

Special Education Program Review

Independent School District 518

"Empowering a community of learners who will change the world!"



Special Education Program Review

Purpose: to ensure all special education programs meet IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) requirements, are aligned with evidence-based practices, and promote student growth, inclusion, and postsecondary readiness

- ★ Administrative Feedback
- ★ SPED Teacher/Related Service Provider Feedback
- ★ SPED Leadership Feedback
- ★ MDE Data
- ★ Finance Director/Southwest West Central Cooperative (SWWC) Input
- ★ SPED Forms Data



Special Education Overview



Worthington Special Education

- ★ Child count (December 1, 2024) : 637
- ★ Public Enrollment: 3,763
- ★ Non-public Enrollment : 188
- ★ Total Enrollment: 3,951

(MDE Unduplicated Child Count)



Personnel: Teachers and Paraprofessionals

2025-26 SPED Staff/Student Ratios	Student Count	SPED Teachers	Teacher:Student Ratio	Class II Paras	Adult:Student Ratio
Prairie Elementary	77	4.5	1:17.1	30	1:2.2
Intermediate School	152	9	1:16.9	24	1:4.6
Middle School	137	7	1:19.6	30	1:3.7
High School	134	5.5	1:24.5	14	1:6.87
Learning Center	25	1	1:25	1	1:12.5

LF Personnel: Teachers and Paraprofessionals

2025-26 SPED Staff/Student Ratios	Student Count	SPED Teachers	Teacher:Student Ratio	Class II Paras	Adult:Student Ratio
Early Childhood	62	4	1:15.5	8	1:5.16
Lincoln (K-2)	45	4.5	1:10	12	1:2.7
Lindbergh (3-5)	90	7.5	1:12	18	1:3.5
Middle School (6-8)	97	7	1:13.8	11	1:5.3
High School (9-12)	117	8	1:14.6	12	1:5.85
CEC (16-21)	1	22	1:22	0	1:22
Transition (post high school - 22)	1	13	1:13	4	1:2.6

Personnel: Related Service Providers

Related Service Providers	District FTE	COOP FTE	Total FTE
Speech Language Pathologists	5.75	0	5.75
School Psychologists	3.4	1	4.4
SEAT Academic Evaluators	2.5	0	2.5
Occupational Therapists	2	.1	2.1
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Teacher	1	0	1
Physical Therapists	0	.5	.5

LF Personnel: Related Service Providers

Related Service Providers	District FTE	COOP FTE	Total FTE
Speech Language Pathologists	5	0	5
School Psychologists	2	0	2
SEAT Academic Evaluators	1	0	1
Occupational Therapists	1	0	1
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Teacher	.8	0	.8
Physical Therapists	1	0	1

Personnel: Related Service Providers

Related Service Providers	District FTE	COOP FTE	Total FTE
Developmental Adaptive Physical Education	1	0	1
Blind/Visually Impaired/Orientation and Mobility	0	.3	.3
School Social Workers	4	0	*4
School Counselors	9	0	9
BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)	.5	0	.5

LF Personnel: Related Service Providers

Related Service Providers	District FTE	COOP FTE	Total FTE
Developmental Adaptive Physical Education	.5	0	.5
Blind/Visually Impaired/Orientation and Mobility	Consultant Hourly	0	Hourly
School Social Workers	6	0	*6
School Counselors	2	0	2
BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)	0	0	0
Behavior Interventionist	*1	0	1

Personnel: SPED Administration/Clerical/Leads and Mentors

	District FTE	COOP FTE	Total FTE
Director	0	1	1
Assistant Director	0	1	1
SPED Secretaries	5	0	5
Lead SPED Teachers (Stipend pay)	5	0	5
Mentor Teachers (Stipend pay)	5	0	5

LF Personnel: SPED Administration/Clerical/Leads and Mentors

	District FTE	COOP FTE	Total FTE
Director	1	0	1
SPED Coordinators (Admin.)	1.5	0	1.5
Due Process Specialist	*1 Agency Consultant	0	1
SPED Secretaries	0	0	0
Lead SPED Teachers (Stipend pay)	5	0	5
Mentor Teachers (Stipend pay)	*1 for every probationary teacher	0	5
Program Assistants (Invoices, Child Count, Transportation, MARSS, MA Billing, SEDRA)	1.5	0	1.5

