

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

BILL: House Bill 1383 - State Board of Education – Online Special Education System – Technical Requirements

DATE: April 02, 2025

POSITION: Information

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The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information for consideration regarding House Bill 1383 - State Board of Education – Online Special Education System – Technical Requirements which requires the State Board to study minimum functional and technical requirements to ensure optimal performance of the Maryland Online Individualized Program (MOIEP) and the Maryland Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) systems, and draft and adopt regulations to ensure those standards are in place in Maryland's systems. MSDE would like to thank the bill's sponsors for their concern and interest in guaranteeing an optimal experience for MOIEP and IFSP users.

To ensure full understanding, we will share the purpose of an IFSP and an IEP, background information about the process for verifying that the Online IFSP and MOIEP systems meet users' needs and summarize recommendations and current plans to study both systems. The overall purpose of both the IFSP and the IEP is to ensure that children birth - 21 years of age with disabilities in Maryland receive the appropriate support and services they need to thrive. The IFSP supports infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities and their families. The IEP is designed for children aged 3-21 years old, focused on delivering tailored specially designed instruction and related services. Together, these plans help ensure that children with disabilities receive the comprehensive support they need at every stage of their development. The Maryland Online IFSP and MOIEP systems, developed in collaboration between MSDE and the Johns Hopkins Center for Technology in Education (JHU/CTE), are two separate electronic databases where IFSPs and IEPs can be written in a format that safeguards state and federal compliance. Both systems are grant-funded through Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) discretionary funds.

MSDE is committed to a cycle of continuous improvement for Online IFSP and MOIEP. MSDE convenes quarterly IFSP and IEP User/Workgroups to obtain stakeholder feedback on the Online IFSP and MOIEP Systems and the IFSP and IEP document form and format. Regular stakeholders from across Maryland who participate in the group include cross-divisional representation from the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (EI&SE) at MSDE, local education agency/public agency (LEA/PA) leaders and service providers, public agency staff (e.g., Maryland School for the Blind (MSB), Maryland Department of Labor (DoL), Maryland Department of Rehabilitative Services (DORS), etc.), nonpublic special education school staff, and the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) for students with an IFSP and Special Education State Advisory Committee (SESAC) members for students with an IEP. Attendance by other stakeholders and users is encouraged. Meetings are held virtually to ensure vast geographic representation.

In addition to the User/Workgroup process, IFSP and IEP users have been asked to submit concerns and recommendations, in real time, through the Support Tracking System (MIST) or provide

suggestions for revisions directly to MSDE staff. For example, in 2021 the Special Education State Advisory Committee (SESAC) provided a list of suggestions to MSDE and most of these recommendations have been implemented over the past two years. MSDE has also met with the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), DORs, and MDOD to obtain their feedback on the functionality of the MOIEP. MSDE is now rolling out a new process in the MOIEP system to submit enhancement suggestions, separate from MIST submissions, which will be designated for system bugs and assistance with system technology. This new process will be visible to all users on the left-hand navigation menu of the MOIEP.

As an agency, we are committed to continuously improving the IFSP and MOIEP for all stakeholders. Currently, MSDE is concluding the work of the Blueprint Special Education Workgroup (SEW) as required by the Blueprint Accountability and Implementation Boards (AIB). The SEW is a coalition of practitioners, legislators, state agency representatives, advocates, and parents brought together to discuss and make recommendations on instruction and services for students with disabilities; the topic of MOIEP was discussed by workgroup members in February 2024. As a result of that meeting, the SEW provided concrete recommendations and plans for improving the MOIEP system that braid naturally into work that this landmark group is addressing. One specific recommendation (Recommendation #6) from the SEW is that “MSDE should review the Maryland Online IEP (MOIEP), including data collection, reporting capabilities, user experience, and current mechanisms for feedback and revision, and report on suggested improvements and/or alternatives.” MSDE has already implemented work to meet that recommendation:

- Created and disseminated surveys to obtain stakeholder feedback on the MOIEP system; MSDE received over 2,000 survey responses;
- Conducted meetings with the four LEAs that do not currently use the MOIEP to identify their reasons for not switching to the MOIEP;
- Included extra interview questions in the comprehensive monitoring protocol to understand how each Local Education Agency (LEA) distributes MOIEP information to its staff;
- Researched other State’s IEP systems to obtain information about potential enhancements;
- Reviewed the Request for Proposal (RFP) created by Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) for their technical specifications and required IEP components; and
- Initiated the development of a RFP to study each system with the ultimate goals of ensuring functionality, ensuring compliance with federal and state regulations, improving user experience, and identifying opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness in serving students with disabilities.

