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MAASE Input Statement

State Personnel Development Grant; Proposed Priorities and Definitions; CFDA Number 84.323A

The Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the above-referenced proposed priorities and definitions for State Personnel Development Grants that were published in the Federal Register on April 13, 2012. We hope our thoughts are helpful to you as you consider how best to define priorities and definitions for the State Personnel Development Grants (SPDG), an IDEA Part D program that supports state educational agencies in improving their personnel preparation and professional development programs.

MAASE is a professional organization of over 600 administrators serving local and intermediate school districts and who are responsible for coordinating the delivery of special education programs/services to students throughout the State of Michigan. We are a unit of the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE). The Mission of MAASE is to provide leadership for the development and implementation of quality programs and services for students with disabilities within the total education community. Professional development issues are a central focus in the implementation of our strategic priorities of technical assistance, networking, political action, encouragement and support for educational innovation and communication and collaboration with all educators and community partners.

MAASE supports the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) proposed priorities and definitions for the SPDG. We find the premise and overall intent of the document to be a conceptually solid practice, whereby universal articulation will influence implementation for improved results. We applaud the use of language identified in ESEA; the more we talk and walk with one voice, the more likely we are to close the gaps that exist in instructional practices between general and special education. Throughout the document, the terms "evidence-based" and "practices" are used repeatedly and in many contexts, sometimes referring to professional development and sometimes to instruction. It is our sense that these uses could be made clearer.

We would like to comment on the following areas of priority and definitions that require clarity for understanding.

1. Evidence-Based Professional Development Section:

- This section indicates that five components of effective professional development can lead to more successful implementation of new practices. Our concern lies with the first component: (1) Professional development participants, trainers, and coaches who have the prerequisite knowledge and skills. We agree that requiring pre-requisite skills is a vital component of professional development; however, we should identify the knowledge and skills required of the participants in a manner that allows for those who do not have them to obtain them and allows the trainer to differentiate curriculum and instruction to accommodate the participants' needs. While we agree that requiring pre-

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requisite skills can be limiting, this is as vital component of professional development as effective training practices, ongoing coaching, performance assessments and administrative support.

2. Use of Technology Section:

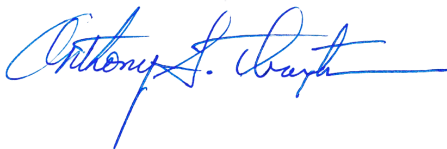
- In the section "Use of Technology," one example is given of technology (e.g., bug-in-ear technology for coaching). Listing one example is too limiting, especially with the rate of change of technology. We recommend removing the example from the proposed document. In the same paragraph, the phrase "offered by these newer technologies" is utilized, yet it is unclear to what this phrase refers. We believe this section should be revised to provide clear guidance and allow for growing and changing uses of technology in professional development.

2. Evidence-Based Professional Development Section:

- The proposed definition of "evidence-based" does not necessarily define "evidence based," but rather reiterates the same term. We recommend revising this definition to indicate the distinction between the term and the definition. The term "evidence-based" is currently used in a variety of ways; generally it is used to show that a body of work has reached a threshold of reliability and/or validity. This section also indicates that "the definitions of evidence-based, student achievement, and student growth are based on the definitions of terms defined in the Department's notice of final supplemental priorities and definitions for discretionary grant programs." is particularly important in this document to define this term so there is clear understanding of its usage in the proposed priorities.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to share our comments with you and hope that you find them useful to your proposed priorities and definitions. Furthermore, please feel free to contact us at anytime for further discussion about these, or any other related issues. Thank you.

For the Executive Board,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anthony S. Thaxton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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