Additional COOP Services

ECSE Coordination

MARSS Support

MA Billing Coordination

SEDRA (Special Education Data Reporting Application)

LEA/Federal Flow Through (Business Manager)

Professional Development for Teachers, Paraprofessionals, and Administration

SPED Procedures

How Students Are Being Served

Early Childhood: Push-in to general education classes, Pull-out to individual or small group, in homes and daycare settings

K-2: Push-in to general education classes, Pull-out to small groups

3-5: Push-in to general education classes, Pull-out to small groups

6-8: Pull-out, push-in and co-taught classes in 8th grade

9-12: Pull-out, push-in and co-taught classes

LC: Pull-out and push-in

VIBE: online 1:1



Stakeholder Feedback



Stakeholder Feedback: Building Administrators

Feedback was gathered in 5 areas:

1. Program Structure and Delivery
2. Staffing and Personnel
3. Student Outcomes and Progress Monitoring
4. Family and Community Engagement
5. Challenges and Areas for Improvement



Administrative Feedback Summary

Overall Strengths

Across programs and sites, several consistent strengths are evident:

- **Strong Parent Engagement:** High levels of family involvement at IEP meetings, VIBE, and transition planning support student success.
- **Effective Collaborative Structures:** Regular PLCs, CST meetings, weekly SPED team meetings, and SPED representation on Building Leadership Teams ensure ongoing communication and problem-solving.

Administrative Feedback Summary

Overall Strengths

Across programs and sites, several consistent strengths are evident:

- **Dedicated and Compassionate Staff:** SPED teachers are flexible, student-centered, and skilled at meeting students where they are academically and behaviorally.
- **Inclusive and Specialized Practices:** Established co-teaching models (including full core coverage at some sites), use of evidence-based interventions (Read 180, Math 180), and specialized programs such as PAES (Practical Assessment Exploration System) Lab and transition programming.
- **Operational Supports:** Strong paraprofessional teams in buildings, effective use of SPED clerical staff, and successful virtual instruction models.

Administrative Feedback Summary

Key Challenges

Several systemic and staffing-related challenges impact program consistency and sustainability:

- **Staffing Instability:** Loss of veteran teachers, understaffing, and unfilled positions (notably an SLD teacher) strain programs and continuity.
- **Paraprofessional Management:** Ongoing need for clearer systems, training, and supervision to maximize effectiveness.
- **Inconsistent Inclusion and LRE Understanding:** Varying beliefs and practices around shared responsibility for students with disabilities, particularly in general education settings.

Administrative Feedback Summary

Key Challenges

Several systemic and staffing-related challenges impact program consistency and sustainability:

- **Time and Access Constraints:** Limited time for meaningful multidisciplinary conversations about student needs and inconsistent general education teacher attendance at IEP meetings.
- **Student Engagement Barriers:** Attendance issues, fluctuating participation in virtual settings, and challenges related to high ELL populations, especially impacting literacy outcomes and graduation rates.
- **Space and Programming Limitations:** Need for additional instructional space and more hands-on, career-connected learning pathways.
- **Family Engagement Gaps:** Lower parent participation at parent-teacher conferences compared to IEP meetings.

Stakeholder Feedback: Special Education Teachers

Feedback was gathered in 7 areas:

1. Programming
2. Data Collection
3. Support from Supervisors
4. Support from Building Administrators
5. Scheduling
6. IEP Meetings
7. Staffing



Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE): Teacher Feedback

Key Strengths

- **Strong Teaching Team:** Dedicated and collaborative staff who demonstrate commitment to high-quality early childhood instruction.
- **Positive Family Partnerships:** Meaningful and impactful relationships with families that support student growth and engagement.
- **Transition Programming:** Effective transition class for 2.5-year-old students that supports early identification and readiness.
- **Curriculum and Assessment Tools:** Use of STAR curriculum and Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS Gold) to inform instruction and monitor progress.
- **Leadership Support:** Strong support from the Early Childhood Coordinator, providing guidance and responsiveness to program needs.



Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE): Teacher Feedback

Key Challenges

- **Lack of Assessment Infrastructure:** Absence of a formal assessment team limits timely evaluations and instructional planning.
- **Behavioral Concerns:** Increasing behavioral needs among students requiring additional support and intervention.
- **Space Constraints:** Limited physical space impacts service delivery, learning through play, and small-group instruction.
- **Curriculum Limitations:** Insufficient access to a comprehensive range of curriculum tools and resources.
- **Program Isolation:** Staff report feeling isolated and responsible for managing systems independently, with limited embedded support.
- **Inappropriate Referrals:** Students demonstrating developmentally appropriate behaviors are being referred to special education, indicating a need for stronger general education and MTSS supports.



