

Determining Special Education  
Placement in Multi-Tiered Systems of  
Support

*Winter, 2015*



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# Introduction



What is the vision we hold for placement practices for students with disabilities in MMSD? What is our theory of action regarding how we will attain our vision? What will all of the stakeholders do to achieve our vision?

## *Vision*

Our goal in MMSD is to ensure all students with disabilities receive their federally guaranteed free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), thus promoting inclusive schooling. To achieve FAPE, placement decisions should be considered dynamic, fluid, and responsive to current assessment data, as reflected by quarterly progress updates. To enact our vision, and to fulfill the promise of the principles of the [Great Teaching Matters Framework](#), Student Services advances a diverse, expansive continuum of services and placements essential for both IDEA adherence, and for realizing inclusive schooling.

Consistent with the continuum of services concept, inclusive schools are designed to meet the educational needs of all of their members within common, yet fluid, environments and activities (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Inclusive schooling means that special education, English as a Second Language (ESL), and bilingual education are no longer described as placements but rather as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). In MMSD schools, students with disabilities (including those described as significant) lose neither services nor



support, but gain the opportunity to have full membership and to grow in functional and meaningful ways in the social and learning contexts of their nondisabled peers (Skrtic, Sailor, & Gee, 1996). A fully realized continuum of services is an essential component of inclusive schools, and a key way to operationalize MMSD's values and principles as expressed in both the Great Teaching Matters Framework and the [Behavior Education Plan](#).

## ***Purpose of the Document***

Outcomes for students with disabilities in MMSD must be dramatically improved. Designing individualized instruction, and utilizing a full continuum of services and placement options is critically important in achieving significant improvement for our students. When recently asked, MMSD special educators indicated that current service delivery models do not allow for flexible and fluid movement among varying levels of support as needed for students with disabilities. Therefore, **we must strengthen the links among current progress towards goals, student specific goals and instruction, and subsequent placement along the continuum of educational environments for students with disabilities. We use this document as source material for guiding conversations related to service delivery for students with disabilities.**

As opposed to existing service delivery structures within the school or district, as opposed to any pre-determination of placement prior to IEP development, as opposed to relying upon disability type, teams must consider options for placement that rely upon individual student needs. The purpose of this document is to:

- 1) Clarify the steps teams should take to as we plan service delivery and decide upon placement for students in pursuit of IEP goals;
- 2) Guide the placement decision-making process, through the use of decision-trees, flowcharts and Frequently Asked Questions;

Beginning with theories of action guiding our vision for the placement process, we then review IDEA concepts, followed by examples of specific environments, services, and specially designed instruction. The following graphic depicts a broad sampling of the continuum of options offered in MMSD, yet is not an exhaustive representation. Since we design individualized placements to match the particular needs of students, many other arrangements are possible.



## *Continuum of Services: Connection to Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports*

The Continuum of Services is delivered within [Multi-Tiered System of Supports](#) (MTSS). MTSS is a term used to describe an evidence-based model of schooling that uses data-based problem solving to provide a seamless system of academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. Educators rely upon MTSS to provide integrated instruction and intervention at varying levels of intensity based on student need. The goal is to prevent problems and intervene early so that all students can be successful. MTSS is for all students, including those who struggle, those who require more challenge, and those with identified disabilities.



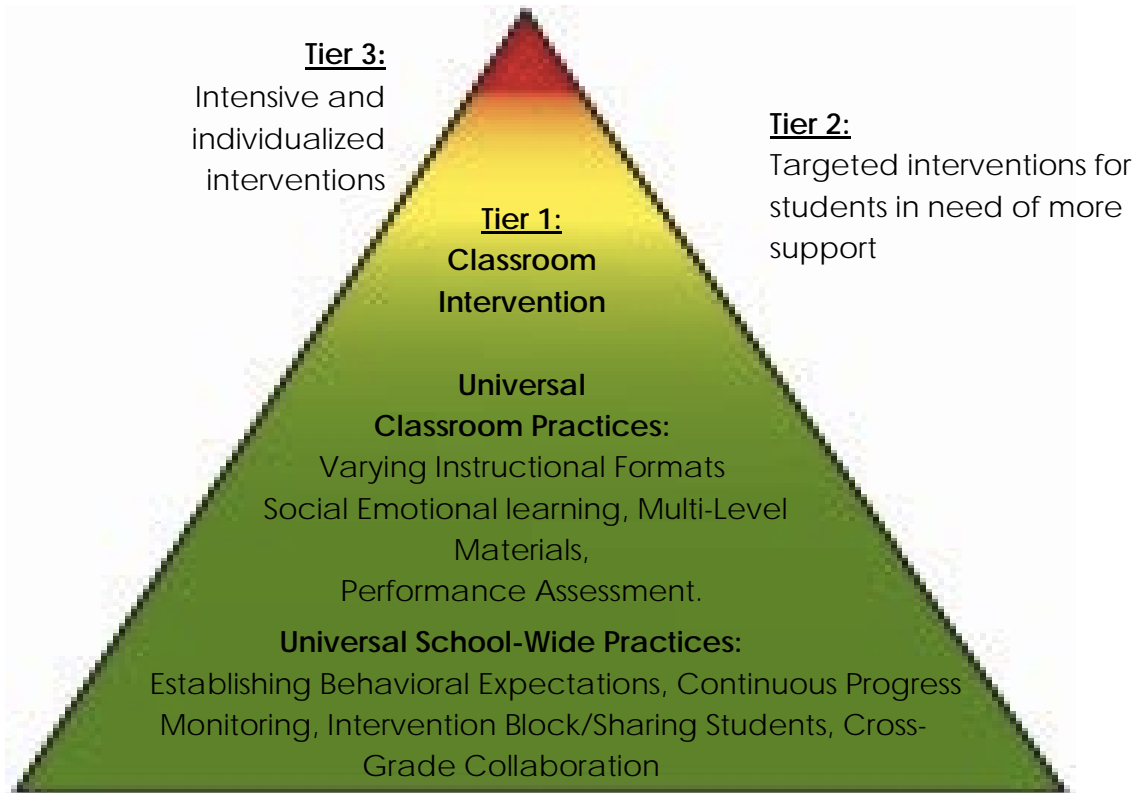
Students with IEPs have access to MTSS, as all students do. Yet, when a student requires special education, some services that are **available** to all are identified as **necessary** to student per his/her IEP. That particular service is specifically articulated within the IEP, and becomes an explicit component of his/her service delivery. While many specific supports and services delivered throughout all three tiers may be similar to those delivered to students with IEPs, special education is not a tier.

Connecting MTSS and special education enables teams to blend the resources and expertise of both general and special educators to provide unified supports to meet the needs of all students.

Great Teaching, and a diverse, expansive Continuum of Services rely upon a well-functioning MTSS in every school.



