***SEAP Communications Plan (outline)***

***Last Updated: Nov. 29, 2022***

**Summary:** Earlier, the Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education gathered input and set the state’s federal targets for the SPP/APR. A key component of setting those targets was gathering input and feedback from many stakeholders in the disability community. The next step is to engage with stakeholders to obtain feedback “*to support the development of the implementation of activities designed to improve outcomes for children with disabilities.”* In short, the state continues to seek feedback from parents, experts in disability and education, and others to help with developing programs that will benefit children with disabilities.

In September, the Special Education Advisory Panel met and identified the following targets as priorities to get feedback:

* **No. 14: Post High School Outcomes**
* **No. 5: Least Restrictive Environments**
* **No. 13: Secondary Transition Requirements**
* **No. 8: School-facilitated parent involvement**

*Targets are listed in order of priority as set by SEAP.*

**Challenges:**

* **Distribution** – Getting the message to the stakeholders is the primary challenge. There has been concern that the message is not reaching as wide an audience as it could be given current technology. A part of this challenge is likely due to communication overload – too many messages going to stakeholders from multiple sources. This plan seeks to find solutions that will help DESE cut through the other communications and stand out so that stakeholders see the initial message and respond.
* **Obtaining Feedback** – Once the message reaches the stakeholders, the next challenge is getting stakeholders to read and then act on the message, providing DESE with good, critical and helpful feedback.

**Audiences –** Based on its mission and locations, DESE is targeting the following groups:

* Parents (need to talk in basic language)
* Outside, Non-profit Organizations that serve children with disabilities/special needs.
* SB 40 organizations
* Missouri PTI (Parent Training and Information center).
* School District Special Services/Special Education offices.
* Special Education Teachers
* SEPTAs around the state.
* Experts/researchers in special education/child development
* Career/Technical Education teachers and directors
* Therapists (Occupational/Physical)
* School for Deaf/Blind administrators/teachers
* State Agencies, including Vocational Rehab
* Parents as Teachers
* School Counselors/Social Workers
* Safety Resource Officers

**Tools:**

* Direct messaging: Email, text message, pre-recorded voicemail drop
* Social Media presence – utilize DESE main channels.
* Media
* Website – DESE and/or special education page.
* Advertising – DESE does have some funds that could be used for paid advertisements.
* Newsletters from School District
* Focus Groups (has been used in the past/DESE has the ability to get this done.)

**Messages:**

* **The education of youth with disabilities is a priority for the state of Missouri. We take this responsibility seriously and are committed to utilizing the latest research and information to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities.**
* **We know we can’t do this alone. We want to gather information from those who have intimate knowledge – parents, experts, dedicated organizations who work with individuals with disabilities every day. (No one knows your kids better than you.)**
* **We have a great opportunity to bring education officials and those who serve individuals with disabilities together. We are looking for constructive feedback on how to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities. (so that we can better our children)**
  + Give an example of feedback received in the past? (Education and enticement to act.)
  + What do we mean by “improve educational outcomes” – how do we demonstrate that?
    - Schools are much more inclusive, educational environments.

**Recommendations:** *Based on the main audiences (supporters of individuals with disabilities; commuters, college students and downtown businesses), the following communications strategies should be considered for each priority. Please keep in mind that the below is a scaffold and should not be considered a complete communications/marketing plan. Additional information would be required to implement a full marketing campaign.*

***Overall Communications Goals:***

* **Create better awareness among audiences about the current targets and the state’s desire to gather feedback on how to improve educational delivery for students.**
* **Establish relationships with the state and several organizations, including organizations that support individuals with intellectual disabilities, experts in the field, school districts and parents.**
* **Create (as close to as possible) permanent communications channels, so that feedback can be gathered by the state quickly and easily in the future.**