## **EXPLANATION:**

The recommendations of the SEW beg for a much more comprehensive study than that required in HB 1383. As a result, the RFP mentioned above will align with the recommendations of the SEW and also address minimum functional and technical requirements to ensure optimal performance required in HB 1383. This RFP will include a study of both the Online IFSP and MOIEP systems. Specifically, the audit will cover the following areas:

- **System Functionality**
  - Evaluation of the overall functionality of both systems, including system performance, stability, and capacity for handling large amounts of data.
  - Identification of any gaps or limitations in system design and performance.
- **Regulatory Compliance**

- Assessment of the systems' ability to ensure compliance with federal and state regulations, including IDEA, COMAR, and FERPA.
- Ensurance that the systems properly handle sensitive data and maintain required documentation and reporting capabilities.
- **User Experience**
  - An in-depth review of the user interface (UI) design, navigation, and overall user experience for all stakeholders, including administrators, educators, service providers, and families.
  - Collection of data on user satisfaction and ease of use through surveys or interviews.
  - Identification of usability issues and recommend improvements.
- **User Feedback Mechanisms**
  - Reviewal of current methods used to collect and incorporate user feedback, including surveys, support tickets, and troubleshooting procedures.
  - Assessment of the effectiveness of these methods in addressing user concerns and driving system updates and enhancements.
- **System Accessibility**
  - Evaluation of the systems' accessibility for users with disabilities, including compatibility with screen readers, keyboard navigation, and other assistive technologies.
  - Ensurance that the systems meet accessibility standards such as WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).
- **Opportunities for Increased Efficiency and Effectiveness**
  - Identification of opportunities for increasing operational efficiency, reducing administrative burdens, and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the systems in serving students with disabilities.
  - Recommendations of new features or functionalities that could improve service delivery.
- **Comparative Analysis**
  - Comparison of Maryland's Online IFSP and Online IEP systems against similar systems in other states.
  - Highlights of both systems' strengths, weaknesses, and best practices that could inform improvements to the Maryland systems.
- **Recommendations for System Improvements**
  - Provision of a detailed report with recommendations for system improvements in the areas of functionality, compliance, user experience, accessibility, and efficiency.
  - Inclusion of actionable steps for implementation, prioritizing changes that will have the greatest positive impact on both systems' effectiveness.

Once this detailed analysis is received, MSDE will make revisions based on the contractor's recommendations or replace the system, consistent with the SEW recommendation.

HB 1383 speaks to ensuring standards for the statewide IFSP and MOIEP systems, MSDE feels it is necessary to clarify that in the state of Maryland, all local education agencies (LEAs) and PAs must ensure their IFSPs and IEPs meet both state and federal guidelines. All Maryland local education agencies (LEAs) and public agencies (PAs) providing infants and toddlers services currently utilize the Maryland IFSP system. However, not all of Maryland's LEAs utilize the MOIEP. Four LEAs (Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, and Wicomico Counties) do not use the MOIEP and Frederick County has announced that it has begun building its own system. Maryland is a local control state and districts have the autonomy to choose a different electronic IEP system. If IEPs produced from all systems

follow the same form and format as the state's approved IEP document and specific data fields are captured in the local system to ensure compliance with federal data submissions, they may choose to use their own.

MSDE also has concerns about including system specifications and requirements in regulations as indicated in HB 1383. Given that both systems are improved annually, adding regulations regarding technology specifications may require that those regulations are updated annually as technology advances. As such, MSDE believes that concerns about the MOIEP and Online IFSP systems can and will be addressed through the RFP process.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **HB 1383**. For further information, please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne at 410-767-0504, or [Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov](mailto:Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov).