost relationship with a wide variety of variables that could potentially affect student outcomes, drawing from a larger set of schools — potentially the entire state — it can more easily control for variables within different school contexts. However, the estimates of cost function studies still have limitations. By design, statistical models describe relationships between current data, so extrapolating to performance standards outside current experience is problematic and will be further complicated by the individualized measures of progress for students with disabilities required by IDEA. Because cost function studies are grounded in data, another potential disadvantage is that they require high quality measures of current performance and expenditures. Similarly, for a cost function study to inform policy, policymakers must set goals based around *measurable* performance outcomes. With its higher level of complexity and economic modeling techniques, a cost function study tends to be more difficult to explain in non-academic settings. Statistical models are not readily transparent, and they require analysts to make judgment calls that inevitably affect the results.

The use of any of these methods to estimate the adequate level of resources for required special education and related services would represent a departure from their common use, and thus entail particular considerations and modifications. These are discussed as part of our approach in the next section. However, in general, the advantages and disadvantages of these common methods would be relevant to this new application.

Our Proposed Approach

In our view, the educational cost function approach is, among the four methods, the best suited to the circumstances of Maryland. This is not only because the approach is the most precise, but because it controls for the presence of certain circumstances and contexts. This is particularly important for special education funding where level of need can vary substantially based on an individual student's specific disability, degree of educational needs, and individualized special education and related services.

However, this method has not, as of yet, been conducted in Maryland for total education costs, let alone focused solely on special educational services in particular. In fact, this method has not, as far as we know, been used in any state to cost out adequacy for special education services. Our

² This includes, for example, Texas (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2004), Kansas (Taylor, Willis, Berg-Jacobson, Jaquet, & Caparas, 2018), and Massachusetts (Nguyen-Hoan & Yinger, 2014)

proposed use of this method would be a new and innovative application, and for this reason we believe it is crucial it be carefully adapted to the unique special education context. It also should be validated by a companion, and relatively more rigorous, study design estimating the impact of particular special education weights on student outcomes (see the Study of State-Level Weights section below).

Educational Cost Function

With respect to adapting the educational cost function to the special education context, while there seems to be no study attempting to cost out adequacy for the special education population alone, it is standard practice to account for variation in the population of special education students as part of these types of studies. As noted by Harr, Parrish, Chambers, Levin, & Segarra (2006), a distinction is commonly made between students with more severe disabilities and those with any other type of disability.³ This ability to capture, at a high level of detail, the composition of disabilities served by a given district is a bare minimum requirement for using the education cost function method to cost out adequacy for these students.

Another key consideration is the level of detail in the available financial data reporting special education spending. It is important to comprehensively capture the expenditures for special education services, otherwise it can limit the utility of cost function results. For example, in Maryland some districts use more non-public placements to serve their highest needs students, while other districts serve these students in house. Available data would ideally fully account for the funds used to serve students in either context. In summary, due to the particular challenges with special education finance data, careful consideration of data limitations and options to mitigate these limitations are important. If incomplete or insufficiently detailed data are simply not available, we would engage with MSDE to identify an acceptable alternative approach.

Finally, the education cost function approach would require valid measurable outcomes that signify the required services are being sufficiently provided. As noted above, determining what these outcomes should be for special education students is by no means simple.

We propose to determine this list of outcomes in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Education and stakeholders. Our preliminary suggestion centers around identifying outcomes that point to educational benefit, such as present levels of performance from various sources, linked to goals and objectives, accommodations that address the student's disability, scope and quantity of services, and specially designed instruction beyond what all students receive.

In summary, our proposed education cost function approach follows Taylor et al. (2018) and uses stochastic frontier analysis (SFA) to estimate an educational cost function. In the SFA, this cost function is regarded as a frontier, or a minimum cost of attaining given outputs with given inputs including environmental factors. Spending may then deviate from this cost frontier, exceeding this minimum cost. Thus, the SFA starts with a basic cost function and adds the assumption that spending exceeds the cost frontier due to random errors or inefficiency. This approach accounts for the idea that schools or districts can at best be on the cost frontier, if they are fully efficient, and if they are inefficient this is captured in the model.

³ For examples see Taylor et al. (2018), and Imazeki & Reschovsky (2004)

Study of State-Level Weights

This section of the proposed project will assess how state financing mechanisms, including the use of weights, impact the well-being and academic success of students with disabilities. We will also assess whether the use of weights leads to an “overidentification” of students as having disabilities or increases the reported severity of disabilities. Using a novel dataset released in the fall this year, we will track the trajectory of students with disabilities within a nationally representative cohort of 18,000 children that follows children from when they entered kindergarten in 2010 through the spring of 2016, when most were completing fifth grade. In addition to direct assessments of children’s cognitive skills, including executive function, the data contains numerous measures of social-emotional development, health, and well-being in both school and home environments at each grade level. Detailed teacher, parent, and school information is also collected in each year, providing a far more complete picture of educational environments and child well-being than can be assembled from typical state-level administrative data sets. By combining this rich, longitudinal data with information on states’ special education financing policies, we are able to rigorously assess the impact of funding formulae weights on students across the spectrum of disabilities, levels of severity, as indicated by scope and quantity to services, and need for specially designed instruction and related services as they age through their elementary school years. The following list is representative of the questions we can answer about whether placing more funding weight on a particular type of disability, or scope and quantity of services:

- 1) Impacts the educational services delivered to students with that particular type of disability, or scope and quantity of services.
- 2) Increases the likelihood of a student being identified as having that disability or having the need for that particular scope and quantity of specially designed instruction and related services.
- 3) Results in a more equitable allocation of special education resources, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic families.
- 4) Impacts the well-being of students identified as having that disability along a number of cognitive, social emotional, behavioral, and home-based dimensions.

In combination with the cost function approach, the results of this analysis will highlight successful state strategies and help inform the use of particular weights for particular disabilities in Maryland.

Review of International Policies and Methods

We recognize the importance of considering the current costs of special education services in international settings, particularly those with superior outcomes for children with disabilities. There are certainly significant policy differences with respect to education finance that would need to be understood and accounted for in any analysis of international policy. Nonetheless, this exploratory investigation would provide valuable information and would inform our proposed methods for costing out adequacy.

Moreover, the methods used to estimate costs of providing special education services in top-performing countries would be of particular interest. To the extent that such methodologies are readily available, they will be used to improve the overall effectiveness and appropriateness of our studies. It should be noted that costing out studies, of the kind summarized above, appear to

be more common in the United States than in international settings. Thus, any incorporation of international methods into our study design would need to take into account the goals of available international studies and how they are aligned and/or complementary to the goals of our proposed studies.

The study team will review the academic literature available both international and nationally regarding the additional costs of serving special education students. The study team will examine the context for which each study was undertaken, and the performance levels expected of students in the study.

Building on the Kirwin Commission's work on implementing an educational system designed to achieve the results of the top performing countries in the world, the study team will focus on the funding approaches utilized in countries performing at the top of Program for International Student (PISA) assessments. Though other countries have different educational contexts, the study team thinks it is important to link the results of its cost function study to special education financing in these PISA countries.

Many states have undertaken adequacy studies over the past two decades. The study team has extensive experience implementing adequacy studies and will use this experience to analyze the both the results and approaches used in other states to set adequate special education funding weights. It is important to not just identify the percentage of additional funding identified in the studies but also the underlying base cost in each identified state. A state with a more robust base funding system may have lower relative special education funding than a state with a lower base. Understanding the total funding available for special education students within each study.

