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MEMORANDUM

TO: District Superintendents

FROM: Dr. Eric J. Smith, Commissioner

DATE: February 26, 2008

SUBJECT: Sunshine Connections and Portal to Exceptional Education Resources (PEER) Web System

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update on the Sunshine Connections and Portal to Exceptional Education Resources (PEER) projects.

Section 1003.576, Florida Statutes, states that “The Department of Education must develop and have an operating electronic IEP [individual educational plan] system in place for potential statewide use. The statewide system shall be developed collaboratively with school districts and must include input from school districts currently developing or operating electronic IEP systems.” The statute does not mandate district participation in the statewide system; districts may continue to use purchased systems or district-developed systems if they so choose.

The PEER system under development by the Department of Education (DOE) requires no data management fees, maintenance fees, or design costs to districts and will be continually updated to align with federal and state requirements, and ultimately will provide a useful and cost-effective tool for districts to use in implementing their exceptional student education (ESE) programs.

The PEER system is designed to comply with the statutory requirements related to IEPs, while also providing districts with the tools needed to address a much wider range of student services and exceptional education procedures. The application currently supports the development of Sunshine Connections and PEER Web System IEPs, including parent notices and progress reports. Matrix of services documents, services plans, and educational plans are under development, as well as intervention, referral, evaluation, and eligibility procedures. In addition,

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the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services is finalizing the development of a Web-based Medicaid Tracking System (MTS) that will be available to districts through the same Sunshine Connections portal as PEER. The Web-based MTS will allow service providers such as therapists to easily check Medicaid eligibility and bill Medicaid for direct services, thus reducing the need for districts to utilize administrative personnel to accomplish this task.

In December 2007, the Sunshine Connections and PEER systems were deployed in the P.K. Yonge Developmental Research Laboratory School at the University of Florida and Gulf County School District. Based on feedback from those two districts, enhancements were made to the flexible authorization system (FAS) tool used by district personnel to assign authorization to local users (i.e., “build” IEP teams for individual students). This new version, FAS 1.5, has been tested, and deployment in seven additional districts is scheduled in the next four to six weeks.

If you have any questions regarding PEER, please contact Bambi J. Lockman, Chief, or Kim Komisar, Program Director, at 850-245-0476 or via e-mail at Bambi.Lockman@fldoe.org or Kim.Komisar@fldoe.org. For questions regarding MTS, please contact Susan Douglas, Medicaid Consultant, at 850-922-3727 or via e-mail at sdouglas@coedu.usf.edu. For questions regarding Sunshine Connections, please contact Greg Giese, Systems Architect, at 850-245-9310 or via e-mail at Greg.Giese@fldoe.org.

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