

# **A REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Eanes Independent  
School District

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**STETSON**  
& ASSOCIATES, INC.

## **A Review of Services for Students with Disabilities**

### **Eanes Independent School District**

---

Stetson and Associates, Inc. was commissioned to conduct a comprehensive review of the quality of supports and services for students with disabilities in Eanes Independent School District. This review of services required an examination of quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources, including classroom observations, structured interviews with key leadership, focus group meetings with multiple stakeholders, a five-year longitudinal review of district statistics, a study of the data of nine comparable districts, a review of eligibility folders of students with disabilities, a compliance review of student services and supports for eight specific students, and a survey of faculty and parents of students with disabilities.

A comprehensive report was developed with the active participation of the Eanes ISD executive director of special education, school and central office administrators, teachers, parents of students with disabilities, and other essential district personnel. The foundation of this report is based on a review of services for students with disabilities within the context of highly effective research-based practices. Although it does include some areas related to compliance, the primary focus of the evaluation is quality standards for special education services.

The decision to evaluate the special education program is an impressive step toward excellence and continuous improvement for all students, and Eanes ISD is to be commended for taking this positive step to ensure effective and equitable practices.

The primary task of this program review was to seek answers to the most critical questions facing the district using the quality standards that were developed by key stakeholders. This evaluation provides findings and supportive data that note strengths and areas of concern impacting the quality and effectiveness of supports and services for students with disabilities. To more efficiently report findings and recommendations, the quality standards were organized into five major themes.

### **Theme 1: A Common Vision Across All Stakeholders With A Philosophy Of Shared Responsibilities For All Learners That Fosters a Climate of Mutual Respect and Trust**

#### **Findings**

There were six strengths and six areas of concern noted for this theme. Findings included acknowledgement of the district's strong commitment to working with all stakeholders to ensure all students, including students with disabilities, receive a rigorous and inclusive school experience. The district's development of the Universal Design for Learning Team indicates

## A Review of Services for Students with Disabilities

### Eanes Independent School District

---

a common vision and shared responsibility for all learners. Eanes ISD clearly values the views provided by parents. Attempts at clear and consistent communication are evident by the forming of the Inclusive Culture Committee to address inclusive practices, providing opportunities for parent feedback through a Special Education Parent Working Group, and utilizing multiple information gathering sources such as surveys and questionnaires to determine parent issues and concerns. The district communicates a variety of information through a robust special education website which includes current topics of interest, guidance documents, district operating guidelines and links to critical information and resources for teachers, staff and parents.

The inclusivity of the district is apparent by its inclusion of the Executive Director of Special Education as a full and equal member of the central office leadership team and the inclusion of special education goals in the District Improvement Plan. However, to be fully inclusive the District Improvement Plan should integrate issues and goals related to special education in all areas of instruction of the plan such as CATE, GT, C&I, Innovations and SEL.

Concerns were noted in the inconsistency of services across campuses for students with disabilities, the number of faculty who hold the belief that services for students with disabilities are based on program names and disability labels rather than student need, and the perception that inclusion of students with disabilities is viewed as a social benefit while 17.2% of faculty respondents do not view inclusion as academically beneficial, and approximately one in four view inclusion as academically harmful to students without disabilities. There is an overall sense of collaboration among stakeholders regarding services for students, but there were additional concerns reported regarding how decisions are made by central office and communicated to campus administrators and other staff members.

### Recommendations

1. Review all current department orientation and language and revise any that reinforces labels, places or program models; substitute with student-needs based approaches to service delivery.
2. Continue the focus on training regarding Universal Design for Learning (UDL) across the district. This is an excellent step towards working with all teachers on meeting the diverse needs of students.
3. Identify and correct misunderstandings and confusion about special education services, supports, and inclusive practices. These revisions should appear in written

communications, on school websites, and in trainings and leadership meetings to ensure consistency of practices across the district.

