



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

June 24, 2021

Honorable Alfred Ada
Commissioner of Education
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System
P.O. Box 501370 CK
Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands 96950

Dear Commissioner Ada:

I am writing to advise you of the U. S. Department of Education's (Department) 2021 determination under section 616 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Department has determined that the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands needs assistance in implementing the requirements of Part B of the IDEA. This determination is based on the totality of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' data and information, including the Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2019 State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR), other Entity-reported data, and other publicly available information.

With the FFY 2019 SPP/APR submission, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requested that States and Entities report whether and how the data collection for any indicator was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, OSEP requested that States and Entities include in the narrative for each impacted indicator: (1) the impact on data completeness, validity, and/or reliability for the indicator; (2) an explanation of how COVID-19 specifically impacted the State's or Entity's ability to collect and verify the data for the indicator; and (3) any steps the State or Entity took to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the data collection and verification. OSEP appreciates States' and Entities' level of transparency regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the data reported in the FFY 2019

SPP/APR. When making determination decisions for 2021, OSEP considered all information submitted that related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. For 2021 determinations, no State or Entity received a determination of "Needs Intervention" due solely to data impacted by COVID-19.

OSEP is continuing to use both results and compliance data in making determinations for outlying areas, freely associated States, and the Bureau of Indian Education (the Entities) in 2021, as it did for determinations in 2020.¹ The

¹ OSEP has used results data on the participation and performance of children with disabilities on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in making determinations for States (but not Entities) since 2014. Although the BIE is the only Entity that administers the NAEP, OSEP has not used NAEP data in making the BIE's determinations because the BIE's NAEP data were previously not available. However, given that the BIE's NAEP data are now available, OSEP is considering using the NAEP data in making the BIE's 2022 determination under IDEA section 616(d).

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' 2021 determination is based on the data reflected in the Entity's "2021 Part B Results-Driven Accountability Matrix" (RDA Matrix). The RDA Matrix is individualized for each Entity and consists of:

- (1) a Compliance Matrix that includes scoring on Compliance Indicators and other compliance factors;
- (2) a Results Matrix that includes scoring on Results Elements;
- (3) a Compliance Score and a Results Score;
- (4) an RDA Percentage based on both the Compliance Score and the Results Score; and
- (5) the Entity's Determination.

The RDA Matrix is further explained in a document, entitled "How the Department Made Determinations under Section 616(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2021: Freely Associated States, Outlying Areas, and the Bureau of Indian Education-Part B" (HTDMD).

The specifics of the determination procedures and criteria are set forth in the HTDMD and reflected in the RDA Matrix for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. In making Part B determinations in 2021, OSEP used results data related to:

- (1) the percentage of CWD who graduated with a regular high school diploma; and
- (2) the percentage of CWD who dropped out.

You may access the results of OSEP's review of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' SPP/APR and other relevant data by accessing the EMAPS SPP/APR reporting tool using your Entity-specific log-on information at <https://emaps.ed.gov/suite/>. When you access the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' SPP/APR on the site, you will find, in applicable Indicators 1 through 16, the OSEP Response to the indicator and any actions that the Entity is required to take. The actions that the Entity is required to take are in the "Required Actions" section of the indicator.

It is important for you to review the Introduction to the SPP/APR, which may also include language in the "OSEP Response" and/or "Required Actions" sections.

You will also find all of the following important documents saved as attachments:

- (1) the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' RDA Matrix;
- (2) the HTDMD document;
- (3) a spreadsheet entitled "2021 Data Rubric Part B," which shows how OSEP calculated Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands's "Timely and Accurate State-Reported Data" score in the Compliance Matrix; and
- (4) a document entitled "Dispute Resolution 2019-2020," which includes the IDEA section 618 data that OSEP used to calculate the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' "Timely State Complaint Decisions" and "Timely Due Process Hearing Decisions" scores in the Compliance Matrix.

As noted above, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' 2021 determination is Needs Assistance. A State's or Entity's 2021 RDA Determination is Needs Assistance if the RDA

Percentage is at least 60% but less than 80%. A State's or Entity's determination would also be Needs Assistance if its RDA Determination percentage is 80% or above but the Department has imposed Specific Conditions on the State's or Entity's last three IDEA Part B grant awards (for FFYs 2018, 2019, and 2020), and those Specific Conditions are in effect at the time of the 2021 determination.

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' determination for 2020 was also Needs Assistance. In accordance with section 616(e)(1) of the IDEA and 34 C.F.R. § 300.604(a), if a State or Entity is determined to need assistance for two consecutive years, the Secretary must take one or more of the following actions:

- (1) advise the State or Entity of available sources of technical assistance that may help the State or Entity address the areas in which it needs assistance and require the State or Entity to work with appropriate entities;
- (2) direct the use of State or Entity-level funds on the area or areas in which the State or Entity needs assistance; or
- (3) identify the State or Entity as a high-risk grantee and impose Specific Conditions on the State's or Entity's IDEA Part B grant award.

Pursuant to these requirements, the Secretary is advising the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands of available sources of technical assistance, including OSEP-funded technical assistance centers and resources at the following website: <https://osep.communities.ed.gov>, and requiring the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to work with appropriate entities. In addition, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands should consider accessing technical assistance from other Department-funded centers such as the Comprehensive Centers with resources at the following link: <https://compcenternetwork.org/states>. The Secretary directs the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to determine the results elements and/or compliance indicators, and improvement strategies, on which it will focus its use of available technical assistance, in order to improve its performance. We strongly encourage the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to access technical assistance related to those results elements and compliance indicators for which the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands received a score of zero. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands must report with its FFY 2020 SPP/APR submission, due February 1, 2022, on:

- (1) the technical assistance sources from which the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands received assistance; and
- (2) the actions the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands took as a result of that technical assistance.

As required by IDEA section 616(e)(7) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.606, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands must notify the public that the Secretary of Education has taken the above enforcement actions, including, at a minimum, by posting a public notice on its website and distributing the notice to the media and through public agencies.

States and Entities were required to submit Phase III Year Five of the SSIP by April 1, 2021. OSEP appreciates the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' ongoing work on its SSIP and its efforts to improve results for students with disabilities. We have carefully reviewed and responded to your submission and will provide additional feedback in the upcoming weeks.

Additionally, OSEP will continue to provide technical assistance to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands as it implements the SSIP, which is due on February 1, 2022.

As a reminder, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands must make its SPP/APR available to the public by posting it on its agency's website. Within the upcoming weeks, OSEP will be finalizing an Entity Profile that:

- (1) includes the Entity's determination letter and SPP/APR, OSEP attachments, and all Entity attachments that are accessible in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and
- (2) will be accessible to the public via the ed.gov website.

OSEP appreciates the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' efforts to improve results for children and youth with disabilities and looks forward to working with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands over the next year as we continue our important work of improving the lives of children with disabilities and their families. Please contact your OSEP State Lead if you have any questions, would like to discuss this further, or want to request technical assistance.

Sincerely,



David Cantrell, PhD

Acting Director

Office of Special Education Programs

cc: Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Director of Special Education