## *Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Within a Continuum of Services*

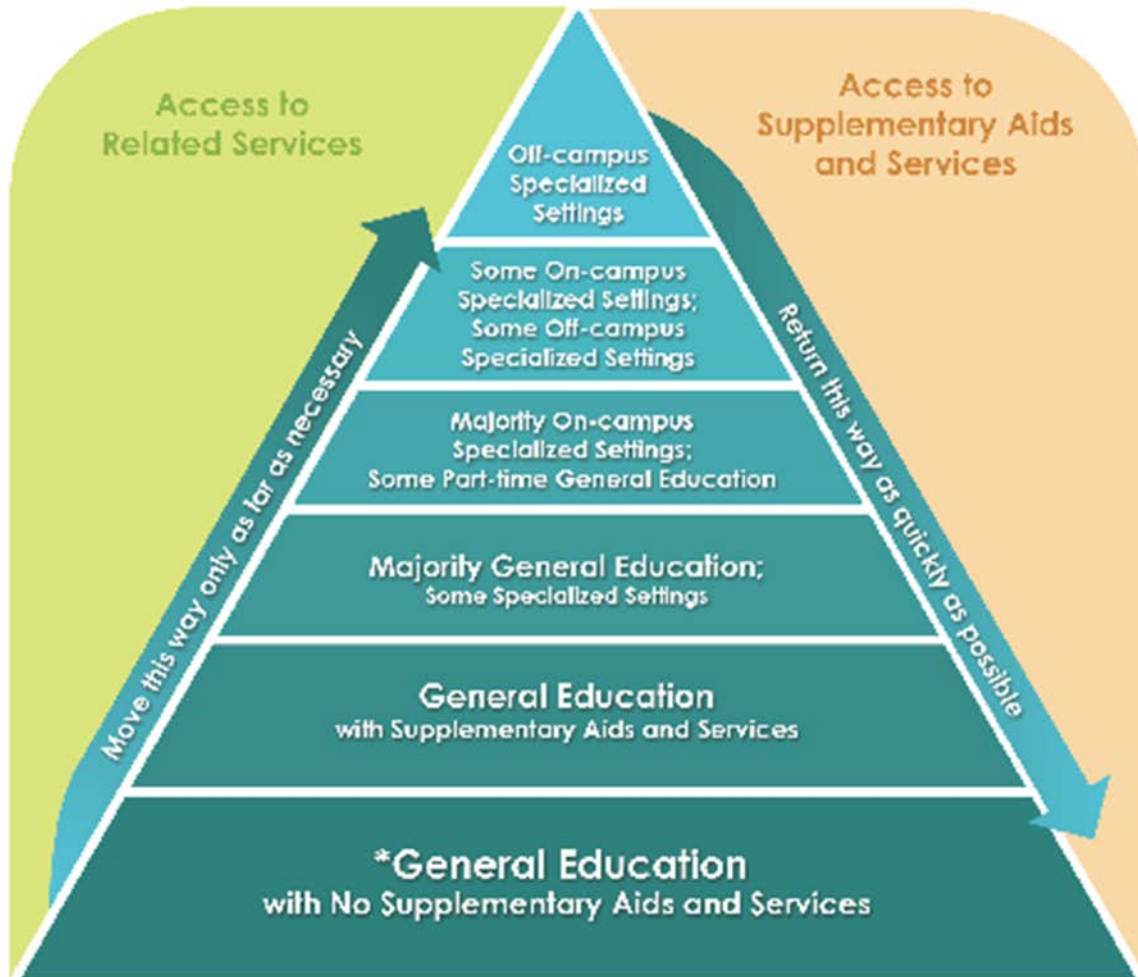


All students, including those who qualify for special education services, have access to the tiered practices and interventions as indicated by academic, behavioral, and social emotional data. For example, as the graphic above suggests, a Universal Classroom Practice such as engaging in performance assessments, or participating in Morning Meeting, may be the pathway to delivering the students' IEP.

For more information and resources on practices and interventions to support student behavior within MTSS, please see the [Behavior Education Plan](#).



## Continuum of Education Services in the MMSD



\* Teams Begin by Presuming General Education Placement

**Please Note:** The above graphic depicts a broad sampling of the continuum of options offered in MMSD, yet is not an exhaustive representation. Since we design individualized placements to match the particular needs of students, many other arrangements are possible.

Specialized settings may include, yet are not limited to:

- Community-based instruction (public transportation, banking, grocery shopping, recreation, domestic/household tasks)
- Internship rotation
- Paid employment
- Apprenticeships



- Operation Fresh Start

## ***Beliefs/Theories of Action***

Since theories of action detail how educators will arrive at the vision, our theories of action related to placement answer the questions: *How might our placement process situate students for optimal learning and improvement? How might teams use the continuum of services to support students? How might district and school level leadership support teams in making placement decisions consistent with our vision? The principles expressed in the Great Teaching Matters guide our Theory of Action.*

### **Theory of Action Supporting Our Vision: Placement Process**

**If we (MMSD staff) engage in a cycle of inquiry to guide our placement process, MMSD teams will...**

- Use current student data and progress relative to goals to make placement decisions;
- Preserve the individualization of needs that is the hallmark of special education;
- Honor process-driven, collaboratively generated, individually determined placement decisions;
- Decide upon placements in a fluid and flexible design, aligned with current student needs.





## Theory of Action Supporting Our

And we will achieve our vision.

Next, we trace foundational concepts of the IDEA that provide the context in which we make placement decisions.



## Section A: IDEA CONCEPTS



How are the core IDEA concepts at work in placement processes? How do the concepts of Inclusive education and mainstreaming relate to IDEA?

### ***FAPE***

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is both a process and a document designed to ensure students' FAPE in the LRE, and consists of three general steps: 1) evaluation and identification, 2) development of the IEP, and 3) determination of placement based on the IEP, the focus of this document. The placement issue that has been most controversial and frequently litigated nationally stems from the requirement from the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) requiring Local Education Agencies (LEA) to confer upon students with disabilities a FAPE in the LRE.

A FAPE describes special education and related services that:

- Are provided at public expense
- Meet the standards of the State Education Agency
- Include preschool, elementary, or secondary education
- Respond to student's unique needs and current progress towards IEP goals
- Confer meaningful educational benefit
- Prepares students for further education, employment, and independent living



To determine whether a student is receiving meaningful educational benefit, use frequently updated information from assessments of the student's progress. **If our students are not making progress towards their goals, we must review the IEP, and make adjustments to ensure FAPE.** Since "appropriateness" is not spelled out by the law, and is an inherently individual decision, we offer a series of questions that can help teams determine what is appropriate, and the extent to which we are delivering educational benefit to our students.

**Questions Guiding the Appropriateness Standard**

**FAPE**

- Can we measure our students' IEP goals? Do our goals prepare them for further education, education, employment, and independent living?
- Are we using research based interventions to achieve goals?
- Are we collecting quarterly data to determine student progress relative to goals?
- Are we making instructional and placement adjustments based upon quarterly progress monitoring? Are our placements fluid?

The consideration and use of Supplementary Aids and Services (SaS) and the principle of LRE are interconnected.

The LRE provisions of IDEA require that:

- (i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and (ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [§300.114(a)]

In determining the least restrictive environment for a child, the LRE represents the intersection of two separate determinations: *what* the child should be learning and *where* the child should be learning it. This placement decision should be considered dynamic and fluid. Accordingly, progress towards goals



must be reviewed at least quarterly. In some cases, programming changes may be significant enough to prompt IEP review and revise. For a decision-tree model that supports teams as they make placement decisions in concert with the LRE, see [the Placement Process](#).