4. Establish and provide professional development for “Quality Standards for Special Education Services” through online presentations, print resources and links. An example of these quality standards is provided here: <https://inclusiveschools.org/inclusion-resources/self-assessment/>
5. Revise the District Improvement Plan format to be more inclusive by addressing the needs of “all” students in all areas of the plan, including but not limited to CATE, GT, Curriculum and Instruction, Innovation, SEL, etc.
6. Review the special education website to update information that is no longer valid or meaningful. The website is a strong communication tool and resource for staff and parents and is an effective way to communicate current information.
7. Include links on campus websites to the special education page.
8. Provide information on all communications with parents on how to access the district information available to them.
9. Develop a handout that could be given to parents at ARD meetings or when students enroll in the district that provides information regarding resources and how they can participate in groups that are already established.
10. Utilize website information in trainings and provide links in handouts and emails; encourage staff to make better use of this resource.

## **Theme 2: Collaborative Instruction Focusing on Excellence With a Full Array of Consistently Delivered Services Including A Robust Process For Transition Planning**

### **Findings**

Theme 2 is the largest and most comprehensive of the report. There were seven strengths and nine areas of concern noted for this theme.

There is a strong district-level focus on instructional excellence as well as quality inclusive supports and services for students with disabilities. A large number of faculty indicate that students with disabilities are considered full members of the student body and they believe their school provides quality services. Special education teachers and support personnel are highly regarded for their skill and competence levels and staff generally feel supported by their principal in their efforts to serve students with disabilities.

## A Review of Services for Students with Disabilities

### Eanes Independent School District

---

Data supports that campuses are richly staffed with teachers, assistants, and related service personnel to serve students with disabilities. Though inclusive practices are a stated priority and many resources are committed to this effort, there is a difference between perceptions of school personnel and parents regarding the quality of services. The district has a strong commitment to transition as evidenced by the Adult Transition Services Program and the amount of resources committed to quality post-secondary school experiences.

Although the district commits a great deal of resources to inclusive practices, the district has not met the state target for 80% or more of the school day spent in the general education setting in the last five years on the PBMAS. Additionally, there are multiple inefficiencies and inconsistencies impeding the quality of services to students with disabilities in the district's collaborative teaching practices.

There appears to be mixed perceptions regarding the skill and expertise of teachers to serve students with diverse learning needs. A sizable percentage of faculty do not view students with disabilities as accessing and participating in the general curriculum. Paraprofessionals are viewed as a positive asset, however there are issues of compensation, retention, and training needs for this group.

Eanes ISD is commended for an A rating with the Texas Accountability System, yet the district should focus on continuous progress towards reducing the achievement gap for students with disabilities. The SST/RtI process in the district is clearly defined and in place to support struggling students, but one in four faculty view the process as ineffective. Access to extracurricular activities and school sponsored events for students with disabilities is a high priority for the district and highly desired by parents.

### Recommendations

1. Provide a consistent level of intervention and training for teachers to address the deficits identified with collaborative teaching teams and ensure that all teachers receive the same level of training. There are many resources available for this type of training.
2. Provide training for inclusive schools on an annual basis to new hires, school action teams as members leave the system, and school leaders; target necessary skills and competencies to successfully and consistently implement inclusive education.
3. Link inclusive practices to other key priorities of the district.
4. Ensure recruitment of leadership and instructional personnel includes an introduction to the district's commitment to inclusive practices, equity and excellence.