Prairie Elementary: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Strengths

- **Established Evaluation Processes:** Clear and effective procedures are in place to support timely and compliant evaluations.
- **Strong Team Collaboration:** Staff demonstrate a high level of teamwork and shared commitment to student success.
- **Social-Emotional Learning Resources:** A strong SEL curriculum is available to support student behavioral and emotional needs.
- **Instructional Programs:** Effective use of Sonday and STAR curricula to address foundational literacy and academic skill development.
- **Operational Support:** Dedicated and highly effective SPED clerical support contributes to program efficiency and compliance.



Prairie Elementary: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Challenges

- **Staffing Constraints:** Ongoing shortages of licensed staff impact service delivery and increase workload for existing personnel.
- **Behavioral Support Gaps:** Absence of a behavior interventionist limits proactive and responsive behavioral interventions.
- **Service Delivery Barriers:** Requiring special permission for services outside the general education classroom restricts flexibility and responsiveness to student needs.
- **Administrative Support:** Administrators stretched across large building and programs
- **Role Misalignment:** SPED teachers are frequently tasked with managing general education classroom behavior, reducing time for specialized instruction.
- **Scheduling Limitations:** Restricted pull-out opportunities due to master schedule constraints and the practice of scheduling all IEP meetings on a single day.
- **SEL Prioritization:** Social-emotional learning is not consistently prioritized across the building.



Intermediate School: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Strengths

- **Strong Administrative Leadership:** Visible and engaged administrators, including an Assistant Principal with a special education background, provide consistent support.
- **Responsive District Support:** Prompt and effective assistance from the Special Education Assistant Director.
- **Instructional Practices:** Effective implementation of the Soday program to support literacy development.
- **Staff Stability:** Stable and experienced paraprofessional team contributes to consistency in student support.
- **Operational Excellence:** Excellent SPED clerical support ensures efficiency, organization, and compliance.



Intermediate School: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Challenges

- **High Caseloads:** Large caseloads place strain on teachers and limit individualized instructional planning.
- **Curriculum Gaps:** Lack of a comprehensive, aligned curriculum for writing and mathematics within special education.
- **Limited Teacher Support Structures:** Inconsistent systems for coaching, collaboration, and instructional feedback.
- **Service Delivery Limitations:** Insufficient push-in services to support inclusion and access to core instruction.
- **Instructional Disruptions:** Teachers are frequently pulled from instruction to support students with behavior, impacting service consistency.
- **Observation and Feedback Gaps:** Limited special education-focused classroom observations reduce opportunities for growth and alignment.



Middle School: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Strengths

- Evidence-Based Interventions: Effective use of Read 180 and Math 180 to support student achievement.
- Collaborative Culture: Supportive general education grade-level teams that promote shared responsibility for students.
- District-Level Support: Consistent and responsive support from the Special Education Assistant Director.
- Specialized Programming: Strong supports and services in place for students in DCD programming.



Middle School: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Challenges

- Behavioral Needs: Increasing prevalence of behaviors requiring more consistent systems and trained support.
- Staffing and Coverage Issues: Paraprofessionals are frequently pulled from student support roles to serve as classroom substitutes, impacting service delivery.
- Administrative Consistency: Inconsistent guidance from building administrators, with differences in procedures and expectations.
- Professional Development Gaps: Not all staff are trained in CPI, limiting capacity to respond effectively to behavioral incidents.
- Limited Inclusion Models: Co-teaching is currently implemented only at the 8th-grade level, reducing continuity across grade levels.



High School: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Strengths

- Inclusive Instructional Models: Strong implementation of co-teaching to support access to core instruction.
- Career and Transition Programming: Effective use of the PAES (Practical Assessment Exploration System) Lab and Work-Based Learning (WBL) to prepare students for postsecondary outcomes.
- Academic Interventions: Consistent use of Math 180 and Read 180 to address skill gaps.
- Instructional Leadership: Building principal with a special education background provides informed and supportive leadership.



