IEP Analysis Project – Frequently Asked Questions
December 7, 2017

1. **What is an IEP?**
   An IEP is an acronym for Individualized Education Program. An IEP is a campus-level written education plan designed to meet a child's learning needs, specifically for students in special education or with disabilities. Approaches to IEPs vary from district to district throughout Texas.

2. **What is the IEP Analysis Project?**
   The IEP Analysis Project is intended to identify patterns and trends LEAs may find useful to improve special education.

3. **Why is TEA performing such an in-depth look at special education programs in the state?**
   While Texas is not currently under any special education improvement requirements from the state legislature or the United States Department of Education, many concerns have been raised since June 2016 regarding the quality of services received by students with disabilities. It is only through deep understanding of the true state of our special education program that we can hope to make lasting, impactful change to services received by our most vulnerable Texas students. The value of the insights gained through this process will have invaluable long-term effects in how we marshal resources to benefit children.

4. **What information will TEA include in this analysis?**
   While there are multiple pieces of information that will be analyzed, the following are examples of what TEA may review as part of this project:

   - Multiple student performance measures, including graduation rate and growth in STAAR scores for students with disabilities
   - Analytic call center data from SpedTEX, Texas' special education informational call center, which provides TEA with reports of inquiries received from across the state
   - Results from interviews with the following groups of stakeholders:
     o Students
     o Parents
     o Student advocacy group members
     o Teachers and other classroom staff
     o Principals
     o Evaluation staff
     o District-Level staff
   - Input directly from stakeholder groups that meet on a regular basis, including:
     o Continuing Advisory Committee
     o State Performance Improvement Plan Steering Committee
     o TCASE Cabinet
     o Student Advocacy Roundtable representing TxSER, Disability Rights Texas, ARC of Texas, and Texas Parent to Parent

- o Special Education Directors from Regional Educational Service Centers
- TEA will work with a contractor to digitally analyze a significant sample of individualized education programs (IEPs) from across the state. More specific information is contained in subsequent questions.

5. Why are IEPs being reviewed?
The IEPs are not being reviewed as much as they are being aggregated and analyzed. This process will look for trends that may reveal areas for improvement in ARD processes. It will not be used to determine the quality of services received.

6. How were LEAs selected for this project?
There was no selection process. This project was made available to all school systems. Participation is strictly optional.

7. What benefit is there to an LEA for participating in this data analysis project?
School systems will receive an LEA-level report much like what will be provided to TEA at the state level. These reports will provide LEAs with information that they could not readily access otherwise. LEAs will be able to easily make comparisons across their programs and among campuses on a number of data points. This information can be used to spur further local analysis and inform programmatic decisions and resource allocation going forward.

8. Why can't an LEA do this on their own?
This level of data would literally take hundreds of hours to complete by hand, making it cost prohibitive for most LEAs. This represents hundreds of thousands of hours of time collectively at a state level. TEA is providing this opportunity for no cost to participating districts.

9. **Are local educational agencies (LEAs) being paid to provide a child's IEP as part of this analysis?**
No. TEA wants to ensure that there are no barriers to participation in this free data analysis resource for districts, especially for our smaller and rural districts. As a result, participating LEAs are eligible for a data sharing grant that is intended to cover the expenses related to data sharing activities (such as staffing costs, technology costs, etc.). The amount of money an LEA receives is commensurate with the number of students with disabilities that it serves and proportional to effort it would take to participate, including any locally-driven coordination and engagement work. The money must be spent to provide special education services to students in the LEA.

10. **Will the results of this analysis be made public?**
The state-level results will be published on TEA's website. Participating LEAs will receive LEA-level reports, and it will be up to each LEA to decide whether to publish the results. In cases where small group sizes might reveal student identities, LEAs must follow their local policies for data masking to protect the privacy of the students involved.

11. What safeguards does TEA require of vendors to keep confidential information secure?

TEA requires vendors to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) guidelines and to use commercially reasonable steps, in accordance with industry standards, to maintain data privacy and security. In addition, TEA required SPEDx to execute individual data sharing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with participating LEAs to address any additional security protocols that each respective LEA required. Participating LEAs may make the data sharing agreements available for review.

12. What confidentiality safeguards are there at the local level?

A significant majority of LEAs in the state have contracts with third party vendors to maintain their IEP files electronically. LEAs enter into data privacy and security agreements with these companies similar to what they have entered into with SPEDx. A child's sensitive IEP information is as secure with SPEDx, TEA's agent, as it is with your LEA's electronic IEP vendor.

13. If student names are kept anonymous, how are IEPs matched with STAAR data for analysis?

TEA has directed the vendor to replace each Texas student's identification code with a unique, randomly generated "Analytic ID". A key file is generated to capture this mapping between the TX student ID and the Analytic ID. This key file is stored in a password-protected, encrypted, and secure location that is separate from the data supplied for the analysis. The Analytic ID is then used in all subsequent data operations to match records between the STAAR and IEP datasets.

14. What money is being used to fund this project?

Federal grant money known as IDEA Part B-Discretionary is being used to fund this project. This money flows to states from the federal government to fund state-level activities that support special education programs.

15. How does use of these federal funds for this specific project affect funding the local school system would have received?

It doesn't. Expenditures on this data analysis project do not reduce the amount of funds LEAs receive to serve their students with disabilities. TEA decided to spend some of these funds on supporting data analysis instead of spending the money on internal agency activities.

16. Who is the outside contractor performing the IEP analysis, and how was it selected?

Large-scale analysis of IEPs has only be made possible very recently, as the bulk of LEAs in the country are now storing IEPs electronically. What previously would have been a very labor intensive process is now more straightforward. Because of the relative newness of this analysis opportunity, there is only one company in the marketplace currently providing this specific type of service. That company is a data analysis and consulting company known as SPEDx. After learning of earlier work that SPEDx conducted in another state, TEA saw a definite need for the type of in-depth analysis that SPEDx could perform of our state's IEPs and sought out a partnership with the company. TEA requested that SPEDx only focus on surfacing observations derived from

the analysis and specifically refrain from making suggestions or recommendations concerning program improvement, resource allocation, and fidelity of implementation. These considerations are handled by the LEA.

The results of this IEP analysis will only serve to make the larger special education analysis stronger and lead to more improved services for our students with disabilities. Because no one else in the market place is performing this type of analysis, SPEDx is a sole source provider and, therefore, the request-for-proposals (RFP) process was not necessary. in fact, it's standard governmental practice in situations where only one vendor can perform a desired function. Currently, the agency has similar sole source contracts in place and TEA's Office of Academics followed all guidelines provided to them for sole source procedures in both cases. Please see the following link for more information about federal law relating to vendor selection in situations like this: https://www.acquisition.gov/far/html/Subpart%206_3.html. More information about SPEDx and the work it does can be found at www.spedx.com