## A Review of Services for Students with Disabilities

### Eanes Independent School District

---

5. Principals and teachers should be evaluated, in part, on the basis of their success in implementing inclusive practices and improving annual LRE data until state standards are met.
6. Require teachers to implement different approaches and strategies in collaborative teaching classes by aligning teacher appraisal goals with teaching assignments.
7. Identify model sites in the district and allow school personnel and parents to visit and learn from best practice mentors.
8. Showcase excellence in inclusive practices as a point of pride across the district and community.
9. Adopt a student-centered decision-making approach to staffing and scheduling. With this approach, all students with disabilities are sorted by grade level, subject area, and a series of questions regarding the degree to which the student can participate in the general education curriculum and the type and level of support the student may need.
10. Ensure inclusion support options are available other than co-teach.
11. Develop a master schedule that will ensure planning time for general and special education staff and addresses appropriate ratios for students receiving in-class support or support/services in a specialized setting.
12. Structure collaborative planning time by requiring completion of an outline or checklist of how the time was utilized and weekly submission of lesson plans that demonstrate implementation of differentiated practices and quality collaborative instruction.
13. Provide training to teachers to provide targeted instruction with ongoing progress monitoring data for writing and other academic areas to realize smaller gaps in performance between typically developing peers and students with disabilities.
14. Align content area trainings with strategies for effective use of appropriate accommodations and modifications in the general education setting.
15. Explore concerns regarding RTI/SST implementation by gathering more specific information, including investigating the integrity of implementation at every campus and surveying teachers to determine what specifically is not working.
16. Provide training to all teachers in best practices and strategies for struggling students with requirements that these strategies be implemented and integrated in classroom instruction, not just during intervention time.
17. Provide teachers training on how to manage and provide supervision to teaching assistants assigned to their classrooms. Schedules and clearly defined job responsibilities should be outlined for paraprofessionals as well as opportunities for them to provide input into performance reports for student through checklist and data sheets.



18. Schedule annual activities that show appreciation for paraprofessionals and their job performance, such as participation in staff appreciation celebrations, notes of gratitude and praise for a job well done, and public acknowledgement of their work.
19. Gather information from parents regarding actual participation of students with disabilities in extracurricular activities, school-based clubs and activities, and specific parent needs related to their child's participation.

## **Theme 3: Strong and Genuine Partnerships With Parents That are Positive, Respectful and Collaborative**

### **Findings**

Parents of students with disabilities report a high level of satisfaction with services, feel valued and included in the various processes regarding their child's services, perceive they are treated as equal partners in their child's education, and are involved with their child's school and program. Parent's reported appreciation of the quality of staff who serve students with disabilities in Eanes ISD.

Comments, concerns, and parent recommendations seemed to fall into four general categories: general gratitude for the program, services and supports in the district; inclusion; appreciation for staff; and, parent district communication.

District leadership reported a high level of commitment to communicating and partnering with parents. Concerns reported by parents included a perception in the lack of implementation of accommodations and modifications in the classroom, and a need for more knowledge regarding the progress of their child in the general education curriculum, including the grading systems utilized for their students.

Approximately 20% of parent respondents did not agree that the district provides adequate training and parent education, with comments specifically noting a need for more consistent communication with the campus and the teachers. Although a high number of faculty respondents agreed they would characterize the relationship between Eanes ISD schools and parents of students with disabilities as positive, there were multiple focus group and survey comments regarding the intense time and resources given to some of the more challenging parents, which seems to have an impact on staff morale. Some respondents expressed a need for collaborative and respectful relationships with parents that included boundaries for time and appreciation for the expertise and training of the school providers.

## Recommendations

1. Continue to promote a “customer friendly” atmosphere with parents of students with disabilities. This should be a priority at all levels, but especially at the campus level.
2. Provide communication from teachers and service providers to parents on a consistent basis. Time should be scheduled for face to face communication, which is more likely to reduce miscommunications that can occur via email or phone.
3. Train teachers and service providers in parent communication and conflict resolution. This can be done annually through PLCs, book studies, or vignettes modeling do’s and don’ts. It is important for general education teachers working with students with disabilities to receive this same training and partner in communications with parents of students with disabilities in collaborative classrooms.
4. Implement strategies to improve communication issues as addressed in Theme 1 recommendations. Capture information on how to improve communications and collaboration by conducting post-IEP meeting surveys to determine if significant discrepancies in perceptions exist and identify needed communication content and the most effective communication strategies to support collaborative and successful school parent partnerships.

## Theme 4: Effective and Efficient Use of Personnel and Capital Resources

### Findings

The district commits a large percentage of financial resources to quality inclusive supports and services for students with disabilities in Eanes ISD. Campuses are richly staffed with teachers, assistants and related service staff to meet the various needs of students. Data suggests that ineffective scheduling of supports and services for students with disabilities impacts efficient utilization of staff.

Inconsistent services from campus to campus, the need for consistent training of all staff members in quality supports and services in inclusive settings, and the need for training in personal organization and time managements skills leads to the perception by some staff members that there are less than adequate resources and personnel to meet the needs of students with disabilities in Eanes ISD.