Table of Evaluation Methods by Task

Table 1. Evaluation Methods by Task

Tasks and Responsibilities, Deliverables	IEP Review or MDOIEP Dashboard	Focus Groups	Group Case Studies	Interviews at state and LSS level	Literature Review	Online Surveys	Review Relevant Documentation
2.3.1				LSS Special Education Directors, Business Managers			Special Education budgets, service delivery procedures, child count data, achievement data
2.3.2		Teacher Family		Re: family support services		Parents, LSS family Support Coordinators	MSDE and LSS websites
2.3.3	Review for parental input and sharing rights'	Teacher Family		Re: IEP quality		Teachers	State policies, records, and documents
2.3.4		Teacher		Re: teacher retention	Special education teacher retention	Teachers Special Ed Directors Human Resources Directors	
2.3.5	Review for Educational Benefit	Teacher Family			IEP best practices	Parents	IEPs training and processes
2.3.6	Compare Educational Benefit to inform cost studies		Staff and families			Staff and families	

Recommendations under 2.3.7 will be a result of the Evaluation Methods used to complete the major Tasks and Responsibilities.

Section 2.3.7 Response

The proposed work contains multiple, complementary sections that each answer a distinct set of questions related to special education in Maryland. These sections will all be integrated in our recommendations.

Section 2.3.7.1 Response

Determining what constitutes cost effective spending is a complex endeavor and depends a great deal on the specific context of a given school and/or district. With so much variation in relevant factors (e.g. local spending choices, policies affecting resource use, practices affecting delivery of services, etc.), a key challenge in ensuring cost effective spending is illuminating strategies that can be generalized beyond a local context and effectively implemented so as to produce desired outcomes reliably at scale. This challenge is particularly acute in the special education context, given the significant variation in student needs, resource use, and practices employed by educators and care-givers.

The cost study proposed in 2.3.6 will take into account the efficiency with which the model estimates a given school is spending its resources. Put simply, it will be able to identify schools

which are achieving the best outcomes for the least amount of money, and those schools which are spending far more than the model suggests is needed to produce the observed outcomes. This information can provide policymakers with an opportunity to consider what distinguishes the two groups, which is an important first step. However, it is insufficient to illuminate actionable findings with respect to ensuring cost effective spending.

To get to these more nuanced aspects of this topic, it is crucial to have a deep understanding of the *particular* services being provided at a given school and the *way* in which they are being provided (i.e. staff time allocation, common practices, use of instructional aids/materials, etc.). This requires engaging with practitioners in these settings and collecting qualitative data on, for example, their work experience, relevant local and school policies, and other elements of the system in which they work that have bearing on providing special education services.

Our approach would be to use the information and insights gained from the surveys of LSS directors of special education and directors of human resources proposed in section 2.3.4, and case studies proposed in section 2.3.5 in combination with the results of the cost study to illuminate a richer picture of resource use in Maryland, and what practices, strategies, and norms are most cost effective. Specifically, the case studies will provide a deeper look at special education services over time for a variety of students, how the available resources play out in the IEP process, and the degree to which relevant local and school policies have bearing on a child's progress, as documented in the IEP or experienced by families in the IEP team process. Specifically, the survey results of LSS directors of special education and human resources will provide insights into budgeting and staffing decision making that will inform our assessment.

We believe this mixed methods approach is the most appropriate one for this study. Moreover, the technical expertise our team brings in both qualitative and quantitative research methodology, and the deep programmatic knowledge about the special education field, make us uniquely qualified to tackle this particularly thorny challenge.

Section 2.3.7.2 Response

Academic achievement for all students is the primary goal of education. While there are many factors that affect student outcomes, teaching and family engagement are two of the most important determinants of success. Exploring staff allocations, both teachers and family support services staff, can provide insight into whether schools are able to meet the needs of students with disabilities. To make recommendations about staffing and student achievement requires an understanding of staff allocation plans, policies, and decisions as well as the relationship of staffing ratios to student achievement. WestEd proposes to address this set of recommendations based on findings from Task 2.3.2, document reviews, district staff interviews, and analyses of available district level data.

To understand teaching and family support services staff allocations, we will review special education budgets, service delivery procedures and other applicable documentation available from the local school systems. We will also interview school system staff to understand some of the staff allocation decision drivers. If MSDE can provide child count data by LSS, we will also review percentages of students with disabilities in each disability category. We propose then conducting correlational analyses using available state assessment data at the district level for each grade level tested. To the extent possible we will also analyze the data by school system type (rural, suburban, urban).

Section 2.3.7.3 Response

WestEd will make recommendations on clarifying and simplifying the IEP process using the results from Task 2.3.5, including the literature review. To identify best practices related to this task in Maryland, we will address questions that have been raised related to the quality of IEPs and further explore the IEP process through school administrator interviews, group case studies, teacher, and parent focus groups, as well as a parent survey that we will make available to families online in multiple languages. This information will be compared to information gained from our literature review on IEP processes. Our exploration of the IEP process with the primary participants will allow us to make recommendations for clarifying and simplifying the IEP process to enable parents and guardians to more easily understand their rights and responsibilities in the process.

Section 2.3.7.4 Response

As part of deliverable 2.4.4.3, WestEd will make recommendations regarding modifying the administrative goals, objectives, and strategies of teachers and IEP teams to make them more efficient and cost effective in their delivery of services to special education students, including potential reductions in caseloads and recordkeeping.

Making special education more efficient and cost effective is an important goal for Maryland; one that is universally appealing. Special education costs are not sustainable, and the state would like to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Everyone, especially families, would like cost effective and just plain *effective* special education services.

To address this recommendation, WestEd will use the results from Task 2.3.5 to identify ways to make IEP teams more efficient based on school staff and parent experiences. For IEPs completed in the Johns Hopkins University MSDE IEP system, project staff will use the dashboard data analytics tab to conduct appropriate queries. For example, a question might be about minutes of speech and language services provided per student with a disability, grade level, disability category, race/ethnicity, or any combination of those. And those minutes could be compared across schools or LSSs against achievement scores or a measure of educational benefit such as progress on goals in a sampling of IEPs. School staff experiences as reported in surveys and focus groups will also inform recommendations for case load sizes and recordkeeping. Using the educational cost function approach, project staff will establish a cost relationship of educational benefit as defined in section 2.3.5, controlling for circumstances such as grade ranges, disability types, and geography.

Section 2.3.7.5 Response

With respect to how Maryland should fund special education, the cost study provides an estimated level of funding that *should be* adequate, while the weights study provides an estimate of what *actually happens* when states direct more financial resources to special education. The interviews with stakeholders and other qualitative data collected by the WestEd team provide further information on how school finance policies may impact students in the local context. Each of these three analyses will inform our recommendations.

Section 2.3.7.6 Response

The results from the cross-state analysis of weights (section 2.3.6) will directly inform the use of particular weights in Maryland. That analysis will assess the impact of various levels of weights for different categories of disability on student well-being.

Section 2.3.8 Response

The results of the tasks above will generate a series of recommendations, staffing models, and associated costs that are different from those currently implemented in Maryland today. It will be important that WestEd work with MSDE and its stakeholder committee to develop a policy development and implementation plan that is reflective of various policy options for the state to move forward with the recommendations, and to ensure that there is consideration for how Maryland might implement such recommendations over time.

WestEd has a strong capacity to convene and engage special education stakeholders, as evidenced by our national and regional centers, the National Center on Systemic Improvement, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Education Lab, and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center. A key part of calibrating the educational cost function method and the IEP process review method will be to engage the stakeholder committee to understand what is working and what needs to change related to the state's IEP process and Maryland's special education funding structure. This work will be informed by information available on the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, commonly called the Kirwan Commission, website.