### ***LRE ~ Inclusion ~ Mainstreaming: Intersections and Distinctions***

The IEP must be reviewed and revised in response to quarterly progress monitoring. At each IEP meeting, the LRE placement of the student should be discussed. The discussion must begin with a) determining whether the original goals were appropriate and then b) considering placement in the general education setting. The IEP team may recommend placement in the more restrictive setting only if:

- The original goals were appropriate
- The student's academic needs can no longer be met in the less restrictive option based on quarterly progress monitoring
- Student behaviors worsen; The student's behavior is so disruptive that the education of other student's is significantly impaired, even given supplementary aids and services
- A due process order has been given

### **Least Restrictive Environment**

- 1) Mandated by IDEA and Section 504
- 2) Most closely approximates where the student would attend if not disabled; For most students with disabilities, this would be an age/grade appropriate general education classroom in the school s/he would attend if not disabled
- 3) Individually determined; LRE ≠ General Education.



## Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming typically refers to a dated practice which suggests that students are based in special education settings and “earn” their way into general education environments. Mainstreaming is often characterized by a lack of collaborative planning among general and special educators and school leaders.

- 1) Term of art; popularized in the 1970’s; **not** mandated by the IDEA or Section 504
- 2) Placing (on a limited basis) students with disabilities with his/her chronologically age peers in a general education setting, typically without supplementary aids and services; Students are based in Special Education environments; Special Educators assume primary responsibility for service delivery for students rather than sharing ownership with general educators.

## Inclusion

Inclusive education propels a critique of contemporary school culture and thus, encourages practitioners to reinvent what can be and should be to realize more humane, just and democratic learning communities. Inequities in treatment and educational opportunity are brought to the forefront, thereby fostering attention to human rights, respect for difference and value of diversity. (Udvari-Solner, 1997, p. 142).

- 1) Term of art; **not** mandated by the IDEA or Section 504
- 2) Placing (for all or part of the school day) students with disabilities with his/her chronologically age peers in a general education setting; Educators collaboratively integrate well-defined supplementary aids and services into the general education instructional designs and formats as they embed systematic instruction; Students are based in general education environments; Special and general educators share responsibility for service delivery.



## Section B: Continuum of Educational Environments and Array of Services



What special education and other services are needed for the student to (1) advance toward attaining his or her goals, (2) Participate and progress in the general curriculum, and (3) Receive education with non-disabled peers?

### *Specially Designed Instruction*

Special education means **specially designed instruction**, regardless of where the instruction is provided, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability. Special education may include specially designed physical education, vocational education and travel training. Special Education is individually developed to address a **specific** child's needs that result from his or her disability.



Remember that the education, services, and supports outlined in a child's IEP do not necessarily cover that child's *entire* education. **The IEP only addresses educational needs resulting from the child's disability.** If a child needs special education support throughout the school day, for all activities, the IEP will address all related needs. If the child does not need special education support in one or more areas (for example, math, music, lunch, Behavior, Social-emotional Learning, etc.), then the IEP will not include these



subjects. The child accesses this content and these experiences through the general curriculum/ class, with no additional special education services.

Since each child is unique, it is difficult to give an overall example of “special education”. Special education is individualized for each child.

### ***Inclusive Service Delivery***

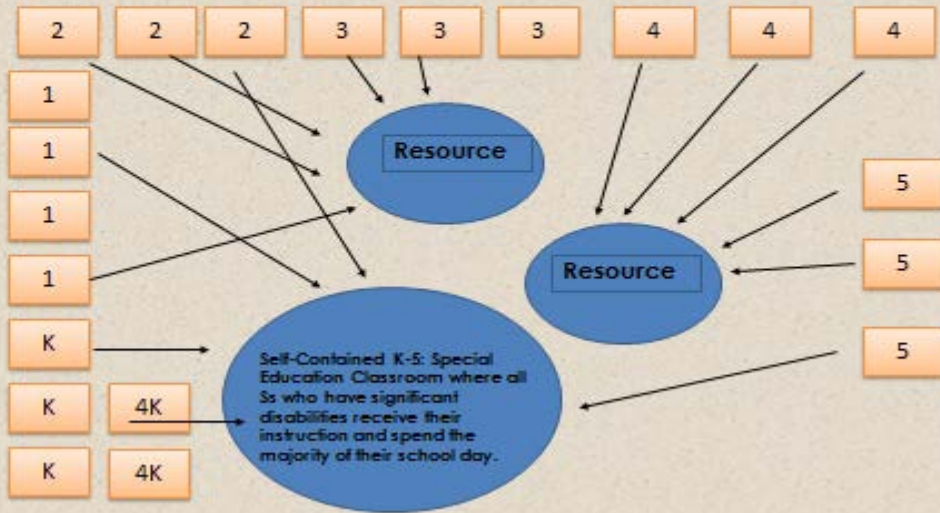
Delivering individually determined services within the context of general education classrooms may require restructuring of service delivery models. Please note that restructuring for inclusive delivery is best undertaken as a component of School Improvement Planning, as restructuring requires a localized visioning process carried out by the SBLT, (and supported by district level leadership). As part of their SIP, schools should examine and update their service delivery approaches, (dependent upon individual student needs) at least quarterly.

[The teacher team toolkit](#), created in Summer 2014, provides tools and resources that may support teams as they analyze student responses to instruction, determine progress relative to goals, and align service delivery as well as instructional practices, with current student needs. The [Data Analysis Protocol](#), [Data Use Toolkit](#) (use the Data Use Guides with the Data Analysis Protocol) and the [Student Work Protocol](#) may be particularly helpful as teams determine student progress, and consider service delivery decisions.

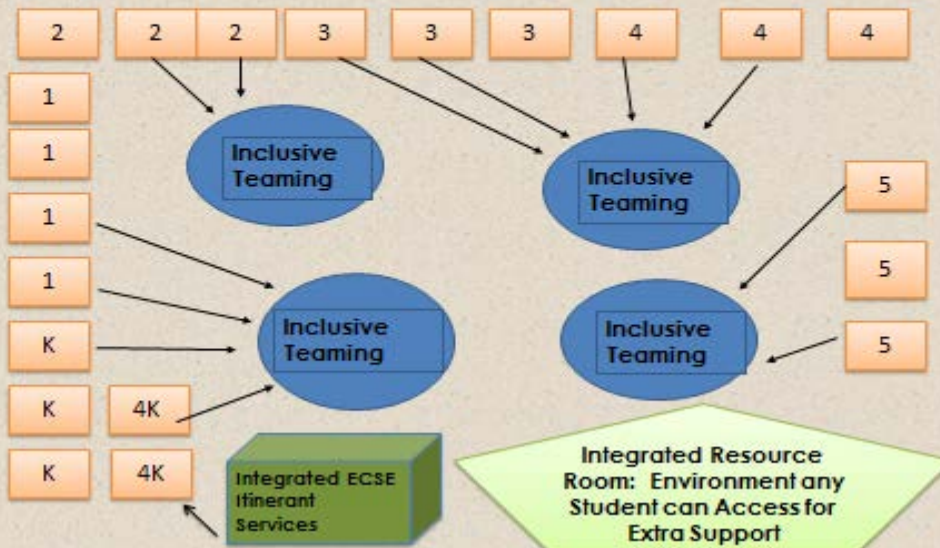
The following model, adapted from the work by Theoharis and Causton (2014), depicts how schools may re-enact the way they deliver services to maximize access to general education for all students with disabilities.



