

Virginia's Special Education Regional Tuition Reimbursement Program (RTRP)

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Background

- As directed by the Commission on Youth, the VDOE has been engaged in a study of the services provided to students with disabilities through Special Education Regional Tuition Programs (RTRPs), to include a review of the model used to provide funds to participating school divisions for these services.
- In December, 2015 the VDOE provided a report on the initiation of this study to the Commission.
 - Several Findings and Issues were identified by VDOE in this report.

Purposes of VDOE RTRP Study

- Growth in number of students served in regional programs
 - 11% increase since 2005
- Growth in annual appropriation
 - \$16,355,694 increase since 2005
- Research on best practices in special education
- Growing philosophy of “inclusion”
- Shift in incidence of disability categories
 - 222% Increase in autism since 2005
- Movement away from services based on disability category in favor of specific need of the individual child
- Growth in number of students with expensive and/or intense support needs
- Growth in number of school divisions interested in participating in an RTRP
 - Requests received from 16 new school divisions

Background

- Virginia's Special Education Regional Reimbursement Programs
 - Authorized by Virginia's General Assembly in 1977
 - P.L. 94-142 (Federal Special Education Law)
 - Cruse V. Campbell
 - full tuition for private placements must be at public expense when determined by IEP Team as appropriate placement
- **Purpose:** to provide a mechanism for school divisions to cooperate and share resources to serve children with low incidence disabilities.

Requirements

- LEAs were authorized to form regional programs by meeting the requirements for operating a joint program consistent with:
 - *Board of Education Regulations Governing Jointly Owned and Operated Schools and Jointly Operated Programs* and related *Code of Virginia* provisions.
 - Required that each program be governed by a joint board constituted of a school board member from each participating LEA.
 - Further, one LEA was to serve as the fiscal agent for the program.

Requirements

- The funding for each RTRP was established based on an annual application to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) termed a rate package.
 - Rate package established fees for special education and related services.
 - Each rate package was to include:
 - A proposed budget based on projected revenues and expenses, and a description of the program(s) being offered including the disabilities served.
 - The rate packages were reviewed by an independent financial management/consulting firm to determine appropriateness of rates submitted.

Requirements

- Authorized disability categories under RTRP:
 - Emotional Disabilities
 - Autism
 - Multiple Disabilities
 - Hearing Impaired
 - Deaf/Blindness
 - Traumatic Brain Injury

Demographics of Students Served

Disability Category	Served in How Many RTRPs	# Served in RTRPs	Statewide Total per Child Count	% of Statewide Child Count Served in RTRPs
Autism	11	2,461	17,030	14.5%
Multiple Disability	10	634	3,356	20%
Emotional Disability	8	951	9,209	10.4%
Hearing Impaired	5	168	1,475	13%
Traumatic Brain Injury	3	<11	392	4%
Deaf-Blind	1	<11	32	2.8%

Variability by Region

Disability Category Served in RTRP	Disability Category Claimed by Participating LEAs in the Regional Program from Low to High Percentage	
	High	Low
Autism	8 percent CCES	62 percent Northern Virginia
Multiple Disability	29 percent SECEP	78 percent Henry
Emotional Disability	8 percent Roanoke Valley	58 percent Northern Virginia
Hearing Impaired	22 percent PREP	87 percent Shenandoah Valley

Students Served

- In the participating divisions of the 11 RTRPs:
 - 31 percent of the students with a reimbursable disability are served in RTRPs
 - 69 percent of students with corresponding disability categories are served but not claimed for tuition reimbursement
- Within the 57 LEAs that participate in an RTRP:
 - 25 percent of students with autism are claimed
 - 46 percent of students with multiple disabilities are claimed
 - 24 percent of students with emotional disabilities are claimed
 - 44 percent of students with hearing impairments are claimed

*These percentages are representative of proportionate population data and will not equal 100 percent