The WestEd team will engage with stakeholders one-on-one or in small group interviews. Questions will focus on what is working with the IEP process and funding system and what areas might need to be adjusted. Feedback from these stakeholders will allow the team to understand how the IEP process and funding system are impacting education in Maryland and will be used to help guide the team's recommendations in both areas.

Building on experience with a variety of states over decades of collaborative work, WestEd will similarly work with MSDE and its stakeholder committee to create a policy development and implementation plan that would include vital components such as: 1) study findings; 2) policy and practice recommendations and options; and 3) timed and staged implementation plan of selected recommendations. WestEd's team of specialists will work closely with MSDE to consider the appropriate forums and opportunities, including the State Board of Education and legislative committees of the General Assembly, to provide this information, bringing appropriate context to the study and the implications for Maryland's special education system.

Section 2.3.9 Response

WestEd and its contractors will become familiar with and utilize the following MSDE documents as resources in conducting the studies described in this proposal:

- MSDE Division of Special Education Early Intervention Services Strategic Plan
- Moving Maryland Forward: Sharpen the Focus for 2020
- MSDE's State Performance Plans and Annual Performance Reports under the IDEA

Upon award of the contract, key personnel assigned to the contract will be required to review these documents and publicly available data on MSDE special education. The documents will be used throughout the project as background information to inform the studies, to provide context in meetings with stakeholders, and in the presentations to the General Assembly, MSDE, DBM,

DLS, and other stakeholders.

Section 2.3.10 Response

WestEd will work together with MSDE, DBM, and DLS to provide a project schedule to be approved by the Contract Monitor describing when tasks shall be completed. Data collection and analysis for the weights and cost studies will commence when the contract is awarded, approximately November 2018, and proceed through March 2019. The report, Deliverable 2.4.4.4, including recommendations, will be written from April to July of 2019. Data collection and analysis for all other tasks and responsibilities will commence when the contract is awarded, approximately November 2018, and proceed through April 2019. Remaining reports will be written May to July 2019.

Section 2.3.11 Response

The project's key personnel have extensive experience presenting to a broad variety of stakeholders including legislators, state and local education agencies, education professionals, and parents of children with disabilities. Presentations will be prepared to report on the results of the completed comprehensive study of the IEP process in Maryland and the review of methodologies to estimate the cost of providing an adequate education to students with disabilities and will include recommendations for action by the Maryland General Assembly and MSDE, DBM, and DLS.

Key staff will provide up to 8 presentations as requested by MSDE, DBM, and DLS, to the State Board of Education, legislative committees of the General Assembly, stakeholders and any legislative and/or executive commission or any other similar body that may be established after submission of the final report. Presenters will be available to present at MSDE, in Annapolis, or at other statewide locations as requested.

Presentations will include results of the studies as well as stories about how this work affects families and students in Maryland, derived from the case studies and focus groups conducted throughout the project. Effective adult learning styles will be considered when preparing for each presentation and presentations will be adapted for different audiences. Multimedia tools will be used to convey the knowledge gained in the study such as video, audio, and infographics portraying important data pieces.

Presenters will make all materials available to MSDE and the attendees of presentations and will ensure that presentations are individualized to meet the needs of each stakeholder group. Presentations and materials will meet federal and any state accessibility guidelines.

Section 2.3.12 Response

The Co-Directors and Project Manager of this project bring a wealth of expertise and commitment to providing an excellent service to the state of Maryland. Key Personnel have strong backgrounds in evaluation, school finance and special education. Most have their PhDs. These staff all possess WestEd's high standard for excellent service and a deep commitment to improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. One works from his home office in Maryland.

Section 2.3.12.1 Response

Table 1 identifies the key personnel who will be assigned to the contract, assigned to each portion of the study, and the estimated amount of time each individual will spend on each deliverable required by the contract. Recommendations Tasks and Responsibilities are assumed to be part of their applicable deliverable. Further details on the qualifications of each key personnel is provided in Sections 3.8 and 3.9 and Tab F: Experience and Qualifications of Proposed Staff.

Table 2. Key Personnel Time on Deliverables

	2.4.4.2 Report-Special Ed Expenditures, Staff Allocation, Effectiveness of Family Support	2.4.4.3 Report-Assessment of TA	2.4.4.4 Report- Review of Costs and Weights	2.4.4.5 Monthly Progress Reports	2.4.4.6 Quarterly Progress Reports	2.4.4.11 Presentations, up to 8
Berg-Jacobson, A.(15%) 2.3.1, 2.3.6	3%		5%	3%		3%
Burdette, P. (14%) 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.3.4, 2.3.5	2%	2%		4%	4%	3%
Dodge, C. (6%) 2.4.4.2 2.4.4.3 2.4.4.4 2.4.4.5 2.4.4.6	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	
Doutre, S. (4%) 2.3.1, 2.3.2	2%	2%				
Ruffini, S. (6%) 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.4, 2.3.5	0%	3%		2%		1%
Silverstein, J. (14%) 2.3.1, 2.3.6	3%		5%	3%		3%
Tanner, S. (10%) 2.3.6			6%	2%		2%
Willis, J. (4%)	1%		1%	1%		1%

Section 2.3.12.2 Response

As demonstrated in the attached resumes in Tab F, all key personnel on the project have a master’s or doctorate degree.

Section 2.3.12.3 Response

Tab F includes resumes for all key personnel.

Section 2.3.12.4 Response

As demonstrated in sections 3.8 and 3.9 and in the resumes in Tab F, most key personnel, including the Project Manager, have at least seven years of experience working in the program evaluation field. The Project Manager and three other key personnel have at least three years of experience directly managing projects that required studies as the primary deliverable.

Section 2.3.12.5 Response

Key personnel include four members with a minimum of five years of special education program experience as described.

Section 2.3.12.6 Response

The Project Manager and two other key personnel have conducted or managed at least one study of the IEP process in a state and conducted many studies of special education in school districts around the country. We have strong expertise in IEPs as the tool that provides access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities and ensures that accommodations are provided to ensure equity. We are well-prepared to evaluate the IEP process, as described below, to identify patterns of equity and inequity among school systems, disability categories, race and ethnicity, and other factors. We understand the importance of IDEA-required transition plans when a student reaches 16 years of age, and that Maryland demonstrates a dedication to transition by beginning the transition process when a student reaches 14 years of age. Our key staff have extensive expertise in developing and evaluating IEPs and transition plans.

Section 2.3.12.7 Response

Key personnel include multiple members with at least five years of education finance experience. And our experience is well rounded. Here are just two examples. Co-Director Willis has been providing educational finance services to state educational agencies and school districts since joining WestEd in 2016. Prior to joining WestEd, Willis oversaw budget functions in two large urban school districts. Co-Director Dodge has co-directs the national Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting for 4 years. Prior to that she oversaw special education in two large urban school districts, each with special education budgets of over \$100 million for a total of 5 years and oversaw special education funding and data for 5 years for the Minnesota Department of Education. See more in section 3.8.

Section 2.3.13 Project Management

Section 2.3.13.1 Response

Within five calendar days of notice to proceed, WestEd will contact the MSDE Contract Monitor to schedule a Kickoff Meeting to review the Scope of Work and Project Deliverables from MSDE. WestEd and the MSDE Contract Monitor and others as determined by MSDE will hold the meeting within 14 days of notice to proceed. WestEd will be prepared to negotiate any terms of the proposal to ensure high quality and timely achievement of deliverables and welcome the participation of representatives from DBM and DLS.

Section 2.3.13.2 Response

WestEd will submit the Scope of Work and a detailed work plan to deliver the Project Deliverables within 14 days of the Kickoff Meeting. The work plan will be reviewed by the WestEd Project Manager, MSDE Contract Monitor, and other relevant key personnel at least quarterly during the term of the contract for needed changes. WestEd will negotiate with MSDE on any changes deemed necessary and will implement changes upon approval by the Contract Monitor.