### Special Education Service Delivery Prior to Inclusive Restructuring



### Special Education Service Delivery Post Inclusive Restructuring







## *Universal Design for Learning*

To maximize the potential of restructured service delivery models, teaching teams may wish to use Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is an instructional model for curriculum development that gives all students opportunities to learn core content in integrated environments (Hehir & Katzman, 2012). At the beginning of instructional planning, teachers collaboratively make decisions about how to provide multiple options for:

- presenting information and content (**representation**) ;
- differentiating the ways students can express what they know (**expression**);
- stimulating student interest and motivation for learning (**engagement**)

By considering the needs of all learners (including English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and advanced learners) at the start of instructional planning, teachers proactively address the widest spectrum of student needs without awkward and time-consuming modifications and retrofitting.

The Universal Design for Learning model offers specific entry points for delivering embedded systematic instruction, particularly for students with significant disabilities. Embedded systematic instruction utilizes naturally occurring routines, activities, and transitions as opportunities to acquire and maintain target skills in general education classrooms. Embedding instruction requires general and special education teacher teams to plan collaboratively, identifying possibilities for systematic instruction within classroom routines, procedures, and instructional formats.

More information and resources about using UDL, and embedded systematic instruction can be found [here](#).



## ***Co-Teaching Models***

Co-teaching is a practice, (often essential for delivering services inclusively and universally) in which educators share responsibility for planning, instruction, and assessment of a group of students (Friend & Bursuck, 2002). The following are examples of co-teaching structures; yet they do not represent all co-teaching arrangements.

Team Teaching, Station Teaching, and Parallel Teaching emphasize the capacity of all educators to lead teach, meet whole class and student-specific needs, and implement positive behavior support strategies. The models afford all students access to each educator's expertise and diverse peers. Students envision all teachers as leaders.

***Team Teaching-*** Both/all teachers lead instructional activities collaboratively. Each teacher has an active role in delivering instruction.

***Station Teaching-*** Students are divided into groups of two or more that rotate through teacher directed stations. Both teachers take active roles to cover a certain part of the content.

***Parallel Teaching-*** The class is divided into heterogeneous groups. Both teachers teach the same content to one of the smaller groups.



Alternative Teaching & One Teach/One Assist are best used as a complement to Team Teaching, Station Teaching, and Parallel Teaching. Over-use can lead to **unnecessarily** limited access to general education and peers, and/or stigmatization of students with disabilities.

**Alternative Teaching**- The class is divided into homogenous groups. One teacher provides the regular instruction to the one needs-based group, while the special education teacher provides individualized instruction to another needs-based group. This model is useful when pre-teaching, re-teaching, tutoring, or enrichment is needed.

**One Teach/One Assist**- One teacher takes the lead delivering the content while the other teacher monitors. This model is useful when a student's struggles behaviorally. The special education teacher problem solves the behavioral issues.

### ***Related Services***

Related Services are those supportive services that are provided to a student with a disability because the services are necessary for a child to make progress toward his or her IEP goals. Related services means transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling,



orientation and mobility services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. Related services also include school health services and school nurse services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training.



In response to the Student Services audit in 2014, we are recalibrating the psychologist and social worker role to strike the appropriate balance of meeting the demands of students needing support with other systems level work. Since a small number of students can create an acute and significant need for additional related services resources (either behavior support teams or additional staffing), we will be providing regular on-going related services to our highest need students as an appropriate first step to addressing this need.

**Please Note:** Frequently asked questions about Extended School Year Services (ESY) are addressed [here](#). ESY services are considered only when the IEP team determines they are required for the student to receive FAP.

### ***Supplementary Aids & Services***

After an IEP team makes a positive eligibility determination, the team generates *individualized* goals and objectives that carry a presumption of access to the general education curriculum with the use of **Supplementary Aids and Services**. Teams should consider SaS to create a system of support that enables most students with disabilities to learn and participate alongside typically developing peers, taking into account their unique instructional needs and differences. Consistent with the LRE principle of IDEA, IEP teams must thoughtfully consider a



full array of SaS that make it possible for students with disabilities to be included in general education classrooms, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities.

Supplementary aids and services are traditionally thought of as accommodations and modifications to the curriculum or the instructional format in which content is presented, or assessment tools or processes used to gauge performance and understanding. Yet, supplementary aids and services can also include **direct services and supports to the child, and support and training for staff who work with that child, and are supplemental to the services all students receive through MTSS.**

In considering SaS, IDEA outlines the following requirements:

(4) A statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child, and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided to enable the child—

(i) To advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals;

(ii) To be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum in accordance with paragraph (a)(1) of this section, and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and

(iii) To be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children in the activities described in this section.

Key to understanding the intent of supplementary aids and services is that they must be created on a child-by-child basis. Supplementary aids and services should:

- Directly address the impact of a disability on a child's education
- Provide meaningful educational benefit
- Avoid stigmatizing students
- Promote independence to the maximum extent possible; Consider the least intrusive support

**Careful deliberation and creativity as teams contemplate the SaS is considered crucial to maintaining substantive integrity of the IEP.** In other words, MMSD teams may find that an appropriate education cannot be



delivered in a general education environment, even with the above full range of SaS considered, and hence the continuum of alternative options for placement of students with disabilities may be considered.

## Supplementary Aids & Services

### To Address Sensory Needs

- ◆ Preferential seating
- ◆ Provision of a study carrel
- ◆ Rearrangement of the classroom
- ◆ Permission to move from place to place in the room (assignment of multiple work places, desks, in different areas of the classroom)
- ◆ Sensory Breaks
- ◆ Headphones

### To Provide Access to Materials & Instruction

- ◆ Digital Text
- ◆ Magnifiers
- ◆ Pacing
- ◆ Vocabulary
- ◆ Use of manipulatives
- ◆ FM System
- ◆ Notes provided



## Supplementary Aids and Services

### To Support Behavior & Social Interactions

- ◆ Extra time to travel between classes
- ◆ Behavior contract or behavior support plan
- ◆ Foreshadowing of transitions and changes in schedules
- ◆ Provision of a visual daily schedule
- ◆ Use of nonverbal signals to guide behavior

### To Enhance Academic Output

- ◆ Modified computer equipment
- ◆ Adapted writing instruments
- ◆ Provision of spell checking, word prediction and related software
- ◆ Use of a calculator
- ◆ Provision of voice recognition software
- ◆ Communication device(s)
- ◆ Shortened Assignments
- ◆ Organizational assistance
- ◆ Modified Expectations

## Supplementary Aids & Services

### To Promote Self Care

- ◆ Toileting
- ◆ Assistance with eating
- ◆ Moving about the environment
- ◆ Support to maintain behavioral or emotional regulation



Often, paraprofessionals and other human resources are thought of when considering SaS. We encourage IEP teams to think about unique combinations of instruction, accommodations, modifications and support that will enable students to attain independence and self-determination in the long run, while benefiting from instruction in the short term.





## Section C: Placement Process

### *General Placement Process*

Placement decisions should be made by made by a knowledgeable group of educators, parents/guardians, and advocates, and in some cases, should include the student. The placement must be determined and created individually for a student, based on his/her team-designed goals.



Will the student participate full-time with non-disabled peers in the general education environment? Will the student be educated in general education classes/environments with the use of supplementary aids and services? Will special education services be provided to the student in the general education classes/environment? Will a preschool child participate in age appropriate settings with non-disabled peers?

