LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Request for Applications: Special Education Professional Development and Direct Services
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Every day in Louisiana, educators are committed to ensuring that every child and school has the opportunity to grow and thrive. To support educators, the Department has issued vendor guides to facilitate partnerships between school systems and vetted organizations such as our Louisiana PD Vendor Guide, Social-Emotional Learning Curricula and Strategies for Louisiana and the Behavioral Intervention Vendor Guide. Yet, students with disabilities often present unique needs that arise due to their disabilities that are not always addressed through universal supports alone. To address the unique needs that students with disabilities often encounter, the Department is building an additional vendor guide of organizations that can deliver high-quality professional development in the area of specialized support and personnel to provide the direct service requirements of individualized educational plans for students with disabilities.

STATEMENT OF NEED

The Department is soliciting local and national organizations to apply as potential partners for our Partnerships for Success guide to collaborate with Louisiana schools to support the complex learning needs of students with disabilities. Partnership applications are being accepted and evaluated in one or both of the following areas:

1. **Professional development in areas of specialized support** that provides strategies and tools, to be implemented by all educators, that remove barriers ensuring students with disabilities spend the majority of class time reading, speaking, writing and solving curriculum based tasks.
2. **Direct student services** utilizing alternative or innovative methods to deliver related services required to implement a student’s individualized educational program.

DESCRIPTION OF NEED

**Professional Development: Specialized Supports for Educators**

All students should spend the majority of their time reading, speaking, writing and solving curriculum-based tasks. However, students with disabilities often face additional challenges because they need educators that can deliver specialized support in the areas of communication, assistive technology, functional skills, sensory and environment, and executive functioning (find additional details in application attachment A-1). In Louisiana, over sixty percent of individual educational plans for students with disabilities identify needs in one or more areas of specialized support. Without educators implementing such support, students with disabilities are unable to meaningfully engage in the classroom, every day.

To provide specialized supports, educators need targeted professional development. Yet, according to a recent survey of special education leaders, eighty-one percent of leaders have trouble finding high-quality professional development to develop educators who can deliver specialized supports. When equipped with knowledge and strategies in these areas of specialized support, educators can more adequately address the unique needs of students with disabilities and ensure meaningful engagement in the classroom every day. To address the obstacles school systems face when acquiring the professional development necessary for educators to support the specialized support needs of students with disabilities, the Department is building a guide of organizations that can provide such training to school systems across Louisiana.
Direct Services: Certified Providers for Students with Disabilities

Nearly forty percent of students with disabilities in Louisiana receive direct services from a certified provider as part of their individualized education plan. Of the forty percent of students with disabilities requiring the direct services of a certified provider, ninety percent of those needed services fall under speech therapy, occupational therapy and adapted physical education. These direct services assist students with disabilities in engaging in the classroom, every day. While these services are critical in both protecting a student’s civil rights and ensuring the student can grow and thrive, sixty-seven percent of special education leaders across Louisiana expressed via survey problems with hiring and retaining certified direct service providers.

Special education leaders most frequently identify speech therapy and occupational therapy as the providers most difficult to acquire when striving to fully support the needs of students with disabilities. To assist school systems in overcoming this challenge, the Department seeks to create an informal inventory of organizations staffed with certified providers that utilize alternative and innovative methods to deliver direct services to students with disabilities.
APPLICATION PROCESS

Phase I: Initial Screening (Summer/Early Fall 2019)
The Department accepts applications from organizations and conducts an initial screening to ensure submissions align to our description of need.

Phase II: Review (Early Fall 2019)
The Department will review applications to ensure they meet criteria for inclusion into the Partnerships for Success Guide. Organizations that do not meet eligibility criteria will be notified.

Phase III: Publication (Fall 2019)
Organizations that meet established criteria will be notified through email that their application has been approved and they are eligible to be included in our Partnerships for Success Guide. School systems will be provided with assistance from the Department to effectively utilize the Partnerships for Success Guide.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS
Applicants interested in being included in the Louisiana Partnerships for Success Guide must submit an application for quality review and approval.

