

## Article 7 Public Hearings – What to Expect

The Indiana State Board of Education has given public “Notice of Intent to Adopt Special Education Rules.” That is the formal, required language. That notice represents the next step down the path that will eventually lead to a revised special education state rule, a revised Article 7.

In less formal language, the State Board of Education is considering changes to our current state rule in several areas. The State Board has made those changes available to us, the public, and they want to know if we think any or all of the changes will benefit students with disabilities and the system that provides their education...or not.

Remember, some of the changes are required to comply with changes in the federal law. Nonetheless, you may still offer comment supporting or opposing those changes, especially if you believe that a different approach would still bring the state into compliance while offering greater benefit. Other changes are being considered because they are intended to reflect better practices, or more current practices, or perhaps greater efficiencies.

Any member of the public now has the opportunity to express their opinion. Do you support a proposed change? Do you oppose a proposed change? It is as important to express your support, as it is to express your opposition. From your perspective, a potential change might appear to offer great benefit. Others may find that change to be of concern. So, if you believe it is important to include a proposed change in the rule, it would be wise to say so.

### **At the Public Hearings...**

The Public Hearings are formal and they provide an opportunity for members of the public to speak their piece. And, it allows everyone in the audience to hear what others who choose to speak, have to say as they offer their perspectives and their interests. The number of people who attend the different Public Hearings is often significant. The number of participants may give the State Board an indication of how more or less important the public finds the proposed changes. In other words, if few people choose to attend, that might suggest that there is little public interest in the process and/or proposed changes. On the other hand, if there are many people in attendance, well, that might send a different message.

If you attend the meeting, you are not required to speak. It is perfectly okay to sit and listen.

Oral or spoken testimony/comments have no more weight or value than written comments. There is no difference.

There will probably not be a transcript or recording made of the Public Hearing. So, to be certain that your comments are considered by the State Board, you should submit

them in writing. You could submit your comments at the Public Hearing. Just hand them in.

You can mail your comments to the following address:

Indiana Department of Education  
Division of Exceptional Learners  
Room 229 State House  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2798

You may fax your comments to: (317) 232-0589

You may submit your comments electronically at the following website:

<http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/exceptional/article7/welcome.html>

Whether you choose to submit your comments at a Public Hearing, or you choose to mail them, fax them or submit them electronically, whatever way you choose, they **must be received no later than May 23, 2008**.

When you arrive at the Public Hearing, you will be asked to sign-in, and when you sign-in, you will be asked if you wish to speak/offer testimony.

You will be speaking to Dr. Robert Marra, Assistant Superintendent, Indiana Department of Education, and possibly a member or members of the State Board of Education.

If you do want to speak, when it is your turn (you will be called in the order of sign-in), you will be asked to probably stand and speak into a microphone.

-depending on the number of people wanting to speak, you may be asked to limit your comments to some number of minutes (perhaps 3 or 4 minutes as an example).

-especially after a number of folks have spoken and if similar comments have been repeated, you may be asked to focus your comments on any issue(s) that have not been repeatedly presented. In other words, they might not want to hear the same comment 50 times from 50 different people. In that case, if you believe that what you wanted to say has been said, and said in a way that you can support, you could decide not to speak,...or you could say something like, "I too am concerned about (whatever issue) and I support (whatever position) that has already been presented."

-The group will probably be asked to confine any comments to the proposed rule revision. You will not be permitted to comment on someone else's comments.

-The group may be asked to avoid lengthy personal stories.

When you have finished your comments, you will leave the microphone and the next person in line will speak. There will probably be no dialogue, no questions and answers.

When everyone who has asked to speak has said their piece, the meeting will end. If the meeting is running long, it may be ended before everyone who wanted to speak has had the opportunity. If that were to happen, those not speaking would be asked to submit their comments in writing.

If you plan to offer testimony, take time to organize your thoughts and write down what you want to say. Try to be brief and to the point, because your time may be limited. Please consider submitting your comments in writing. Written comments are not limited in length. It is always best to be as brief as you can be, but say what you need to say.

The changing of our state rule is a very important activity. Those changes will often be directly expressed in the school buildings and classrooms our students attend. Please consider taking advantage of the opportunities to provide your comments orally or in writing, expressing your support or opposition.

In reviewing the comments, if the State Board learns that there is a great deal of concern about or opposition to a proposed change, they may be persuaded to reconsider their position. If there appears to be a great deal of support for or little concern is expressed about a proposed change, they will likely move forward. So your comments are important.

The State Department of Education and the State Board are feeling some pressure to keep the process moving forward. Although it is not critical, everyone would prefer to have a new rule in place before the beginning of the next school year. Implementing change is often difficult and attempting to do that in the middle of a school year will only make it more difficult.

The State Department has prepared a "Timeline For Promulgation of New Article 7 Rules." It includes the dates, locations and times for the six scheduled Public Hearings. The timelines will give you a good sense of what has occurred in the process to this point and you will see what yet needs to happen before we have a revised Article 7 in place. We hope you find it helpful.