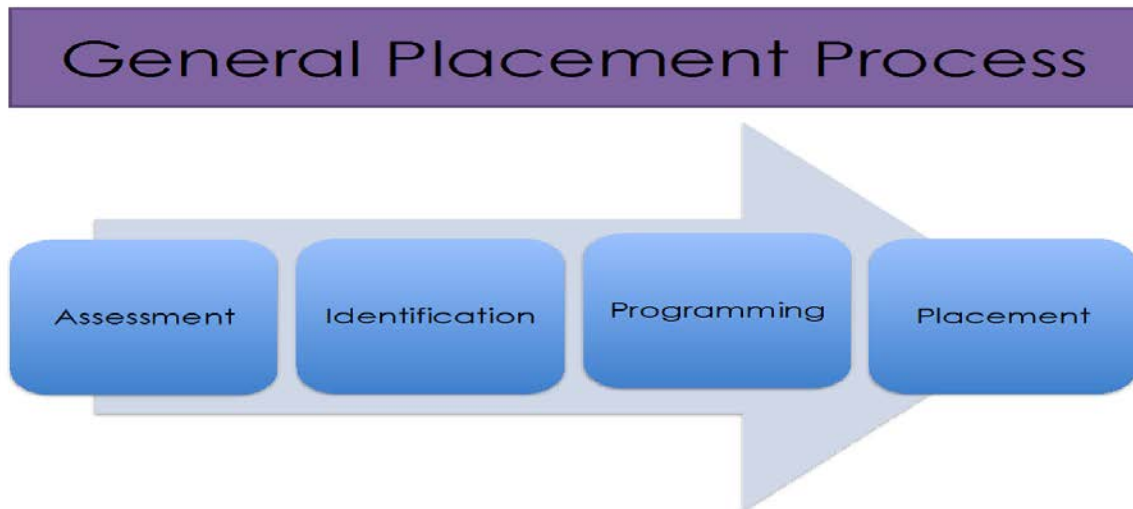
**Placements for students with disabilities should be seen as fluid.** This means that decisions are not stationary, but are reflective of student progress relative to IEP goals. A key responsibility of the IEP Team is aligning a student's current achievement, his/her placement, and the LRE principle throughout the school



year. The team's objective is always to progress towards being educated with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent as swiftly as possible.

Placement decisions occur at the end of the IEP process, after teams have conducted assessment procedures, considered identification, and created goals and programming for the student (if the team determines a disability).

Depicted graphically:



Because placement is individualized, schools are expected to provide a continuum of services ranging from full general education placement, to full-time in a special education environment, to off-site placements. The language of IDEA is instructive in understanding the intent of the continuum expectation:

IDEA 2004 Part 300 (B)(300.115)

*(a) Each public agency must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.*

IDEA 2004 Part 300 (B)(300.115)

(b) *The continuum required in paragraph (a) of this section must--*

*(1) Include the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education under Sec. 300.38 (instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions); and*



*(2) Make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement.*

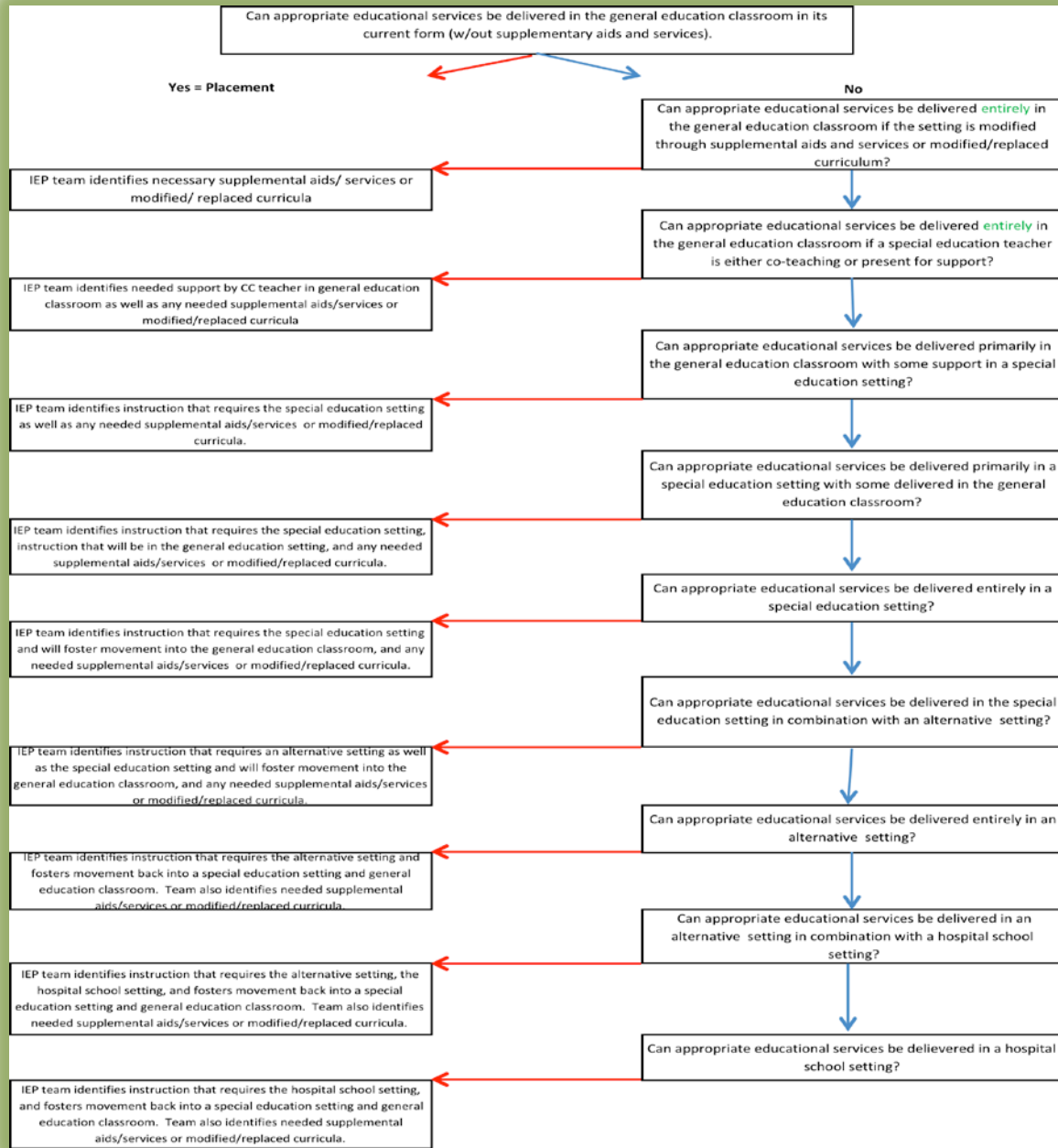
Unless a child's IEP requires some other arrangement, the child must be educated in the school he or she would attend if he or she did not have a disability [§300.552(c)].

On rare occasions, IEP Teams may decide on a [Shortened Day](#) for students who demonstrate that need. Moving to Shortened Day is a short term decision which rarely aligns with realization of IEP goals.