***Tactics:***

* **Web-based survey:** *The survey would be a key tool. Most of the marketing tools would provide the link to the target audiences asking them to complete the survey that should take about 5-7 minutes to complete. It would ask basic questions about their demographic and then ask them to provide feedback on the four priorities.*
* **Digital Marketing:**
  + Emails – used for parents, organizations, school districts, experts. Needs to be designed to grab attention. Should not only be text, needs to include a graphic or emotional plea.
  + Social Media – Facebook, twitter. Facebook is used by parents and organizations. Twitter tends to be used by parents, researchers and specialists.
  + Text messaging – parents.
  + Pre-recorded voicemail – parents, organizations
* **Advertisements** – several options include
  + Mail – could be sent to district administrators encouraging them to get their parents/teachers/administrators involved in the feedback.
  + Coupons/flyers – advertising in school district communications.
  + Media advertising – recommend this be used in only extremely targeted areas. Since the population is strategically targeted, blanket advertisement will not be as effective.
  + Digital (internet) advertisements – can be designed to target those either in geofenced areas or who self-identify with a special education background.
* **Earned media –** earned media is a media placement that is earned through a free promotional pitch. For DESE;, they should focus on utilizing media pitches for new requests or timed with
  + **Press Releases/Media Advisories** – should be used to connect with media across the state. Both newspapers and local radio stations.
  + **Direct Pitch** – calling media outlets directly to promote a particular story. Often done once a good relationship has been established with a media outlet.
  + **Expert comments** – When an individual with the organization is established as someone who can comment about an issue or event that is taking place and applies to the local media or community. The state should identify experts that could talk about special education issues and train them to include messages about the state’s work on gathering feedback.
  + **Editorials** – 600-700 word essays that are pitched to the local newspapers. Often used to argue on a particular topic, but can occasionally be used to feature an important item for the community in a positive way.
* **Grassroots efforts** – typically involve employees doing physical tasks to draw attention to the issue.
  + **Toolkit** - create a toolkit that arms volunteers/KOLs with the information and resources they need to effectively reach out. present, share
  + **Visits –** to area SEPTAs, school district administration, teacher’s unions, organizations that support individuals with disabilities, etc.

**Suggested Actions:** The following are only suggestions. There are likely other actions that can be taken. Some of which might incur a significant cost. If a budget is available, it would be helpful to know the amount of money available. If specific tactics are chosen, Christian and Leigh can help draft some of the communications or review drafts to ensure the information is interpreted correctly by the targeted audiences.

Additionally, the above should not be considered to be a one-and-done situation. The most effective means of getting messages to target audiences is through a layered, repetitive approach.

* **School districts:**
  + **Top Administrators: Superintendents, Special Education leaders**
    - Official letter from the state strongly encouraging them to engage with their parents to get feedback. Should be signed by a top DESE official.
    - Regular email reminders that include a simple toolkit (possibly a Qualtrics type of survey?).
    - Ashley Krause is the current president of the Missouri Council of Administrators of Special Education: [akrause@farmington.k12.mo.us](mailto:akrause@farmington.k12.mo.us)
  + **District Communication offices:**
    - Newsletters: See what districts do to communicate regularly with all parents. Encourage them to run announcements about obtaining feedback. Possibly see about advertising in the school district’s newsletters.
    - Other tools: Ask for a list of other tools the district uses to communicate – including digital social media, and see if there are options for the district to boost DESE posts about getting feedback. Could also include communications from principals. Ask communications offices to utilize whatever channels work best for their parents in their school district. (Will likely vary throughout the state.)
* **Parents**
  + **Mail –** Direct communication from top DESE official asking parents for their help.
  + **Email –** reminders from both DESE and the school district.
  + **Advertising –** target parents on social media platforms. Can narrow target to parents in Missouri.
* **Disability organizations/SEPTAs:**
  + Identify and connect with disability support organizations throughout the state. Some examples include:
    - Boone County Family Resources (SB 40 organization in Boone County)
    - Down Syndrome Innovations (Kansas City)
    - The Farmers House: <https://www.facebook.com/thefarmershouse>
    - Missouri Families for Effective Autism Treatment (Ballwin, Mo.)
  + Tactics to connect with them include mail and email. Provide a toolkit to engage parents and organizational experts in responding. Follow up with the organization and provide a soft deadline.
* **Researchers/Specialists**
  + *Christian is working to identify the best way to reach this group. He’ll report back when he has more specific information.*
  + Media – once experts are identified. They could be trained and then pitched to the media as sources for stories involving special education. Armed with the messages in this plan, they would indirectly help the state get the word out about gathering feedback.
* **General Public** *While the general public is not a target audience, it can be helpful to utilize some broad communications channels.*
  + **Press Release –** Issued statewide to all media, the release could be utilized to announce the state’s desire to obtain feedback.
  + **Editorial –**“authored” by a top DESE administrator. This could be placed in targeted areas, expressing the state’s desire to continually improve on the delivery of education, and by helping our kids with special needs – our state is helped in the long run.

**TOOLS**

**– Survey**

**What is your occupation?**

**–** Special Education Teacher/Administrator

– Professional therapist (physical/occupational/etc.)