Section 2.3.13.3 Response

WestEd will provide complete, clear, concise monthly progress reports that are free of structural errors. These reports will identify the work that has been undertaken and upcoming work. WestEd will provide MSDE, the Department of Budget Management, and the Department of Legislative Services an opportunity to provide input on any decision that will affect the design, methodology, or outcomes of the study or other elements of the contract.

Section 2.3.13.4 Response

WestEd will meet at least quarterly with representatives of MSDE, the Department of Budget and Management, and the Department of Legislative Services at a location to be determined by the Contract Monitor. These meetings may be held virtually at the discretion of the Contract Monitor. At these quarterly meetings, WestEd will provide an update of progress on the studies and present reports or other requested information. Time will be set aside to answer questions and discuss any decisions that MSDE, DBM, and DLS should provide input, including items and issues that affect the design, methodology, or outcomes of WestEd's work on this project.

Section 2.4 Deliverables

Section 2.4.1 Deliverable Submission

- A. WestEd will submit all reports referred to in Section 2.4.4 in draft form for review at least two weeks prior to the due date. The data necessary to verify any findings or recommendations made by WestEd based on the WestEd's analysis of the data will be provided to MSDE upon request in the form requested by MSDE. Due dates shall be determined after the initial, kickoff meeting with MSDE and adjusted as necessary during the quarterly progress meetings with the Contract Monitor's approval.
- B. For every deliverable, WestEd will request that the Contract Monitor confirm receipt by replying to an e-mail that identifies the deliverable name and date of receipt in the subject line.
- C. Unless specified otherwise, WestEd will submit written deliverables in a form compatible with Microsoft Office, Microsoft Project or Microsoft Visio within two (2) versions of the current version.
- D. During the initial, kickoff meeting, WestEd and MSDE will elaborate and agree on a standard deliverable review cycle. This review process will begin when WestEd completes a deliverable.

- E. For any written deliverable, the Contract Monitor may request a draft version of the deliverable, to comply with the minimum deliverable quality criteria listed in **Section 2.4.3 Minimum Deliverable Quality**. Drafts of each final deliverable, except status reports, will be delivered at least two weeks in advance of when the final deliverables are due (with the exception of deliverables due at the beginning of the project where this lead time is not possible, or where draft delivery date is explicitly specified). Draft versions of a deliverable will comply with the minimum deliverable quality criteria listed in **Section 2.4.3.I Minimum Deliverable Quality**.

Section 2.4.2 Deliverable Acceptance

- A. Each of WestEd’s final deliverables will satisfy the scope and requirements of this RFP for that deliverable, including the quality and acceptance criteria for a final deliverable as defined in **Section 2.4.4 Deliverable Descriptions/Acceptance Criteria**.
- B. WestEd will provide sufficient time for the Contract Monitor to review final deliverables in advance of submission deadlines. The Contract Monitor shall review a final deliverable to determine compliance with the acceptance criteria as defined for that deliverable. The Contract Monitor is responsible for coordinating comments and input from various team members and stakeholders. The Contract Monitor is responsible for providing clear guidance and direction to the Contractor in the event of divergent feedback from various team members.
- C. WestEd will work with the Contract Monitor to ensure that each deliverable is acceptable and will obtain a notice of acceptance for each deliverable. The Contract Monitor will issue to the Contractor a notice of acceptance or rejection of the deliverable. Upon receipt of any notices of rejection, WestEd will make revisions to meet the procedures and receive of a notice of acceptance. Following the return of the notice indicating “Accepted” and signed by the Contract Monitor, WestEd will submit a proper invoice in accordance with the procedures in **Section 3.3**. The invoice will be accompanied by a copy of the notice or payment may be withheld.
- D. In the event of rejection, the Contract Monitor will formally communicate in writing any deliverable deficiencies or non-conformities to WestEd, describing in those deficiencies what shall be corrected prior to acceptance of the deliverable in sufficient detail for WestEd to address the deficiencies. WestEd will correct deficiencies and resubmit the corrected deliverable for acceptance within the agreed-upon time period for correction.

Section 2.4.3 Minimum Deliverable Quality

WestEd has a comprehensive internal quality-control process that includes programmatic and technical reviews. WestEd will subject each deliverable to its internal quality-control process prior to submitting the deliverable to the state.

Each deliverable will meet the following minimum acceptance criteria:

- A. Each report will contain, but is not limited to, the following format: executive summary, purpose, background, findings, status in Maryland, and recommendations. Research and findings will be properly cited.
- B. Be organized in a manner that presents a logical flow of the deliverable’s content.
- C. Represent factual information reasonably expected to have been known at the time of

submittal.

- D. In each section of the deliverable, include only information relevant to that section of the deliverable.
- E. Contain content and presentation consistent with industry best practices in terms of deliverable completeness, clarity, and quality.
- F. Meets the acceptance criteria applicable to that deliverable, including any state policies, functional or non-functional requirements, or industry standards.
- G. Contains no structural errors such as poor grammar, misspellings or incorrect punctuation.
- H. Will contain the date, author, and page numbers. When applicable for a deliverable, a revision table will be included.
- I. A draft written deliverable may contain limited structural errors such as incorrect punctuation and shall represent a significant level of completeness toward the associated final written deliverable. The draft written deliverable shall otherwise comply with minimum deliverable quality criteria above.

Section 2.4.4 Deliverable Quality

Section 2.4.4.1 Response

In collaboration with the Contract Monitor and MSDE, DBM, and DLS, WestEd may suggest other subtasks, artifacts, or deliverables to improve the quality and success of the assigned tasks. The included deliverables summary may not list every contractually-required deliverable. WestEd has included some additional potential deliverables in addition to meeting all contract requirements. The specifics of any additional subtasks, artifacts, or deliverables, will be discussed during quarterly meetings. WestEd may suggest a written summary of findings and recommendations from the group case as a supplemental deliverable. It is also not clear to what degree the RFP is asking for a complete cost study. WestEd may propose a full cost study and work with MSDE, DBM, and DLS to define the parameters of such a study.

Deliverables and deliverable deadlines may be adjusted by the MSDE Contract Monitor as necessary and requests for such adjustment will be submitted in writing from WestEd to the Contract Monitor.

Section 2.4.4.2 Response

The study team will provide a report containing an assessment of how all state public school systems and other schools identified (including Maryland School for the Blind, Maryland School for the Deaf, SEED School, and Juvenile Services Education Program) spend their special education funds, allocate their teaching and family support services staff, and the effectiveness of special education family support services provided by local school system staff members. The report will include recommendations for ensuring that special education funds are being spent cost effectively and recommendations for ensuring that local school systems are effectively allocating their teaching and family support services staff to improve the education achievement of special education students. The report will identify best practices for retaining special education teachers. The report will be informed by Responsibilities and Tasks section items 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.4, 2.3.7.1, and 2.3.7.2.

Section 2.4.4.3 Response

The study team will provide a report containing an assessment of how local school systems utilize technical assistance provided by MSDE to local school systems to assist parents in understanding their rights and responsibilities in the IEP process, based on the MSDE, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services Strategic Plan, Moving Maryland Forward: Sharpen the Focus for 2020. The report shall be informed by tasks 2.3.3, 2.3.5, 2.7.3.3 and 2.3.7.4. We will provide recommendations as described in the RFP.