## Recommendations

1. Obtain expert analysis of the evaluation process and criteria for disability identification. Determine if the high percentage of students identified with Autism, Other Health Impairment, and Emotional Disturbance and the lower percentage of students identified with Intellectual Disabilities and Speech Impairment are issues with assessment and establishment of primary and secondary disability identification, or if this is simply the natural make-up of the community and the school district.
2. Ensure service providers are trained in research-based practices for serving high needs students such as those identified with Autism, Behavioral needs, and Social Emotional needs. Lack of training can often lead to a belief that there are inadequate resources available to meet the needs of these students.
3. Implement the recommendations for the decision-making process for determining services for students with disabilities, staffing and communication, then re-survey staff to determine if perceptions of inadequate staffing changes. It appears that scheduling, training, and personal time management and organizational skills lead to the perception of some staff members that there is less than adequate staff available to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
4. Provide teachers training in organization and time management.
5. Continue to provide the rich level of resources in order to improve inclusive practices and the quality of supports and services to students with disabilities.

## Theme 5: Full Compliance With Federal, State, and Local Mandates

### Findings

The district is mostly compliant in all areas evaluated and was designated as “*Meeting Expectations*” by the state for the past five years. Schedules and documentation confirmed compliance with all eight students selected for verification of IEP implementation, with the exception of a lack of written documentation of implementation of accommodations. The district has an effective and efficient process for Child Find and addressed recent state compliance issues for dyslexia identification.

Although the district is in compliance, there is a need to focus on areas of non-compliance. Eanes ISD did not meet state compliance targets on five items on the State Performance Plan for the 2018 District Profile (school year 2016-17) and did not meet the performance level indicator of 0 on the Performance Based Monitoring Analysis System in four areas.

## **Recommendations**

1. Address all compliance issues by reviewing the indicators on the SPP and PBMAS that do not meet the state target. Disaggregate the data by campus if possible, specifically LRE data, and develop an action plan to address desired changes.
2. Produce a clearly written set of special education policies and procedures and use a dissemination plan that makes certain all district teaching staff, campus and central office administrators, assessment, and related services personnel understand and feel confident in implementing necessary practices to be compliant and provide quality research-based supports and services to students with disabilities.
3. Develop a system to audit folders on an annual basis to identify systemic issues in documentation and implementation of local, state and federal guidelines for special education.
4. Provide annual and on-going training and monitoring for all those who are responsible for ARD documentation.
5. Implement best practice procedures and preserve document integrity by requiring all attendees at an ARD meeting to sign the signature page.
6. Utilize a system of total electronic management. When staff are required to maintain an electronic system as well as a paper document, system errors in archiving can occur. Requiring staff to maintain two data systems can add to the workload of those responsible. With appropriate training and safeguards for archival and storage in place, an electronic system can be more efficient.
7. Provide training for teachers in how to document implementation of accommodations in lesson plans, grade books, and/or by maintaining portfolios of work samples and communicating this to parents.

## **CONCLUSION**

This evaluation of services for students with disabilities represents an inquiry into the status of present services and the perceptions of multiple stakeholder groups. This report was developed with the active participation and support of every educator within Eanes ISD that was called upon to provide data, perceptions, and recommendations. Stetson and Associates, Inc. greatly appreciates the assistance and candor of all involved in the process.

During the evaluation process, numerous positive influences for improved services for students with disabilities in Eanes ISD were identified, including a long history of commitment to excellence and improvement, strong district leadership, a high degree of parent satisfaction,

## **A Review of Services for Students with Disabilities**

### **Eanes Independent School District**

---

strong emphasis on instructional excellence and quality, and the provision of human and capital resources to support districts goals. The district possesses the leadership, skills, and resources to make significant and positive improvements for all students.

Throughout our work in the district, educators from all levels and departments commented on a commitment to students with disabilities evidenced by district leadership and teaching faculty. Eanes ISD is to be commended for taking positive steps to ensure effective and equitable practices for students with disabilities are in place across all of its schools.