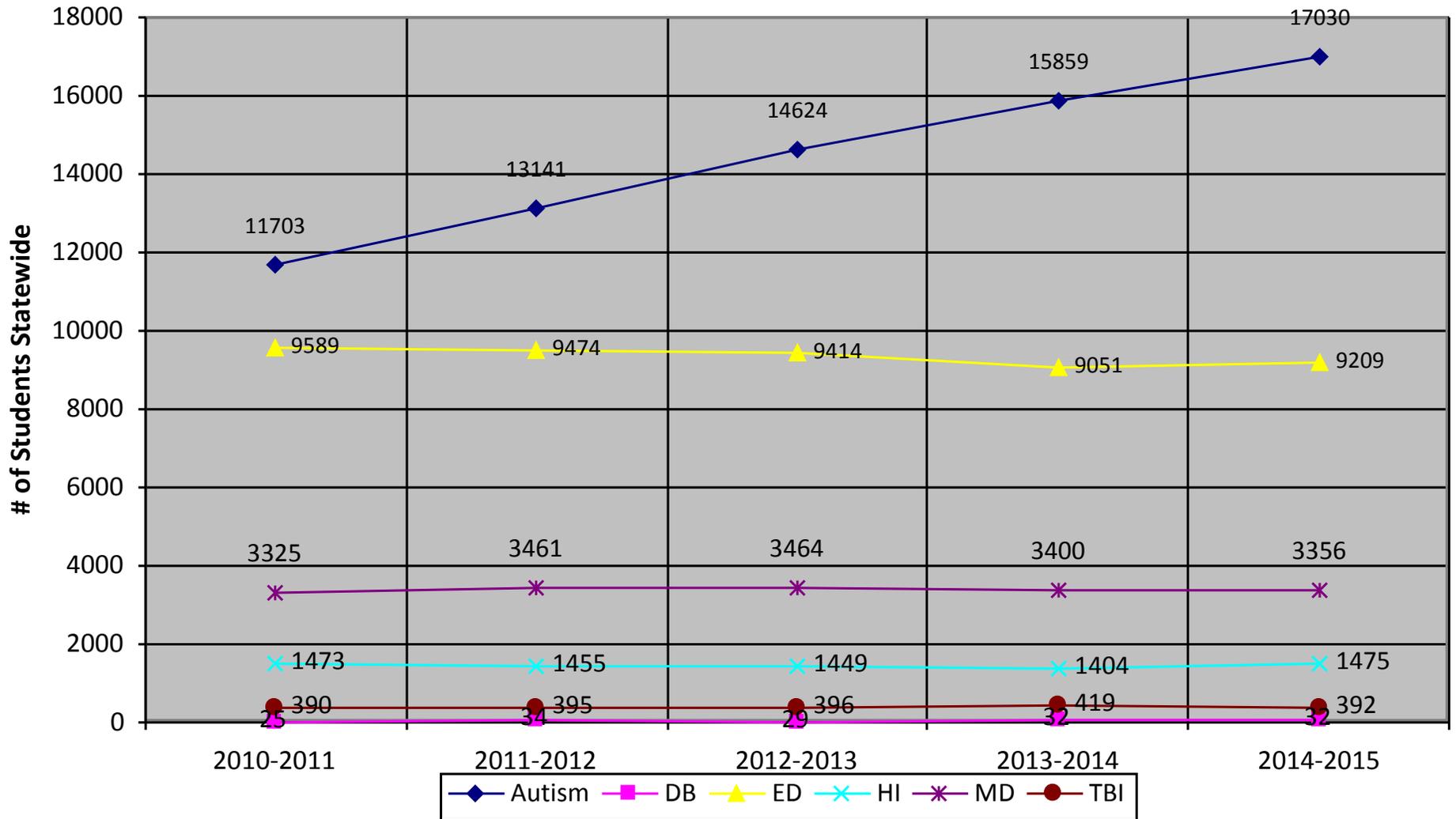
Current Approved RTRPs

- **Cooperative Centers for Exceptional Students**
 - Carroll County
 - Grayson County
 - Smyth County
 - Washington County
 - Wythe County
 - Bristol City
 - Galax City
- **Middle Peninsula Regional Special Education Centers**
 - Gloucester County
 - Middlesex County
 - West Point (Town)
- **LAUREL Regional Program**
 - Amherst County
 - Appomattox County
 - Bedford County
 - Campbell County
 - Charlotte County
 - Lynchburg City
- **Northwestern Regional Education Program**
 - Frederick County
 - Winchester City
- **New Horizons Regional Education Center**
 - Gloucester County
 - York County
 - Hampton City
 - Newport News City
 - Williamsburg-James City County
 - Poquoson City
- **Piedmont Regional Education Program**
 - Albemarle County
 - Culpeper County
 - Fluvanna County
 - Greene County
 - Louisa County
 - Madison County
 - Nelson County
 - Charlottesville City