- Applicants applying only in the area of professional development for specialized support must complete and submit sections one and two of the application.
- Applicants applying only in the area of direct student services must complete and submit sections one and three of the application.
- Applicants interested in applying to all areas must complete and submit the entire application, sections one through three.

All completed applications should be submitted through the Google form: Request for Applications: Special Education Professional Development and Direct Services. While we encourage and prefer early submissions the application will close Friday, August 16, 2019. If you need assistance, or would like to discuss the application and application process in greater detail please contact specialeducation@la.gov.
Section I: Application Cover Sheet

This section of the application is intended to provide a brief overview of your organization and the types of services your organization can provide to support students with disabilities in Louisiana.

Organization Name:
Organization Contact Person:
Email:
Phone:
Brief Vendor Description: (No more than 4-5 sentences)

Identify the areas of specialized support for which your organization provides professional development. More details regarding areas of specialized support can be found in application attachment A-1. (select any or all that apply)
- Communication
- Assistive Technology
- Functional Skills
- Sensory Environment
- Executive Functioning and Self Regulation

Identify the areas in which your organization can provide direct student services. (select any or all that apply)
- Speech Language Pathology Services
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Adapted Physical Education
- Social Work Services
- Counseling Services
- School Psychological Services
- School Health Services
Section II: Professional Development for Specialized Support

The Department would like to ensure school systems have access to partnership services that can provide high-quality professional development to equip educators with strategies and tools to provide specialized supports to students with disabilities. Outline the types of professional development your organization can provide to educators by responding to the following prompts for up to five unique professional development services your organization can provide to school systems.

- Title of service provided.
- Description of services provided.
- Areas of specialized support addressed (see application attachment A-1 for further details).
- Method
  - face to face, virtual, blended, coaching, etc.
- Type of support (Initial or ongoing)
- Maximum number of participants
- Cost

Describe your current experience providing high-quality professional development, based on professional learning standards, for school systems to support students in areas of specialized support. Be sure to include all elements bulleted below. (No more than one page.)

- Describe the number of school systems, including the geographic reach and school system type (traditional, charter) your organization has partnered with in the last three years.
- Provide evidence that your organization’s professional development has improved outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Describe how the professional development provided by your organization is anchored in evidence-based adult learning strategies.
- Upload a small sample of materials used to deliver professional development, which may include but is not limited to slide decks, accompanying handouts, and presenter notes.
- Upload curricula vitae or resumes of key personnel responsible for development or delivery of professional development.
Section III: Direct Services

The Department seeks to ensure that all school systems have sufficient access to partnerships that assist in providing the direct service needs of students with disabilities from related service providers. Please provide the information requested below for each category of services your organization either currently provides or anticipates being able to provide to school systems in Louisiana.

- Identify the category of services provided.
- Describe your organization's service delivery model. Be sure to include details regarding staffing status, contractual conditions for services, and the settings in which you are able to provide services.
- Method of delivery.
  - Face to face, virtual, or both
- Type of support provided.
  - Evaluations, direct student services, or both
- Provide information about your organization’s area of impact. Can you provide statewide or regional support to school systems? If regional, please identify the parishes you anticipate being able to support.
- Are all service providers in your organization properly certified or supervised by an appropriately certified provider for the services in which they deliver?
- Provide a description of the hourly cost of services to school systems.

Be responding to the questions below; describe your current relationships working with school systems to provide direct services to students with disabilities. (No more than one page.)