High School: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Challenges

- **Staffing Constraints:** Ongoing shortages contribute to overloaded class sections and reduced instructional flexibility.
- **Program Capacity:** Co-taught classes contain a disproportionate number of students with disabilities, impacting instructional balance.
- **Service Delivery Reductions:** Decreases in WBL (Work Based Learning) opportunities and special education service minutes limit student access and growth.
- **Process Inconsistencies:** Lack of consistent procedures, including the need for a formal process for waiving evaluations.
- **Scheduling and Compensation Issues:** Summer scheduling and planning responsibilities are unpaid, limiting staff participation and program readiness.



Learning Center: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Strengths

- **Small Class Sizes:** Traditional small class settings allow for individualized instruction and strong student-teacher relationships.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** A 5-period day provides increased flexibility and expanded options to meet diverse student needs.
- **Strong Administrative Support:** Building leadership is engaged and supportive of special education programming.
- **Work-Based Learning Growth:** Continued expansion of WBL (Work Based Learning) opportunities supports career readiness and student engagement.
- **Positive Student Outcomes:** Evidence of student success across academic and transition domains.
- **Mental Health Supports:** Strong collaboration with the school social worker and Greater MN Mental Health enhances student well-being.
- **Adaptive Instructional Staff:** Teachers demonstrate flexibility, problem-solving skills, and responsiveness to student needs.



Learning Center: SPED Teacher Feedback

Key Challenges

- High Caseload: Large caseloads impact the ability to provide intensive, individualized support.
- Limited Paraprofessional Support: Insufficient paraprofessional staffing reduces instructional and behavioral support capacity.
- Late Identification of Risk: Need for earlier identification and intervention for students who are credit deficient.
- Attendance Concerns: Ongoing attendance issues negatively affect academic progress and graduation outcomes.



Stakeholder Feedback: Special Education Evaluation Team (SEAT)

Feedback was provided in 4 areas:

1. Program Structure and Delivery
2. Staffing and Personnel
3. Student Outcomes and Progress Monitoring
4. Family and Community Engagement



SEAT (Special Education Assessment Team)

School Psychologists complete:

1. Cognitive/Intellectual Assessments
2. Social Emotional Rating Scales
3. Adaptive Rating Scales
4. Autism Rating Scales (ASRS or ADOS)
5. FBA's (25-26 school year due to staffing of BCBA position)

**Team collaborates to determine which parts each person will assess and summarize.



SEAT (Special Education Assessment Team)

Academic Specialist completes:

1. Academic Assessments (Reading, Math, Written Language)
2. Transition
3. Medical Updates
4. Background Information

**Team collaborates to determine which parts each person will assess and summarize.



SEAT Data - 5 Year Summary

Evaluations

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Initial	89	118	105	111	128
Re-Evals	159	155	98	118	117
Waived	4	26	62	84	135
Total	252	297	265	313	380



Special Education Assessment Team (SEAT)

Key Strengths

- **Efficient Referral Processes:** Strong systems are in place to streamline referrals and support timely movement through the evaluation process.
- **Highly Skilled Staff:** Team members demonstrate expertise, professionalism, and commitment to supporting student needs.



Special Education Assessment Team (SEAT)

Key Challenges

- **Limited Problem-Solving Structures:** Absence of a formal problem-solving team at the high school limits early intervention and data-based decision-making.
- **Intervention Gaps:** Lack of available interventions for mathematics and behavior restricts the effectiveness of pre-referral supports.
- **Reduced Clerical Support:** Reduction of the SEAT secretary position impacts efficiency and capacity to manage referrals and documentation.
- **Process Clarity:** SAT and CST procedures require clearer definition to ensure consistency and compliance.
- **Referral Volume:** High volume of referrals makes it challenging to maintain timelines and provide thorough review.
- **Over-Identification:** Disproportionate identification of students in grades K–2, particularly before sufficient time for language acquisition.