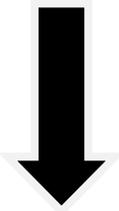
Current Approved RTRPs

- **Shenandoah Valley Regional Program**
 - Augusta County
 - Page County
 - Rockingham County
 - Shenandoah County
 - Harrisonburg City
 - Staunton City
- **Southeastern Cooperative Education Program (SECEP)**
 - Isle of Wight County
 - Southampton County
 - Chesapeake City
 - Franklin City
 - Norfolk City
 - Portsmouth City
 - Suffolk City
 - Virginia Beach City
- **Northern Virginia Regional Special Education Program**
 - Prince William County
 - Spotsylvania County
 - Manassas City
 - Manassas Park City
- **Roanoke Valley Regional Program**
 - Botetourt County
 - Craig County
 - Franklin County
 - Roanoke City
 - Salem City
- **Henry County/Martinsville Regional Program**
 - Henry County
 - Martinsville City

Statewide Trend of Specific Disability Categories Eligible to be Served in Regional Programs



Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Continuum of Options:

Level	Setting
<p style="text-align: center;">Least Restrictive</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Most Restrictive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular school building: regular classroom with accommodations and/or support services
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular school building: regular classroom with itinerant services or resource room services (pull-out)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular school building: full-time self-contained special education class
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full-time self-contained class in a separate public facility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private day school
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home based
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public or private residential program

Setting: Placement in LRE

Within the 11 RTRPS

- 75 percent of the students claimed for tuition reimbursement are served in a regular building
- 25 percent of the students claimed for tuition reimbursement are served in a separate building
- Statewide average over time is consistent

Financial Analysis

- From all funding sources (local, state, federal):
 - Students served in regional programs generated an average per-pupil amount of **\$29,097**
 - Students not served in regional programs generated an average per-pupil amount of **\$13,497**
- From state-only funds:
 - Students served in regional programs generated an average per-pupil amount of **\$17,392**
 - Students not served in regional programs generated an average per-pupil amount of **\$3,014**

Financial Analysis

Year	Amount	Amount of Increase
2010-2011	\$64,436,343	
2011-2012	\$70,208,260	\$5,771,917
2012-2013	\$74,168,478	\$3,960,218
2013-2014	\$77,040,276	\$2,871,798
2014-2015	\$80,792,037	\$3,751,761
		Total: \$16,355,694

Average growth of \$4.1 million per year for the five-year period

Options for Reform

- **Option 1: Equity Model**

- Phase out and replace the current 11 RTRP models over 2-3 years.
- Allow all 132 school divisions to access the approved state funding.
- Develop an application process based on strict criteria that clearly identifies students with intense support needs and moves away from disability labels.
- Develop a per pupil funding rate depending on the number of applications within the existing appropriation.
- Remove any regional program requirements but allow localities to create regional options between themselves.
- Allow local flexibility on how and where to implement the special education services.
- Student outcomes and accountability reverts to the locality in which the student resides.
- Restore ADM funds for students enrolled in this model (approximately 4,600 students.)

Options for Reform

- Option 2: Reform Current Model

- Phase in new application process. The application process would be based on strict criteria that clearly identifies students with intense support needs and moves away from disability labels.
- Phase out the rate package and develop a budget to be approved by VDOE.
 - Phase out all expenditures allowed except for instructional costs.
- Allow for the immediate applications of new regional programs.
- Prorate current regional programs to account for new programs to stay within current state appropriation.
- Develop a robust set of accountability measures for public reporting on the performance of student outcomes enrolled in regional programs.
- Investigate the feasibility requiring a individualized student transition plans to explore whether a student could transition back to their home school

Note: U.S. Department of Justice initiated a lawsuit against the Georgia Department of Education for operating similar regional programs for students with disabilities.

Options for Reform

- **Option 3: Continue Current Model**
 - Continue to operate the regional programs under the existing rules.
 - Allow for new divisions who are interested in developing a regional program to create a new program and receive regional tuition reimbursements.
 - Keep rate packages in place.
 - Prorate existing regional program funding when new programs are created.

Note: U.S. Department of Justice initiated a lawsuit against the Georgia Department of Education for operating similar regional programs for students with disabilities.