## Placement Flowchart

We offer the following flowchart to support teams as they make placement decisions:





*\*Please note that prior to placement in any more restrictive placements, the case manager or building administrator collaborates with central office on the documentation that supports the need for an IEP discussion regarding potential placement.*

As depicted above, in determining placement the essential question is: **“How might it be possible for the student to receive his/her individually determined services in a general education classroom?”** To answer, the following questions may also support teams as they consider procedural steps in placement:

- Ⓢ Does the IEP provide for the full range of supplementary aids and services that would facilitate the students’ progress in general education setting?
- Ⓢ What are the non-academic benefits to the student from interacting with nondisabled peers?
- Ⓢ If some services are best delivered outside of general education or other integrated settings, is it possible for the student to access the general education curriculum and meet his/her annual goals in general education/integrated settings for **some** of the school day?
- Ⓢ Given supplementary aids and services, is the student’s behavior so disruptive that the education of other students is significantly impacted? *If so, keep in mind the goal is to return the student to integrated settings as soon as possible.*
- Ⓢ Given supplementary aids and services, does the student require the curriculum to be modified so significantly that it bears little relation to the instruction in the classroom? *In these instances, first consider how community referenced or community based instruction may advance the students’ annual goals (Spooner, Knight, Browder, & Smith, 2012).*

### **Placement Missteps**

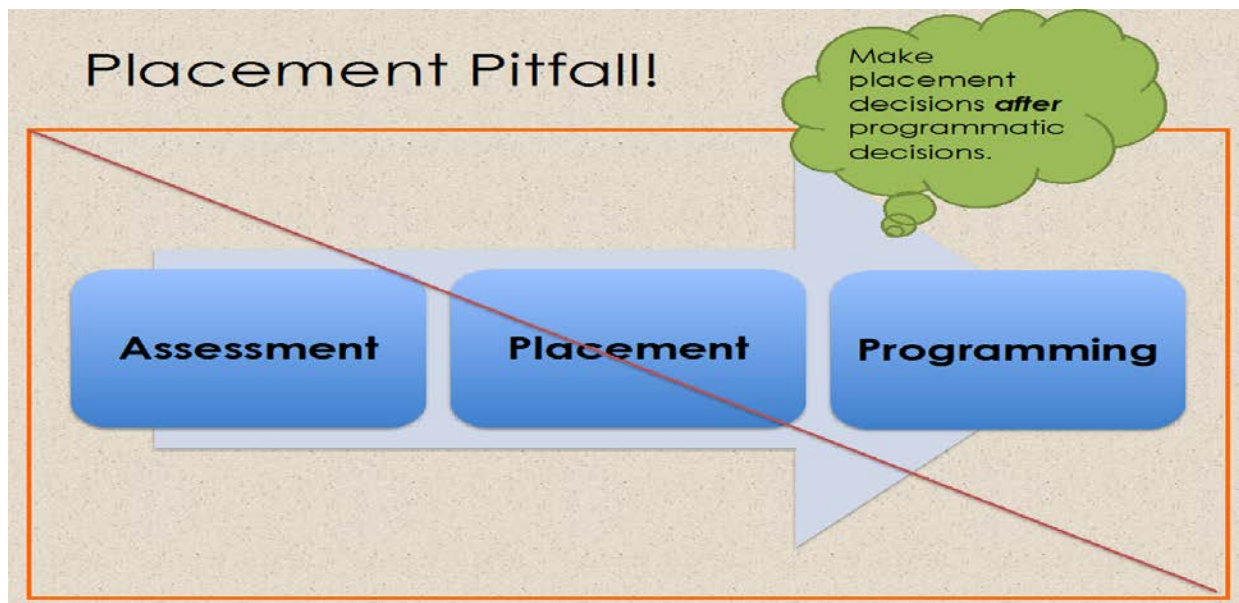
Along with careful examination of service delivery models, schools should also be mindful of common errors in placement. Consider these inappropriate (and often unintentional) influences for determining placement, with accompanying examples:

- **Category of disability** (“These are the services/this is the placement we provide for Ss with learning disabilities”)
- **Severity of disability** (“We always place students with intellectual disabilities in this environment...”)



- **Availability of related services** (*We can't provide that related service, we don't have \_\_\_ in MMSD*)
- **Availability of space** (*"We can't access that setting, that room is full."*)
- **Administrative convenience** (*"It will be easier for educators to track/support his progress in \_\_\_ environment, so let's place him there."*)

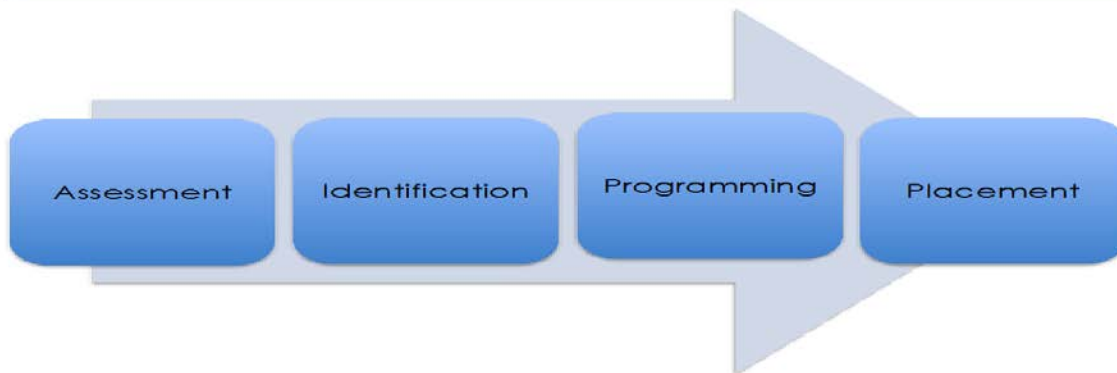
The process, and sequencing of steps in IEP development leading to placement is integral to honoring the LRE. To ensure beneficial placement decisions for students, make placement decisions only after the team has completed the goals and services section of the IEP. Deciding upon placement prematurely is a common procedure error (Yell, 2012), and we show it here visually:



Instead, please use the following graphic as a general guide (seen also above)



## General Placement Process



Important to note within the context of placement decisions is that while the IDEA carries a presumption that education will occur in integrated environments, the LRE clause is secondary to the law's requirement that educational placement must be based upon

appropriateness for the individual student's needs. In other words:

LRE ≠ General Education

Therefore, the availability of a continuum of alternative services, creatively and individually designed, is essential for IDEA adherence to both the letter of the law, and the vision of service delivery in MMSD.

### ***Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ Section)***

**A. How might we create more time for placement decisions? There is so much to discuss at IEP meetings!**

We agree! A few suggestions to make the most of the time we have include:

***Share present levels of performance ahead of time and link present levels to goals, and then services.*** Teams thus integrate valuable discussions about students' current performance while prioritizing instructional planning and service delivery, which often become sidelined due to time constraints. Use existing quarterly progress updates to further streamline the process.



**Send draft goals home and to all team members.** Making drafts available prior to meeting day provides advance-processing time and a path for the special educator to elicit feedback and anticipate questions early, maximizing time at the IEP meeting.

**Plan longer meetings for students with intensive needs.** Planning for inevitably complex IEP meetings demonstrates an appreciation for everyone's time and avoids rushing and retro-fitting that can occur when time is unavailable.

**Write few, simple, goals in one sentence to support clarity, promote coherence, and maximize time. And, use objectives to clarify your intent.**

**Capture big ideas at the meeting in real time, and wordsmith later.** Set a "final edit due-date" to insure team produces a final copy.