- Describe the number of school systems, including the geographic reach and school system type (traditional, charter) your organization has collaborated with in the last three years.
- Provide any relevant information to ensure you meet the minimum liability insurance requirements to conduct contractual work with Louisiana school systems.
- Provide evidence that your organization has improved outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Please provide documentation that providers within your organization are certified.
- Please provide references from three of the most recent schools/school systems you have contracted with.
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A-1: Areas of Specialized Support Definitions

The Department has categorized areas of specialized support that are frequently required to support the unique needs of students with disabilities. Professional development for school systems and educators may encompass more than one area of specialized support simultaneously. The descriptions provided for areas of specialized support are intended to provide potential partners and school systems a common understanding of the type of professional development a particular organization might provide as well as how they can support the unique needs of students with disabilities. If you have additional questions regarding how the support your organization provides would fit into any of the areas outlined below, reach out to specialeducation@la.gov for guidance.

Communication
In Louisiana, about half of all students with disabilities have identified communication needs. Communication-focused professional development helps school systems and educators address communication barriers that manifest because of a student’s disability, whether it be the result of a hearing or visual impairment, limitations in verbal skills, or other significant impairments in receptive or expressive communication. This enables students with disabilities to use their most effective modes of communication to express and receive information across environments and with varied communication partners.

Assistive Technology
Across Louisiana, about sixty percent of students with disabilities have assistive technology needs identified in their individualized education plans. Assistive technology-focused professional development supports school systems and educators in identifying and implementing assistive technology services that will have meaningful application for the educational, social, and developmental experiences of students with disabilities. This can include technology, strategies, or other tools that increase a student’s access and engagement with high-quality instructional materials.

Functional Skills
Approximately ten percent of students with disabilities have a significant disability affecting their ability to function independently. School systems must provide these students with the explicit support and instruction they need to become as independent as possible given their unique needs. Therefore, functional goals are often included in students’ individualized education plans. Professional development that focuses on functional skills (ex: hygiene, community-based navigation, self-advocacy) support the independence of students both academically and beyond the school setting. Supporting functional skill development for students with disabilities can allow for independent living and meaningful participation in the community.

Sensory Environment
One in five students with disabilities, including students with autism and developmental disabilities, experience under- or overstimulation by sights, sounds, and smells in the school environment. Sensory-based professional development

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1 This includes but is not limited to impairments in the areas of apraxia, articulation/phonology, fluency, pragmatics, or auditory processing.
seeks to help school systems design environments that are responsive to controlling environmental factors and supporting individual students in interpreting and responding to environmental stimuli. This enables students with disabilities to experience, understand, and appropriately respond to the information they receive from their environment in a manner that facilitates engagement in high-quality instruction.

**Executive Function and Self-Regulation**

According to recent data, over seventy-five percent of students with disabilities need additional support in the area of managing and sustaining tasks. Executive functioning and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable students to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully.\(^2\) Students with disabilities often need explicit, systemized support to develop, practice, and then independently manage these skills. Professional development helps educators learn age-appropriate ways to support and strengthen the executive functioning and self-regulation skills of students with disabilities through structured interactions and practice.

\(^2\) [https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/)
Attachment B-1: Evaluation Criteria for Application Submissions

To ensure school systems have access to high-quality organizations, the Department has established tentative criteria that must be met before providers can be included in our Partnerships for Success Guide. As vendors develop relationships with school systems, additional assurances may be required. Outlined below are the criteria to which the Department will evaluate submissions.

**Professional development for specialized support providers** will be evaluated by the following four components.

1. Demonstrated experience in providing professional development for specialized support to school systems and educators.
2. Data that demonstrates that the organization’s professional development has supported school systems in improving outcomes for students with disabilities.
3. PD samples indicate that professional development is grounded in evidence-based adult learning strategies.
4. Provided resumes or curricula vitae indicate strong expertise and experience in designing and delivering special education specific professional development.

**Direct service providers** will be evaluated by the following four components.

1. Demonstrated experience in providing direct services to support the needs of students with disabilities.
2. Data that the services rendered by your organization has led to improved outcomes for students with disabilities.
3. Evidence that providers within the organization are appropriately certified.
4. Proof that the organization holds the minimum required liability insurance to work with students in Louisiana schools.

Organizations applying as candidates to provide both professional development and direct services will be evaluated using both sets of criteria.