Stakeholder Feedback: Speech Language Pathologists

Feedback was provided in 7 areas:

1. Current Practices and Workload
2. Student Needs and Outcomes
3. Alignment With Best Practice
4. Collaboration and Communication
5. Scheduling and Service Delivery Logistics
6. Workload Sustainability and Support
7. Future Design and Innovation



Speech Language Pathologist Feedback

Key Strengths

- **Consistent Evaluation Practices:** A single SLP evaluator for initial assessments supports consistency, reliability, and fidelity in evaluation decisions.
- **Effective Virtual Service Delivery:** Many students demonstrate stronger performance and engagement in the online setting compared to in-person services.
- **Paraprofessional Support:** Paraprofessional assistance during virtual sessions significantly enhances student engagement and service effectiveness.
- **Innovative Service Model:** Use of a 3:1 service delivery model supports skill generalization and progress monitoring.
- **Professional Learning:** Ongoing professional development through [SpeechPathology.com](https://www.speechpathology.com) supports evidence-based practice.
- **Clerical Support:** Strong SPED clerical support at school sites contributes to scheduling, documentation, and compliance.



Speech Language Pathologist Feedback

Key Challenges

- **Role Clarity and Administrative Understanding:** Perceived lack of understanding of the SLP role by special education administration.
- **Partnership Concerns:** Staff report feeling micromanaged, impacting collaboration and professional autonomy.
- **Evaluation Coordination:** The evaluating SLP is not consistently integrated into SEAT processes, limiting alignment between evaluation and intervention.
- **Scheduling Constraints:** School schedules drive service minutes and groupings, rather than student needs and best practices.
- **Limited School Integration:** Virtual providers have fewer opportunities to build relationships and participate in the school community.
- **High Caseloads:** Elevated caseloads impact service quality, planning time, and sustainability.



Speech Model Selection Guide

Student Profile	Best-Fit Model
High Support Needs, AAC/complex communication, rapid skill practice needed	5 days direct
Mixed caseload with ongoing evaluations, need for collaboration in the classrooms	4:1 weekly
Large caseload, heavy evaluation demands, generalization of needs	3:1 monthly



Due Process Review



Due Process Review

Twenty student cases were reviewed from all age/grade levels.

Summary of Due Process Strengths:

- Strong Present Levels
- Consistency in meeting deadline dates
- Consistent Teams present for IEP meetings/Collaborative Input
- Engaged Families
- Strong evaluations



Due Process Review

Summary of Due Process Challenges:

- Significant amounts of paraprofessional supports w/o goals to build independence
- Goals don't include from/to baseline data
- Objectives are stacked w/o end dates and not always skill based
- Meetings don't always include an EL teacher for dual identified students
- Related service teams could benefit from developing common service methods and minutes (Direct vs. Indirect, minutes per week/month/year)



Recommendations for Next Steps



Recommendations for Next Steps

1. **Develop Decision Making Model for the District**

- a. Determine stakeholders
- b. Determine feedback model
- c. Determine the level of decision making by each stakeholder group
- d. Communicate this information to each group/team

2. **Develop SPED Administrative Team**

- a. Determine roles and responsibilities across the district
- b. Determine reporting methods (to whom?, what information is important?)
- c. Develop communication avenues with all teams
- d. Continue partnership with building administration for clear directions to staff



Recommendations for Next Steps

3. Increase Communication with Related Services Teams

- a. Design feedback model
- b. Utilize decision making model for each team
- c. Schedule regular meetings with agendas (Informational vs. Learning meetings)
- d. Determine best model fit for SLP's

4. Develop Clear Job Descriptions for Each SPED Staff Member

- a. Communicate often when a role or responsibility changes
- b. Hold annual feedback sessions (more often if needed) to determine needs (what's working well, what are some needed areas of growth)
- c. Promote employee ownership to agreed upon responsibilities
- d. Evaluate staff growth in a meaningful way



Recommendations For Next Steps

5. Continue to “Grow Your Own”

- a. Staff want to work for districts who share their student successes
- b. Continue to hire skilled staff members
- c. Continue to train staff in instructional best practices
- d. Continue to train staff in best practice due process procedures
- e. Create staff connections that will increase their sense of belonging

6. Appreciate the Highlights



Recommendations for Next Steps:Organizational Finances

- ★ SWWC tracks the majority of the Special Education Finances

Recommendations:

1. Review all expenditures for the district
2. Review which staff members are coded to SPED (State and Federal)
3. Plan for early Intervention (VPK,CEIS, ADSIS)
4. Determine SPED Administrative positions needed based the needs of staff and the organization
5. Positions such as nursing, social work, behavior intervention, instructional/behavioral specialists, due process specialists, etc. can be paid for with SPED dollars.
6. Encourage a mindset of **“we all share in the growth of every student”** to prevent silos or miscoding in spending and instructional delivery



Thank you!

Questions?

