



Regional School District #17

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MEMORANDUM

Date: September 27, 2023
RE: Special Education Program Review
From: Jeffrey Wihbey, Superintendent

FAQ & Additional Language

What does this project involve?

We are pleased to share that the district is undertaking an effort to expand and strengthen best-practice supports and increase the equity of services for students who struggle (both with and without disabilities). It focuses on the academic, SEL, and behavioral needs of students and also aims to improve the work-life of staff.

We are only in the beginning stages of this effort, which will involve a better understanding of how our students are currently served and how they could be served even better. We are committed to a process that is thoughtful, measured, and inclusive for students, staff, and families. We will keep you involved in our work as we move forward to better serve our students.

Why is the district undertaking this process?

We believe that all students have the ability to perform at high levels, including the vast majority of students with disabilities. We are undertaking this process to ensure that all our students have the necessary support to reach their full potential.

What is the goal of this effort?

The goal of this effort is to expand and strengthen the effectiveness of services for students who are struggling. This includes students with disabilities and other students who may be struggling—such as struggling readers, English language learners, students living in poverty, and others.

Furthermore, our goal is to do that in a sustainable way—meaning that services should also be practical given our budget, equitable to students and staff, and transparent. Equally important, we want to improve the work life of teachers through this review.

Why is the district undertaking this effort now?

This effort is part of the district's ongoing commitment to continuously improve. We believe that all school districts have a responsibility to learn from research, build on what is working, and address areas that can be improved. This is our opportunity to do just that for our learners who

are struggling. No one forced the district to begin this work, but we feel our students and families will benefit. Given the impact of the pandemic, this work is more important than ever.

Is the district trying to cut costs?

This project focuses on strengthening and expanding support and services for struggling students. We will examine the current allocation of resources with the aim of ensuring that every dollar does the most good for the most students possible and simultaneously promoting equity in resources for all staff and students. However, the goal is not to reduce resources or spending.

Is the district trying to raise standardized test scores?

Standardized test scores are one of many potential long-range measures of the success of the effort but are not the singular desired outcome. Overall, the district aims to improve supports for struggling students to ensure all students can reach their full potential and achieve at high levels.

Who is leading this effort?

This effort was initiated by the superintendent and will be led by a guiding coalition of central office leaders, school principals, and district staff.

The district will partner with New Solutions K12 (NSK12), providing facilitation support, a deep understanding of best-practice research, and a national perspective from other successful school districts. This will allow the district to take a deep, comprehensive look at our current supports for students who struggle to identify areas for improvement that have proven to be effective in other districts and are supported by a strong research base.

What is the work plan?

The district is undertaking a multi-step process to incorporate many voices and ensure we use research and best practices to better serve our students.

This first step will systematically study the district's current special education and some general education services, programs, procedures, staffing, and spending. This will be achieved through both qualitative and quantitative analysis, including synthesis of existing district data, on-site observations, interviews, and focus groups. Taken together, this will provide us with a more complete understanding of the many demands and needs of the staff and how we might better support struggling students.

Second, the district will take this stakeholder input and analysis, and combine it with published research, the experience of achievement gap-closing districts, and the wisdom of district teachers and administrators. We will identify and codify which practices will best serve students who struggle in our district. The process will also highlight commendable practices already in place.

Third, the district will create a phased roadmap for implementing any desired practices and service delivery models in a cost-effective manner across schools. Throughout the entire process, we will be meeting with stakeholders to share our plans and collect feedback. The district, not NSK12, will decide what changes are appropriate for our students.

How will stakeholder voices be incorporated (including teachers, parents, and others)?

This process will be led by a guiding coalition of both district and school leaders. These diverse representatives will be closely involved with shaping and guiding this process.

Additionally, stakeholder voices will be incorporated during two distinct phases of the process:

- During the diagnostic phase, interviews and focus groups will be conducted with representatives across various internal and external stakeholder groups
- After the guiding coalition has synthesized stakeholder input, research, and analysis into a preliminary vision for how students who are struggling will be better served, this vision will be shared across stakeholder groups by the district for input and feedback.

Besides these opportunities to provide feedback, the district will share regular updates on this process through various channels, including the superintendent's newsletter, district website, etc.

How long will this process take?

This effort will take approximately nine months.

Additional questions, concerns, or comments on this effort can be directed to Sarah Levenson at slevenson@newsolutionsk12.com.