– Parent/Caregiver

– Education administrator

– Special Education expert/researcher

– Career/Technical educator

– Other

**How many years have you been in your profession?**

– 0-5

* – 5-10

– 10-20

– 20+

**What does Missouri do well with special education?**

**The next four questions ask about specific areas in special education. Please provide as much detail as possible.**

**What can Missouri schools do to better prepare students for the transition from high school to a post-secondary experience? Please indicate what areas are current strengths, current weaknesses and (as detailed as possible) what actions Missouri educators and administrators could take to improve this area.**

**What can Missouri schools help students be more successful in being accepted into a collegiate program, employed in a full-time job or being accepted into a training program following graduation from high school. Please indicate what areas are current strengths, current weaknesses and (as detailed as possible) what actions Missouri educators and administrators could take to improve this area.**

**What can Missouri schools do to have more children with special needs in the regular education classrooms? Please indicate what areas are current strengths, current weaknesses and (as detailed as possible) what actions Missouri educators and administrators could take to improve this area.**

**What can Missouri schools do to better invite and encourage parental involvement in their children’s total education experience? Please indicate what areas are current strengths, current weaknesses and (as detailed as possible) what actions Missouri educators and administrators could take to improve this area.**

**– Email:**

*Dear XXX,*

*The state of Missouri is asking for your help as we continue educating our students with special needs. In your role as a relative, caretaker, or professional, we are asking you for your feedback on four educational priorities for our children.*

*Please consider completing a short survey to provide us with your important perspective as we work to improve services for our school-age children that will set them up for the best future possible.*

*SURVEY:*

*The survey only takes 5-7 minutes of your time. We appreciate any feedback you can provide.*

*Sincerely,*

*Mark?? (Who is the best person to sign this?)*

**– Social Media**

* Are you a relative or professional who cares for or works with a child with special needs? DESE wants your perspective to make Missouri better! (bitly link)
* DESE is looking for feedback on educating children with special needs. Help us by filling out this short survey. (bitly link)
* Help us help our children! Fill out this DESE survey to help us improve special education in Missouri (bitly link)
* (Facebook post) DESE is asking for your help. If you are a caregiver or professional who works with children with special needs, please consider completing a short survey to help us improve special education (LINK to Survey). (Include a picture of a teacher working with a child.)

**– Release**

Dec. 10, 2022 Contact: Media Contact???

**DESE Asks for Help to Identify Improvements with Special Education**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is asking for the help of caregivers and professionals who work with children with special needs to identify possible improvements in special education in four key areas.

“Education is the future of our state, and the more students who are successful in our elementary and secondary schools, the more adults will be contributing members to a thriving Missouri economy,” said ????? “Students who are eligible for special education services often have tough challenges to overcome. Our teachers and specialists do outstanding work, and we are very proud of them. We also know that we can always improve, and who better to help us than those caregivers and professionals who live and work with those children.”

The department is asking any caregiver or professional who works with children with special needs to consider completing a 5-to-7 minute survey to get feedback on four key areas:

**– Secondary Transition Requirements:** What can schools do better to help students prepare for their upcoming transition out of high school and into a post-secondary experience, whether that is a full-time job, additional educational program, or something else?

**– Post High School Outcomes:** What can schools do better to help students either 1.) be accepted into a college program, 2.) be competitively employed or 3.) enrolled in a training program?

**– Least Restrictive Environments:** What can schools do better to have children with special needs included in a regular education classroom more?

– **School-facilitated parent involvement:** How can schools encourage and invite more parent involvement in their children’s complete educational experience?

“Missouri has a lot of success stories, but we want more,” said XXX “We’re hoping that the feedback we receive will help us engage with our students in the best ways possible so we can help them meet their lifelong learning goals.”

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GENERAL NOTES:

* Federal targets have been set.
* Looking to engage parents in developing improvement strategies and evaluating progress.
* Increasing the capacity of diverse groups of parents.
* How are we getting services to kids that it’s making a difference and improving outcomes.
* What are we doing? Is what is available out there working? What could we do differently?
* Are there things we aren’t doing that need to change or do we need to add services?
* What’s happening now that is not working?

**Immediate Action Steps - May 20, 2022**

* Mary to send the link to the list of focus areas/initiatives we are focused on
* Leigh will work on editing into plain language that makes it more accessible to the reader
* Leigh will work on illustrative examples that draw an emotional appeal as to why this work matters - answer “what’s in it for me”
* Christian and Leigh will work on a presentation for the July SEAP meeting
  + Presentation will include a ranking exercise - $100 to spend, how do you divide it up among these priorities
  + Session will include a discussion on seeking additional stakeholder input (are we, as committee members, willing to do direct outreach, distributing the ranking survey?)