Section 2.4.4.4 Response

The study team will provide detailed analysis on the relevant international and national data and studies of current cost of special education. The report will begin by examining the data available internationally on special education costs. Research in this area will focus on countries that rate highly on the PISA results. The report will begin by describing each countries' special education system including the requirements for serving students and the expectations for those students. It will then describe student demographics within special education including distribution of student across disabilities where available. Finally, methods for serving students and the costs associated with services will be provided.

The national study of how other states fund special education will describe the special education systems used in all 50 states. Research will be done to identify any states that utilize cost-based special education funding systems. These systems could be either weighted or categorical systems, but the emphasis will be on identifying cost-based approaches to funding. The study team will utilize reviews of state statutes and interviews with state personnel to make the determination of a cost-based system. Once the states are identified, an analysis of the total level of funding available to special education students will be conducted. This means that both the base and special education funding will be examined to understand the total resources available to special education students.

In addition to the cost-based analysis, special emphasis will be placed on examining those states that fund differentially based on student characteristics of special education students. States can fund differentially either through weights or categorical funding. For example, Colorado funds special education through a categorical program but does so in multiple tiers of per student funding. The study team will examine the various methods states use to fund differentially and attempt to categorize if there are similar approaches to differential funding across states. For example, are there certain disabilities or service levels that tend to have higher funding and if so, are the additional levels of funding similar across the states. The report will provide Maryland with detailed information on the various funding approaches utilized across the country.

The study team will then suggest the appropriate funding levels by examining the results of the cost-function analysis, how states and other national fund special education students, the current expenditure patterns seen in Maryland, and information gained throughout the rest of IEP process study. The report will determine if what weights should be used to fund Special Education students in Maryland to ensure student success. This will include if different weights should be used for different special education student characteristics. This deliverable is associated with Responsibilities and Tasks section items 2.3.6, 2.3.7.5, and 2.3.7.6.

Section 2.4.4.5 Response

WestEd will provide complete, clear, concise monthly progress reports that are free of structural errors. These reports will identify the work that has been undertaken and upcoming work. WestEd will provide MSDE, the Department of Budget Management, and the Department of Legislative Services an opportunity to provide input on any decision that will affect the design, methodology, or outcomes of the study or other elements of the contract.

Section 2.4.4.6 Response

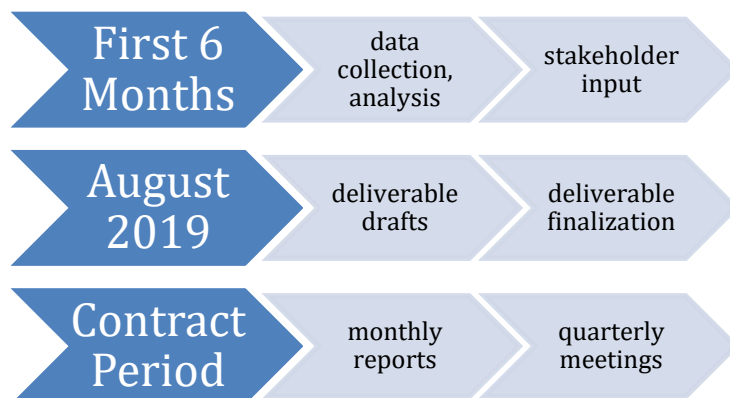
The project’s key staff have extensive experience presenting to a broad variety of stakeholders including legislators. Presentations will be prepared to report on the results of the completed comprehensive study of the IEP process in the state of Maryland and the review of methodologies to estimate the cost of providing an adequate education to students with disabilities and will include recommendations for action by the Maryland General Assembly and MSDE.

Key staff will provide up to 8 presentations as requested by MSDE to the State Board of Education, legislative committees of the General Assembly, stakeholders and any legislative and/or executive commission or any other similar body that may be established after submission of the final report. Presenters will be available to present at MSDE, in Annapolis, or at other statewide locations as requested.

Presenters will make materials available to attendees of presentations and will ensure that presentations are individualized to meet the needs of each stakeholder group.

Implementation Schedule

Work will start immediately following the NTP Date to prepare for the kickoff meeting. Anticipating a November start, data collection and analysis, informed by stakeholder input, will occur through the last spring. In late spring we will begin to shift to production of deliverables. Required report drafts will be shared with MSDE ahead of time in the manner described in the RFP and produced for ultimate acceptance by the Contract Monitor. A presentation will be made to MSDE by August 2019, and then, to the General Assembly on by September 2019. Additional presentations, up to 8 total, will be made at a time and place mutually agreed upon, through the life of the contract. WestEd will produce monthly status reports and hold quarterly status meetings through the life of the contract.



Service Locations

WestEd has a well-appointed office at 1350 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 201, Washington, DC 20036-1709. Local staff will work from that office or their home offices. Meetings with the Contract Officer or others participating in this study will occur at the Maryland location most logical and convenient for the parties involved. Some key personnel on this project work in other parts of the country. WestEd uses an online video meeting platform to facilitate face to face meetings. These staff will travel to Maryland when appropriate. On days when WestEd staff are required to be onsite at MSDE for multiple meetings, we request access to some modest space with Internet services.

Section 3.1 Contract Initiation Requirements

If awarded the contract, WestEd will schedule and hold a kickoff meeting within 10 Business Days of NTP Date. At this meeting, WestEd's Project Manager will furnish an updated Project Schedule describing the activities for WestEd, the State, and any third parties for fully transitioning to WestEd's recommended solution.

Section 3.2 Invoicing

Section 3.2.1 Response

WestEd will invoice following the format and process required in Section 3.2.1, A-H of the RFP.

Section 3.2.2 Response

WestEd will follow the invoicing schedule outlined in Section 3.2.2., A-B, and per our Attachment B.

Section 3.2.3 Response

WestEd's deliverable invoices will be accompanied by notice(s) of acceptance issued by the State for all invoices submitted for payment. WestEd acknowledges that payment of invoices will be withheld if acceptance notice is not submitted, per section 2.4.2.

WestEd acknowledges that payment for deliverables will only be made upon completion and acceptance of the deliverables as defined in Section 2.4.

Section 3.2.4 Response

WestEd acknowledges the contract requirements outlined in A-I of section 3.2.4 and will comply.

Section 3.2.5 Response

WestEd acknowledges the travel reimbursement and restrictions outlined in section 3.2.5, A- D, and will comply.

Section 3.2.6 Retainage

Section 3.2.6.1 Response

WestEd understands MSDE's retainage policy to be: The Department shall retain an amount equal to 10% of the total 1 Contract price. If the Contract is for multiple years, the Department shall retain an amount equal to 10% of the annual Contract price for each year. This 10% retainage amount shall be dispersed only upon full satisfactory performance and acceptance of the final deliverable for each Contract year.

Section 3.2.7 MBE Liquidated Damages

MBE liquidated damages are identified in Attachment M.

Section 3.3 Disaster Recovery Data

Section 3.3.1 Redundancy, Data Backup and Disaster Recovery

WestEd can and will comply with the redundancy, data backup and disaster recovery requirements as detailed in the RFP.

Section 3.3.2 Data Export/Import

WestEd can and will comply with the data export/import requirements as detailed in the RFP.

Section 3.3.3 Data Ownership and Access

WestEd can and will comply with the data ownership and access requirements as detailed in the RFP.

Section 3.3.4 Response

WestEd will comply with requirements of section 3.3.4.

Section 3.4 Insurance Requirements

WestEd will maintain, at a minimum, the insurance coverages outlined below, or any minimum requirements established by law if higher, for the duration of the Contract, including option periods, if exercised, per requirements of the RFP.

Section 3.4.1 Response

WestEd will comply with insurance requirements of section 3.4.1.

Section 3.4.2 Response

WestEd will comply with insurance requirements of section 3.4.2.

Section 3.4.3 Response

WestEd will comply with insurance requirements of section 3.4.3.

Section 3.4.4 Response

WestEd will comply with insurance requirements of section 3.4.4.

Section 3.4.5 Response

WestEd will comply with insurance requirements of section 3.4.5.

Section 3.4.6 Response

WestEd will comply with insurance requirements of section 3.4.6.

Section 3.5 Security Requirements

Section 3.5.1 Employee Identification

- A. As indicated in the RFP, WestEd Personnel will display their company ID badges in a visible location at all times while on State premises. Upon request of authorized State Personnel, each WestEd Personnel will provide additional photo identification.
- B. As indicated in the RFP, WestEd Personnel shall cooperate with State site requirements, including but not limited to, being prepared to be escorted at all times, and providing information for State badge issuance.
- C. As indicated in the RFP, WestEd shall remove any of its personnel from working on the Contract where the State determines, in its sole discretion that WestEd Personnel has not adhered to the Security requirements specified herein.
- D. We understand that the State reserves the right to request that WestEd submit proof of employment authorization of non-United States Citizens, prior to commencement of work under the Contract.

Section 3.5.2 Security Clearance / Criminal Background Check

WestEd will obtain at its own expense a Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) State and federal criminal background check, including fingerprinting, for all WestEd Personnel listed in sub-paragraph A. We understand that this check may be performed by a public or private entity. WestEd will provide certification to the Department that we have completed the required criminal background check described in this RFP for each required WestEd Personnel prior to assignment, and that the WestEd Personnel have successfully passed this check. We understand that persons with a criminal record may not perform services under the Contract unless prior written approval is obtained from the Contract Monitor. The Contract Monitor reserves the right to reject any individual based upon the results of the background check. Decisions of the Contract Monitor as to acceptability of a candidate are final. The State reserves the right to refuse any individual WestEd Personnel to work on State premises, based upon certain specified criminal convictions, as specified by the State.

Section 3.5.3 On-Site Security Requirements

WestEd understands and will comply with the on-site security requirements as indicated in the instructions for section 3.5.2 of the RFP.

Section 3.5.4 Information Technology

WestEd can and will comply with the information technology requirements as detailed in the RFP.

Section 3.5.5 Data Protection and Controls

WestEd can and will comply with the data protection and controls requirements as detailed in the RFP.

WestEd will work with MSDE during grant negotiations and the development of the performance agreement to address copyright and licensing issues for the data (typically a Data Sharing Agreement). If necessary, we will also enter into any data sharing agreements with individual local school systems.

Section 3.5.6 Security Logs and Reports Access

Section 3.5.7 Security Plan

WestEd can and will comply with the data export/import requirements as detailed in the RFP. Upon notice of contract award, WestEd will provide the written data security policy per the details of this RFP.

Section 3.5.8 Security Incident Response

WestEd can and will comply with the security incident response requirements as detailed in the RFP.

Section 3.5.9 Data Breach Responsibilities

WestEd can and will comply with the data breach responsibilities requirements as detailed in the RFP.

Section 3.5.10 Response

WestEd acknowledges that the State, at its discretion, has the right to review and assess WestEd's compliance to the security requirements and standards defined in the contract.

Section 3.5.11 Response

WestEd acknowledges that the provisions in **Sections 3.6.1 – 3.6.10** shall survive expiration or termination of the Contract. Additionally, WestEd will flow down the provisions of **Sections 3.6.4-3.6.10** (or the substance thereof) in all subcontracts.

Section 3.6 Problem Escalation Procedure

Section 3.6.1 Response

WestEd will provide the PEP within 10 business days of notice of recommended award.

Section 3.6.2 Response

Upon award, WestEd will provide contact information to the Contract Monitor, as well as to other State personnel as directed should the Contract Monitor not be available.

Section 3.6.3 Response

WestEd understands the requirements of the Problem Escalation Procedure (PEP) and will

provide it within 10 business days of notice of recommended award.

Section 3.6.4 Response

WestEd understands that nothing in this section shall be construed to limit any rights of the Contract Monitor or the State which may be allowed by the Contract or applicable law.

Section 3.8 Experience and Personnel

Section 3.8.1 Preferred Offeror Experience

WestEd, its subcontractors, and all key personnel on this project contribute to a team with significant experience in and expertise on the conducting studies in the field of special education, individualized education programs (IEPs) in Maryland and across the country, and directly managing projects requiring studies as the primary deliverable.

WestEd has led multiple studies in the field of special education including evaluations of special education services in two Maryland school districts; and key personnel have conducted studies on behalf of states as well as under the direction of legislative bodies and the US Department of Education to examine the implementation of IDEA and effectiveness of specific strategies. WestEd has done extensive special education evaluation and technical assistance work for California, Hawaii and Arizona, for example, and has provided special education leadership development services for the state of Massachusetts for many years.

As demonstrated in the included resumes for key personnel, this project will be led and executed with personnel with experience and demonstrated knowledge about special education and the IEP process including the Maryland IEP process. Including key personnel that are parents of students with disabilities. Subcontractors Chrysalis Collaborations. Johns Hopkins University and the Parent's Place of Maryland add to the breadth of knowledge about special education in Maryland, and especially the IEP process. To avoid redundancy and provide clarity, remaining details of offeror experience are incorporated under Tab G, Offeror Qualifications and Capabilities.

Section 3.8.2 Personnel Experience

Key personnel have worked as special education teachers, leading IEP meetings with families, school district and state personnel responsible for ensuring reliable implementation of the IEP process and content required by IDEA, and as technical assistance providers assisting states to implement policies and procedures to ensure compliance with IEP requirements and improved educational results for students with disabilities. Key personnel have a combined 85 years of experience in special education.

The Project Manager, Dr. Burdette, and other key personnel each have more than three years of senior level experience directly managing projects that required studies as the primary deliverable including studies on IEP processes and adequate funding methods for students in public education.

The following table summarizes key personnel experience and knowledge in each of the areas listed, further documented in this section and on individual resumes:

Table 3. Personnel Experience

Required Personnel Experience	Key Personnel with Expertise and Experience
Demonstrated knowledge of project management within the field of special education. A	Burdette, Paula Dodge, Cecelia Doutre, Sara
Seven years of experience within the field of special education. B	Burdette, Paula Dodge, Cecelia Doutre, Sara Ruffini, Stephen
Three years of senior level experience directly managing projects that required studies as the primary deliverable. C	Berg-Jacobson, Alex Burdette, Paula Doutre, Sara Ruffini, Stephen Tanner, Sean Willis, Jason
A minimum of five years of special education program experience. D	Burdette, Paula Dodge, Cecelia Doutre, Sara
Conducting or managing at least one study of the individualized education program (IEP) process in a state. E	Burdette, Paula Dodge, Cecelia Ruffini, Stephen
Conducting or managing a study of adequate funding methodologies for students in public education. F	Berg-Jacobson, Alex Silverstein, Justin Tanner, Sean Willis, Jason

Alex Berg-Jacobson is a School Performance and System Transformation Specialist for the Comprehensive School Assistance Program at WestEd. Berg-Jacobson has served on multiple research projects related to education finance, educator mobility, and cost modeling. This includes two funding adequacy studies, two educator supply and demand studies, and a cost study evaluation. His work on these projects demonstrates his technical abilities including the collection, preparation, analysis, and reporting of quantitative data in service of addressing specified research questions.

Through his diverse professional experience, Berg-Jacobson has also developed a broad skillset and demonstrated ability to provide collaborative research-based capacity building to education practitioners. This includes providing direct organizational improvement assistance to education stakeholders and facilitating conversations among stakeholders.

