



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

June 20, 2019

Honorable Sinton Soalablai
Minister of Education
Republic of Palau
P.O. Box 189
Koror, PW 96940

Dear Minister Soalablai:

I am writing to advise you of the U. S. Department of Education's (Department) 2019 determination under section 616 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Department has determined that Palau needs intervention in implementing the requirements of Part B of the IDEA. This determination is based on the totality of Palau's data and information, including the Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2017 State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR), other State-reported data, and other publicly available information.

Protecting the rights of children with disabilities and their families is a key responsibility of States, but it is not sufficient if children are not attaining the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve the goals of IDEA as reflected in Congressional findings in section 601(c)(1) of the IDEA: equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. To address this concern, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has been using results data when making annual determinations for States under IDEA section 616(d) since 2014. 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 2019, as it did for determinations in 2018.

Palau's 2019 determination is based on the data reflected in Palau's "2019 Part B Results-Driven Accountability Matrix" (RDA Matrix). The RDA Matrix is individualized for each State 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) Palau'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 2019:

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

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 Palau. In making Part B determinations in 2019, OSEP continued to use results data related to:

- (1) the participation of children with disabilities (CWD) on regular Statewide assessments;
- (2) the percentage of CWD who graduated with a regular high school diploma; and
- (3) the percentage of CWD who dropped out.

The Secretary is considering modifying the factors the Department will use in making its determinations in June 2020 as part of its continuing emphasis on results for children with disabilities. Section 616(a)(2) of the IDEA requires that the primary focus of IDEA monitoring must be on improving educational results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities, and ensuring that States meet the IDEA program requirements, with an emphasis on those requirements that are most closely related to improving educational results for children with disabilities.

The proposed Part B determinations process will include the same compliance factors as in past years, with one addition. For the 2020 determinations, rather than weighting each compliance factor equally, OSEP is considering assigning greater weight to those compliance factors most directly related to improving results for children with disabilities. For the 2020 determinations process we are also considering, as two additional results factors, State-reported data on: preschool child outcomes and the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). Using preschool outcomes for Part B determinations is consistent with the use of the early childhood outcomes factor that has been used for Part C determinations since 2015. Use of this factor emphasizes the importance of preschool outcomes in promoting later school success for students with disabilities. The inclusion of the SSIP as a results factor in making determinations would continue OSEP’s emphasis on incorporating a results-driven approach as States identify evidence-based practices that lead to improved outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. In addition, we are considering several changes to the results factors related to the participation and performance of children with disabilities on assessments, including: (1) using Statewide assessment results, rather than the National Assessment of Educational Progress performance data; (2) looking at year-to-year improvements in Statewide assessment results and taking into account the full Statewide assessment system, including alternate assessments; and (3) no longer comparing each State’s assessment performance with that of other States. Finally, OSEP will be revisiting ways of measuring improvement in the graduation rate of students with disabilities. As we consider changes to how we use the data under these factors in making the Department’s 2020 determinations, OSEP will provide parents, States, entities, LEAs, and other stakeholders with an opportunity to comment and provide input through OSEP’s Leadership Conference in July 2019 and other meetings.

You may access the results of OSEP’s review of Palau’s SPP/APR and other relevant data by accessing the SPP/APR module using your Entity-specific log-on information at <https://osep.grads360.org>. When you access your Entity’s 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 two places:

- (1) actions related to the correction of findings of noncompliance are in the “OSEP Response” section of the indicator; and
- (2) any other 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 to the Progress Page:

- (1) Palau’s RDA Matrix;
- (2) the HTDMD document;
- (3) a spreadsheet entitled “2019 Data Rubric Part B,” which shows how OSEP calculated Palau “Timely and Accurate State-Reported Data” score in the Compliance Matrix; and
- (4) a document entitled “Dispute Resolution 2017-18,” which includes the IDEA section 618 data that OSEP used to calculate Palau’s “Timely State Complaint Decisions” and “Timely Due Process Hearing Decisions” scores in the Compliance Matrix.

As noted above, the Department has determined that Palau needs intervention in implementing the requirements of Part B of IDEA. The Department identifies a State or Entity as needing intervention under IDEA Part B if its RDA Percentage is less than 60%. Palau’s RDA Percentage is 52.5%. We note here that OSEP will continue the Specific Condition on the Palau’s FFY 2019 IDEA Part B grant award related to ensuring that policies and procedures meet the requirements governing qualifications for special education teachers in section 612(a)(14)(C) of IDEA and 34 CFR §300.156(c). The specific reporting requirements and other required actions will be described in OSEP’s FFY 2019 IDEA Part B grant award documents.

Pursuant to section 616(d)(2)(B) of the IDEA and 34 C.F.R. § 300.603(b)(2), an Entity that is determined to be “need intervention” or “need substantial intervention” and does not agree with this determination, may request an opportunity to meet with the Assistant Secretary to demonstrate why the Department should change the Entity’s determination. To request a hearing, submit a letter to Johnny W. Collett, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202 within 15 days of the date of this letter. The letter must include the basis for your request for a change in your Entity’s determination.

States and Entities were required to submit Phase III Year Three of the SSIP by April 1, 2019. OSEP appreciates Palau’s ongoing work on its SSIP and its efforts to improve results for students with disabilities. We have carefully reviewed your submission and will provide feedback in the upcoming weeks. Additionally, OSEP will continue to work with Palau as it implements the fourth year of Phase III of the SSIP, which is due on April 1, 2020.

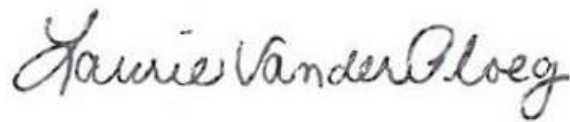
As a reminder, Palau must make its SPP/APR available to the public by posting it on your agency’s website. Within the next several days, OSEP will be finalizing an Entity Profile that:

- (1) will be accessible to the public;
- (2) includes the Entity’s determination letter and SPP/APR, and all related State and OSEP attachments; and

- (3) can be accessed via a URL unique to your Entity, which you can use to make your SPP/APR available to the public. We will provide you with the unique URL when it is live.

OSEP appreciates Palau's efforts to improve results for children and youth with disabilities and looks forward to working with Palau 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,



Laurie VanderPloeg
Director
Office of Special Education Programs

cc: Palau Director of Special Education