**Pace the meeting and forward the conversation when ideas have already been vetted.** Please see the DPI's Guide for Facilitating IEP Meetings [here](#); guide begins on page 6.

**B. Sometimes, we use the word "support" and the instructional implications are vague. I am not always sure what "support" means. How might we ensure we talk about actual instructional practices once students are placed?**

Some suggestions for clarifying "support" follow:

**When writing or saying the word "support", consider whether it is a verb or a noun—an action or an item.** If it is a person supporting, what is the adult doing? (Verbally prompting toileting procedures? Team-teaching in math? Providing advance guided notes in social studies?) If it is not a person, what support is being used? (Assistive technology? Adaptive equipment?) **Consider SaS.**

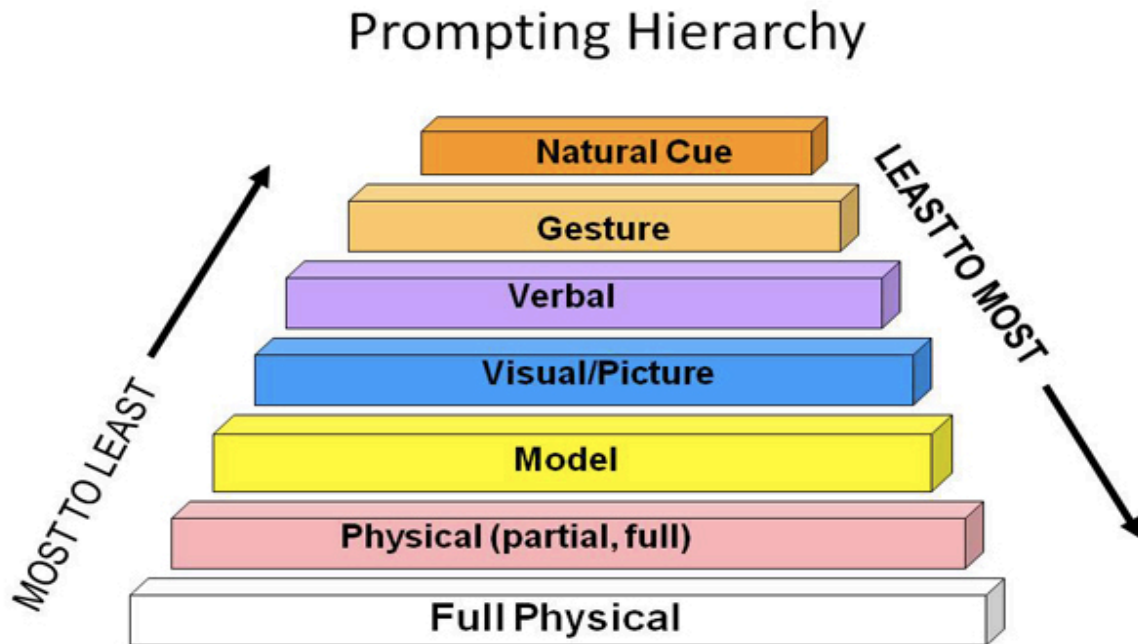
**Please use the word "support" with intention.** So many members of our staff have expressed concern about the uncertainty the term "support" brings. They want to know exactly what they should be doing or providing as they support. Be sure your use of the word "support" captures the specificity of your conversation at the IEP. Also, ensure your precise description of support is (a)in the IEP, (b)available to educators not in the room, and (c)useful as a future reference of those who were present.

Below is a graphic depicting various levels of support, in terms of prompting, form least to most intrusive. The language used may also be instructive for





teams when articulating what “support” might look like in goals, and service delivery planning:



<http://mast.ecu.edu/>

**C. How do we decide when a student’s behavior is significantly detrimental to the learning of other Ss, that we may consider other placements outside the general education classroom?**

The premise of this decision is nested in careful consideration of the updated BIP, with documentation and fidelity. Asking the following questions helps us get to this core:

**Does the student have access to all behavioral and social-emotional instruction and supports outlined with the school’s MTSS?** For example, when a student is refusing to comply with teacher directions, a team may first consider MTSS such as re-teaching expectations, emphasizing positive reinforcement, co-creating daily goals for behavior and engagement, analyzing instructional formats and strategies, and exploring the cultural responsiveness of curriculum. If the student does not have access to behavioral instruction and interventions within MTSS, he/she increasingly relies upon SaS and Related Services. Increased reliance upon specialized supports limits



engagement with non-disabled peers, decreases access to core instruction, and constrains building resources.

**What is the quality of the FBA, and resulting BIP?** Gathering and analyzing recent data can help us to define behaviors, and identify triggers and communicative intent, so we may meet Ss needs and avoid behavior that impedes others' learning. Your PST is instrumental in this process. Results of the implementation of the PST's FBA/BIP are prioritized as we collaboratively make decisions about placement.

**Have all educators connected to the student shared input into the plan? Do they all have knowledge of recent developments?** Have supports been defined and put in place, and has progress been monitored? What related services and modifications have been put in place, and (how) have those services impacted the Ss behavior?

**(When teams are concerned about safety)...What does your data reveal about the safety of other Ss?** Telling us about your data helps us to better serve you and our Ss as we problem-solve. Teams should consider the type of safety in question (risk to physical, emotional, etc.)

**Importantly, any restrictive placements are viewed as temporary.** Initial moves to restrictive settings are typically not an immediate jump, and are based upon intensive use of strategies designed to integrate students in general education environments. When students are served in restrictive settings, moving back into integrated settings provides current benefits, and leads to the preferred future for every child.

**D. As an SEA, I am concerned about how to serve students with IEPs in general education environments, especially when collaboration time is minimal, and/or the special or general educator's expectations seem unclear.**

First, SEAs are welcomed and respected members of the instructional team in MMSD. To communicate and activate this collaborative stance towards teamwork, we recommend teams establish team goals, and map out roles and responsibilities of members. You may wish to use this quick references for teams as they establish roles and responsibilities, and /or use this series of beliefs statements, along with corresponding indicators to gauge your team's activities. (<http://mmsd-sea-support.wikispaces.com/Best+Practice+Guidelines>)

When teams meet, discuss, and define roles at the beginning of their work together and throughout the year, we maximize opportunities to deliver IEP



services to the student in multiple environments. Conversely, when SEAs have misunderstandings or confusion about their roles and duties, we miss chances to support students' growth, as well as entry points to contribute to a thriving workforce. To jump-start the process of determining entry points for SEA contributions in general education classrooms, teams may meet to create a student participation plan. In creating the plan, the team outlines student-specific moves the SEA and other educators can make in alignment with IEP goals per environment. Click here for the template [here](#) for the sample.

Beginning in 2014-2015, SEAs now have access to 25 additional hours of PD. This addition represents an exciting opportunity for SEAs to participate in ongoing discussion about alignment of roles and responsibilities of all team members, as well as engage in Student Data Analysis, enacting the Great Teaching Framework. Supporting materials can be found [here](#).

Recognizing that high-quality teacher teams are the cornerstone to Great Teaching, central office supports the work of teacher teams as they develop, refine, reflect, and adjust their structures and functioning. We wish to become partners with schools as they engage in the complex and intellectually demanding work of teaming. Please contact the professional development team if you desire a thought partner, co-planner, and or facilitator of your team meeting process. You can reach Anna Park, who plans SEA professional learning, at [Park@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:Park@madison.k12.wi.us). We are eager to work with you.