Paula Burdette joined WestEd in 2015 as a Senior Program Associate. Burdette is the technical assistance team co-lead for the Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting and her work focuses on assisting state departments of education with systems improvement. Prior to this role, Burdette was a principal investigator for the Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities and the director of Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. She has also served as Delaware Department of Education’s State Improvement Grant Director with a focus on inclusive education, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), reading, and Universal Design for Learning. In collaboration with external evaluators, Burdette found that this work resulted in decreased inappropriate referrals and identification of students for special education. Burdette provided technical assistance in critical areas, including alternate assessment

and development of State Performance Plans, to state departments of education through the regional resource center program and was Mid-South Regional Resource Center's internal evaluator. Burdette has experience in program evaluation, providing professional development to teachers and school leaders, technical assistance at the state and local levels, reviewing special education programs, and teaching students with disabilities in multi-categorical classrooms at all grade levels.

Cecelia Dodge is a Project Director for WestEd's Center for Prevention and Early Intervention (CPEI) with more than 20 years of experience as a leader in special education. She co-directs the national Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting (CIFR) and provides technical assistance as part of the national Center for Integration of IDEA Data (CIID). She has served as a consultant, facilitator, and coach, assisting school districts and state agencies with meeting their goals to improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. Dodge is also an expert facilitator of data-driven decision-making at the state and local levels, including collection, reporting and analysis of special education fiscal and program data.

As an experienced state policy-maker and school district administrator, Dodge is expert at developing collaborative relationships and building consensus among educators to improve outcomes for students. A successful change-manager, as Supervisor for Special Education funding and data in the Minnesota Department of Education, she utilized stakeholder input to streamline and improve fiscal reporting and monitoring processes and worked closely with the legislature on cost models and policy development.

Dodge has more than 20 years of leadership experience in special education, birth through 21, in state and local administrative roles, as well as technical assistance and research. In WestEd, she has worked with school districts and state agencies in many states including Minnesota, California, Illinois, West Virginia, and Colorado; and has a track record of engaging and building fruitful relationships with stakeholders and demonstrating improved system and student outcomes.

As Assistant Superintendent and Director of Special Education in Minnesota and California schools, she reorganized special education administration to be more efficient and effective; and she built system capacity to provide standards-based education in inclusive settings and reduced disproportionate suspension of students of color and increased delivery of evidence-based practices in specially designed instruction and related services.

She has been recognized for her work to improve education for young children with disabilities and children and youth who are placed in correctional facilities or for care and treatment.

Sara Menlove Doutre is a Senior Program Associate with the Center for Prevention & Early Intervention. As a key contributor to the center's National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) and Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting (CIFR) projects, she facilitates communities of practice, provides direct technical assistance, and develops tools and resources for strengthening the capacity of state educational agencies.

With strong education and experience in developing, evaluating, and implementing state policy for special education and early intervention services, Ms. Doutre is an excellent partner in collaborative state work. She helps states assess and improve systems for ensuring compliance with IDEA and improved outcomes for all students including students with disabilities. Doutre's areas of expertise include policy and procedure development and gaining consensus among

diverse stakeholders in special education and other health and disability policy. Doutré is also the parent of a child with a disability and brings the perspective of a consumer of the early intervention and special education systems.

Stephen J. Ruffini, Ph.D. is a Senior Research Associate, based in Washington, D.C., for Learning Innovations at WestEd. Over the past 27 years, Dr. Ruffini has managed, conducted, and led research and evaluation efforts in a variety of education organizations. Over the past five years, a good portion of his work has focused on reviewing district services to students with disabilities. Dr. Ruffini co-led a special education services review for Calvert County (MD) Public Schools and he led a special education review for the Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools. He also served as an external evaluator for two National Science Foundation grants related to special education stereotype threats. His experience and interest in students with disabilities began while serving as Director of the Office of Consent Decree Evaluation and Data Management for the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS). Dr. Ruffini applied quantitative and qualitative skills to monitor progress on 16 outcomes. In his current work with WestEd, he is also coordinating WestEd's effort to monitor charter management organization grantees. He also developed products for state departments of education to improve special education data quality. Dr. Ruffini's experience and skills include: project management, quantitative and qualitative (document reviews, observations, interviews, and focus groups) methods, sample design, survey development; data management, qualitative data analysis, descriptive and complex statistical analysis, as well as staff supervision to ensure data integrity and report accuracy.

Justin Silverstein oversees APA's school finance work. He has lead statewide school finance studies in numerous states including Alaska, Alabama, Colorado, Michigan, and New Jersey. He currently is assisting Maryland's Kirwin commission working with staff to understand the cost implications of the commission's work. Mr. Silverstein's work with the commission provides him insights into the use of international benchmarking for work in Maryland as is being requested as part of this study.

Sean Tanner is a Senior Research Associate with the Comprehensive School Assistance Program (CSAP) at WestEd. His research focuses on the impact of Pre-K through 12 policies, such as accountability and school finance reform, and on educational and socioeconomic inequality, particularly for educationally disadvantaged students. Tanner received an MPP and PhD in public policy from the University of California, Berkeley.

Jason Willis is the Director of Strategy & Performance for the Comprehensive School Assistance Program (CSAP) at WestEd. In this role, he oversees and guides the expansion of CSAP's existing performance and accountability services, which include support to California's state and local education agencies to implement policies and practices to support the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and realization of genuine continuous improvement efforts in school systems. Performance and accountability services provides this support through capacity building, facilitation of professional learning networks, and analysis of financial data including the effective use of resources. He has also worked with weighted student funding systems and identified the weights for additional resources that are allocated to schools for EL students.

Willis also provides visionary and strategic leadership to expand CSAP's project portfolio by working in collaboration with CSAP's Management Team.

Prior to joining WestEd, Willis served as Assistant Superintendent, Engagement and Accountability, for the San Jose Unified School District. He also served as the Chief Financial

Officer/Chief Business Official for the Stockton Unified School District and Budget Director and Program Manager for the Oakland Unified School District.

Section 3.8.3 Key Personnel Identified

A. Project Manager: Paula Burdette, PhD See Dr. Burdette's full bio above.

Prior work of the organization and key personnel also demonstrate knowledge of project management within the field of special education including projects that required studies as a primary deliverable. The Project Manager, Dr. Paula Burdette, has managed federally funded projects including the State Personnel Development Grant in Delaware; Project Forum, a policy research project charged with researching critical issues in special education; and the Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities where staff conducted various forms of research such as family engagement, policy, and usability studies. Other key personnel have directed national special education technical assistance centers and led projects in states across the country.

Section 3.8.4 Response

Contractor Personnel Experience Equivalency is not applicable to WestEd key personnel, as they all have a Master's Degree or a higher degree.

Section 3.8.5 Contractor Personnel Maintain Certifications

All contractor personnel will maintain in good standing all required professional certifications for the duration of the contract.

Section 3.9 Substitution of Personnel

Key personnel submitted in response to the RFP have sufficient experience education, thus the substitution of education for experience or experience for education, as approved by the state, is not required.

Section 3.9.1 Continuous Performance of Key Personnel

Key personnel identified in this proposal will be available to perform contract requirements as of the NTP date and WestEd will comply with the requirements in Section 3.9 of the RFP to ensure availability of key personnel and substitution of personnel as necessary and with prior written approval of the Contract Monitor.

Section 3.9.3 Continuous Performance of Key Personnel

Key personnel identified in this proposal will be available to perform contract requirements as of the NTP date and WestEd will comply with the requirements in Section 3.9 of the RFP to ensure availability of key personnel and substitution of personnel as necessary and with prior written approval of the Contract Monitor.

