



A Community of Learners

Informational Memo - Special Education Continuum of Services Update

TO: School Board
Superintendent Kocanda

FROM: Beth Martin
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Background

Establishing a District-wide special education service delivery model is one part of the annual goal, *Reaching all Learners*. In efforts to develop a District-wide delivery model, the Department of Student Services is undergoing a full review of the current continuum of special education services we offer. This memo is designed to provide the School Board with an update on the progress to date with this program review.

Alignment with the District 36 Shared Vision

Evaluation of the special education service delivery model aligns with the “support and challenge” elements of the District’s Shared Vision.

- Special education services are designed to offer specific instruction to support students who may demonstrate deficits in their learning or social and emotional profiles.
- Special education teachers, therapists and associates also challenge each student to work to their full potential through the use of targeted instruction and intervention.
- Through provision of proper levels of support and opportunity for students to meet challenges successfully, students are able to achieve a greater level of independence.

Overview

To date, there have been multiple touch points with the stakeholders in the District regarding our current continuum of special education services. These touch points have included meetings or forums with the following groups:

- Principals
- Special education coordinators
- Special education staff
- Department of Student Services committee members
- Parents

Through meetings with these stakeholder groups, the following emerged.

- The District has a broad range of services that are offered to all students.
- Similar delivery models currently exist in each of the elementary schools.
- Co-teaching models differ between the two middle schools. This is primarily a result of the number of teachers on a team (2 at SK; 4 at CW)
- Parent communication is a key component to student success.
- Interventions offered to students should be targeted and purposeful.
- Transitions between schools can be challenging for students and parents.
- Specialized programs need to be well defined (SOAR).

Through discussions with the different stakeholder groups, two primary areas were targeted for immediate review; student transitions between school buildings and the SOAR program, which is in its second year of implementation.

Student Transitions

Special education staff members have had opportunities to meet and discuss student transition between school buildings on multiple occasions this school year. In January, a specific release day was designed to discuss transition processes. How best to facilitate student transition from one building to the next was added to the calendar. This additional meeting time was well-received by members of the DSS team, as it provided team members with an earlier touch point to begin discussions about individual student need. This also provided opportunity for discussion regarding which types of service delivery will be most appropriate within each building. Outcomes from these meetings have included:

- Development of a continuum of service guide that will enable staff to share information with all families regarding special education services available within

the District.

- Development of criteria that will inform decisions regarding student placement into services within the continuum.

An opportunity for parents to learn more about the transition process from Skokie to Washburne was offered on March 1st as a part of the 6th grade orientation process. A similar opportunity for parents to learn more about transition from the elementary schools to Skokie will be offered this Spring.

SOAR Program

This is the second year that the SOAR program has been a part of the continuum of services within the District. A SOAR committee was formed this year where program strengths and weaknesses have been discussed. The committee has formulated specific entrance and exit criteria for the program. These criteria will help to manage referrals to the program and enable staff to better address the needs of those students who are properly referred.

Program evaluation of SOAR was also initiated in December 2016 with specific focus on the program within Skokie School. The needs of students who have been participating in the program at Skokie have been greater than initially anticipated. This has resulted in formulation of tighter criteria regarding the profiles of students that may benefit from participation within the program and review of how resource periods can be best utilized to support students with specific social and emotional needs.

The addition of program entrance and exit criteria will help to form decisions regarding which students can be supported through our standard special education program, which are most appropriate for specialized supports offered through SOAR, and which students may require consideration for special education placements outside of the District.

Other Discussion Points

Ongoing discussion among special educators and administrators has led to evaluation of how the District is currently utilizing all special education staff, and where modifications in staff use may lead to more inclusive opportunities for students. This is not solely restricted to how associates support students in general education classrooms, but also how to best utilize certified members of the special education team to support students in general education.

While considering how best to provide more inclusive opportunities, goal writing and

special education service recommendations will also be reviewed. Improvements in goal writing will ultimately lead to determination of which special education services warrant removal from the general education classroom and which goal areas may be best addressed in an inclusive setting. [Research](#) supports more inclusive opportunities as a means to promote student growth. It is a goal of the department to provide more inclusive opportunities for all students who attend The Winnetka Public Schools.

Next Steps

- Re-evaluate in which subjects co-teaching will be offered at Washburne School.
- Determine how best to utilize all members of the special education staff.
- Provide professional development regarding inclusive practices to all staff members.
- Implement transition criteria this spring for transitions from 4th to 5th grade and 6th to 7th grade.
- Collaborate with NSSED regarding successful ways to increase inclusive services within the general education classrooms.
- Enhance goal writing such that instructional service needs are directly derived from student goals.