### **E. What might a Continuum of Services look like in EC?**

In alignment with the larger MMSD Student Services Mission & Vision related to a Continuum of Services, the Early Childhood staff's values and beliefs regarding special education placement place emphasis upon the needs of our youngest learners within MMSD. The following statements ground our understanding of Early Childhood's theory of action:

1. A student's natural environment is the first setting that the IEP team considers as a placement option.
2. Students with disabilities access special education and related services in their natural environment as long as educational benefit can be derived from the implementation of their IEP.
3. Providing services to students in their natural environment promotes their learning, their sense of belonging, as well as generalization of skills taught.



4. Consistency in relationships and minimizing transitions are primary factors to be considered when placing students with disabilities.
5. To the maximum extent appropriate, students are educated with peers who do not have disabilities in their natural environment.
6. Students with disabilities are provided opportunities to participate in all functions and activities within their natural environment.
7. The IEP implementation team has the responsibility to coordinate and practice flexibility in the delivery of special education and related services amongst themselves and with other care givers within the student's natural environment.
8. IEP teams use resources efficiently and strategically.
9. When the IEP team proposes a placement outside of the student's natural environment, the team must document the opportunities the student will have to access peers who do not have disabilities.
10. The IEP decision to place a student in an MMSD Early Learning Session (ELS) classroom is done only after the team has considered and rejected placement of the student in their natural environment.

**The Placement Standard is thus:**

Pre-school aged students with disabilities will receive special education and related services in their natural environment (least restrictive environment (LRE)) unless the standard of a free, appropriate, public education (FAPE) cannot be maintained with the provision of specially designed instruction, related services, supplementary aides and services, and program modifications and supports.

For teams looking for a step by step process for determining special education placement, please see [Implementation Memo #5](#) for a process based upon a series of questions. This process is used when any special education or related service is being proposed. IEP teams arrive at a placement decision by collectively asking a series of questions that assist the team in placing the student in the LRE with access to peers without disabilities.



Because natural environments of our youngest learners are distinctive and diverse, MMSD Early Childhood Special Education teams consider a range of options for placement. As noted above, placements hinge upon each child's unique learning needs and particular environments the child

naturally experiences. The following is a sample, yet non-exhaustive list of options teams may considered:

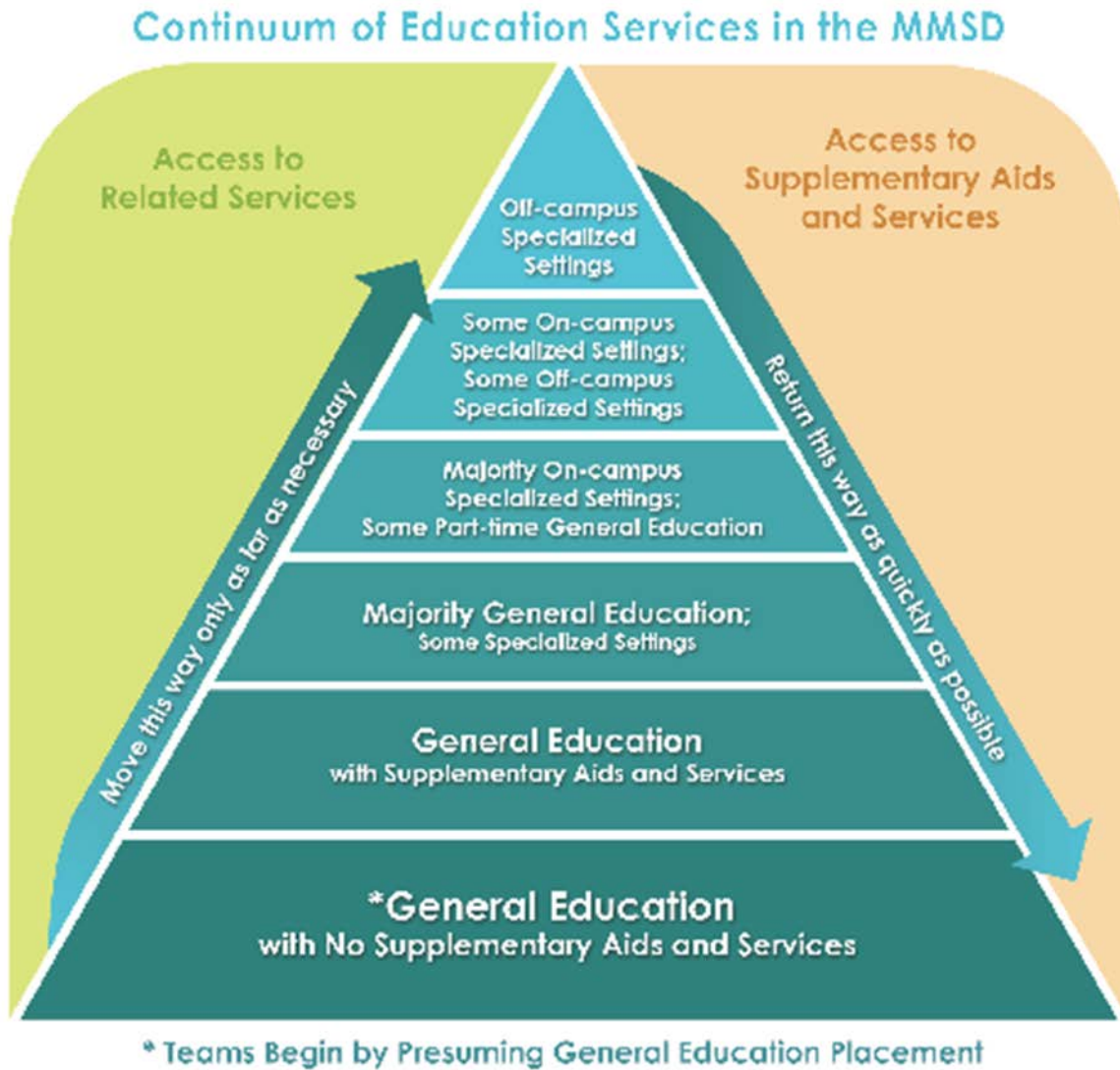
Home	Family Member's Home	Preschool or Child Care Facility	MMSD Play And Learn
MMSD Early Learning Standards	MMSD Early Learning Session	MMSD 4k Community Site	MMSD 4k School Site

**F. When I am delivering specialized instruction, can students in general education also participate in the intervention/instruction?**

Yes, under certain conditions. Special educators may deliver formal interventions to students without disabilities if they would already be performing these same duties in order to provide special education and related services to children without disabilities, therefore delivering "incidental benefit" (For further explanation, please see DPI's [Guidance Related to OSEP's Letter for Couillard](#)). When special educators provide formal interventions to students without disabilities, the instruction is short-term and goal-specific, with an exit plan in mind. Teachers should be sure to take data on how the student is progressing to determine when he/she can exit the intervention. If the student makes little or no progress, educators should develop systems of support and tiered interventions to respond to the student's need. One concern we have in including students in general education in specialized instruction/interventions is that we want to ensure we provide all the safeguards and rights to students with identified disabilities to which they are entitled. If there is a student whom the team perceives demonstrates significant, pervasive challenges that may impede learning, we want to follow through with our complete referral process.



As shared at the beginning of this document, we use the following graphic to depict an array of services available for IEP Teams to consider:





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