Section 3.9.4 Replacement Circumstances

WestEd understands the conditions for replacement of personnel laid out by the state in section 3.9.4 of the RFP and intends to comply with them.

Section 3.9.5 Response

WestEd understands that prior to Contract execution or within thirty (30) days after Contract execution, we may not substitute proposed Key Personnel except under the following circumstances (a) for actual full-time personnel employed directly by WestEd: the vacancy occurs due to the sudden termination, resignation, or approved leave of absence due to an Extraordinary Personal Event, or the death of such personnel; and (b) for any temporary staff, subcontractors or 1099 contractors: the vacancy occurs due to an Incapacitating event or the death of such personnel. To qualify for such substitution, we understand that WestEd must demonstrate to the State's satisfaction the event necessitating substitution. Proposed substitutions shall be of equal caliber or higher, in the State's sole discretion. Proposed substitutes deemed by the State to be less qualified than the originally proposed individual may be grounds for pre-award disqualification or post-award termination.

Section 3.10 Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) Reports

WestEd can and will comply with the MBE reporting responsibilities requirements as detailed in the RFP.

Section 3.11 Veteran Small Business (VSBE) Reports

WestEd can and will comply with the VSBE reporting responsibilities requirements as detailed in the RFP.

Tab F: Experience and Qualifications of Proposed Staff

Proposed Staff's Experience and Qualifications As Related to the Work Plan

Key Resource

Dr. Paula Burdette is being proposed as the key resource, per item G, of 5.3.2, submitted under Tab F. Dr. Burdette will function as the Project Manager. She is uniquely qualified for this role, with a strong background in project management, evidence-based practices in special education, and special education funding. Located in WestEd's Washington DC office, Dr. Burdette is familiar with the context of special education in Maryland and available to meet in person without the added expense and inconvenience of long-distance travel. Additional resources that are anticipated to be needed for this project are already built into the proposal and the budget. But, WestEd, with its staff of over 500, and its extremely well qualified staff of over 20 in the Washington DC area, will have no problem acquiring additional resources to meet the needs of the Department. Please see Dr. Burdette's bio (section 3.8.2) and resume later in this tab for details of her experience and qualifications.

The staff proposed for this project have experience and qualifications that directly relate to their specific responsibilities. Staff of proposed subcontractors bring a unique mix of experience; and were each chosen because of the unique ways they can support the work and enhance the experience and qualifications of WestEd key personnel and staff. See the detailed information below and in Tab L.

Experience and Qualifications of our Partners

See more information about our subcontractors in Tab L.

Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) has worked with state policymakers for over 30 years. The firm specializes in helping policymakers understand the changes needed in funding systems to best serve students and then working with policymakers to create actionable changes to the systems. The firm has worked in all 50 states and is a leader in implementing costing out studies across the country. This includes two costing out studies for the state of Maryland. Justin Silverstein, of APA, is included in our Key Personnel.

Chrysalis Collaborations, which addresses our MBE goal, is a woman and person with disability MBE/DBE registered in the state of Maryland. The company builds on over 30 years' experience providing targeted research, technical assistance, continuous process improvement, and program and policy development as a consultant to local, state and federal government, government contracted service agencies, community organizations, and businesses. Staff experience also includes government service, managing nonprofits providing contracted services to government, and consulting with schools, human services and workforce development agencies, local, state and national governments.

Dr. Schneider is an organizational consultant and applied social scientist with over 30 years'

experience working with government, non-profit organizations, and communities to develop innovative, evidence-based model programs, policies, continuous process improvement systems, and research on a wide range of education/special education, workforce development, employment, human services, housing, and health topics. She offers over 25 years conducting applied and evaluation research. She has worked with people with disabilities in Maryland since 2008, including work on the IEP process and transitioning youth. Her work focuses on achieving social equity and opportunities for marginalized groups (people of color, immigrants/refugees, people with disabilities, low income). Dr. Schneider is one of the few social science research professionals known for looking equally at the impact of federal, state and local policy, organizational behavior, community dynamics and individuals/families in her work, understanding that program process and results come from the interaction among these different factors. This approach is demonstrated in her book *Social Capital and Welfare Reform* and other writings.

A person with lifelong disabilities, Dr. Schneider also understands Maryland special education and disability systems as the partner of the parent of two recently transitioned youth with significant disabilities served by MSDE, as a Commissioner for Baltimore County's Commission on Disabilities (2011-2018), and as a DORS and DDA consumer herself.

Her expertise combines 7 years as a non-profit administrator in organizations contracting with local and state government, over 25 years as a consultant to government and private service providers, and 4 years working in the federal government and congress with her research experience. She has also conducted needs assessments, suggesting outreach strategies, collaboration among agencies, program improvements, and new programs to numerous organizations providing services.

An applied anthropologist, Dr. Schneider has conducted focus groups, observations, interviews and other multi-methods research for over 30 years and taught research methods for over 20 years. A former American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science and Technology Policy Fellow (2003-2005) and American Anthropological Association Congressional Fellow (1989-1990), she is internationally known for translating research into practice. She is author of five books; numerous policy and practice reports, briefs, summaries, white papers, and factsheets; and editor of three journal special issues. This includes two best practices guides on employment/transition for people with disabilities, editing a special issue on research and writing articles on multi-methods qualitative research for *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* (NML).

Johns Hopkins University School of Education (JHU SOE) is consistently ranked among the top graduate schools of education in the nation by U.S. News & World Report and was recently ranked #15 in the 2018 Times Higher Education World University Rankings. JHU SOE is a leader in the nationwide movement to improve student learning and is at the forefront of cross-disciplinary efforts to put innovative research into practice. From policy to programming, pre-K to college completion, JHU SOE's renowned education faculty and associated research centers deliver evidence-based findings that help transform schools and communities.

Laurie deBettencourt, Ph.D., a Professor at Johns Hopkins School of Education for the past 13 years, offers over 34 years of experience training special educators and working with families with children who have special needs. She has also studied the supply and demand of special educators and the unique supports needed for their retention. Her publications include 7 special

education textbooks including one detailing the evaluation of one state's special education programs. Her most recent research includes training special educators to use high leverage practices while becoming a reflective practitioner and preparing special educators for English Language Learners. Her knowledge of the Maryland School Districts is influenced by the fact she has placed graduates of JHU programs across the state. In addition, she has served as Principle Investigator or Co-PI for over a million dollars of MSDE funded training programs during the past ten years which have sported the training of special educators placed within multiple MD school districts.

Dr. deBettencourt has also advocated and supported families across Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina for the past 34 years as they have navigated their children's special education individualized educational programs. She has represented parents in school-based meetings and has reviewed testing results with them to prepare for IEP meetings

As Maryland's Parent Training and Health Information Center, **Parents' Place of Maryland** (PPMD) has over 25 years of engaging families/caregivers to learn the skills needed to be their child's best advocate. We accomplish this through several avenues – one on one assistance and support, training, resources, referrals and leadership development. PPMD provides families/caregivers with meaningful resources about navigating the IEP process and community support and services. PPMD serves all children and families with disabilities and special healthcare needs.

Rene Averitt-Sanzone is the Executive Director at Parents' Place of Maryland, MD's Parent Training and Health Information Center. Prior to that she worked as the Regional Technical Assistance Co-Director for the OSEP funded parent centers in the mid-south region. She has held a variety of roles in the field of special education – Parent Educator, Early Childhood Behavior Specialist, Evaluator, and Charter School Administrator. Rene has a undergraduate degree in Psychology and a masters in Organizational Change Management. She is the parent of two grown daughters who are deaf.

For attachments and appendices, please contact Marcelina Contreras at WestEd, 415-615-3449.