

Special Education Staffing Plan

SY 2025 - 2026

St. Mary's County Public Schools
Department of Special Education



Assurance and Compliance

The St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) Staffing Plan is consistent with procedures outlined by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for the purpose of ensuring a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities.

Evidence of Public Input

Public input to the plan is sought on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Input is obtained from caseload reviews with supervisory staff, site-based administrative staff, School Improvement Team feedback, the Citizens Advisory Committee for Special Education (CACSE) members, and Board of Education presentations.

Staffing Plan/Budget Timeline

January 2025	Infant and Toddler Teams, Individualized Education Program (IEP) Chairpersons, Special Education Department Chairs, and Elementary School special education representatives initiate transition planning for students transitioning from Part C services to Part B services, students matriculating from 5 th to 6 th grade, and from 8 th to 9 th grade. Sending schools meet with receiving schools to review individualized student needs. Planning begins to ensure appropriate resources are in place for the beginning of the next school year. Supervisors meet with school-based teams/administrators to discuss transition needs.
March 2025	Leadership teams continue plans for the SMCPS system-wide articulation day in preparation for student transitions between levels and schools. Initial staffing decisions are based on data obtained from the Maryland Online IEP census data, caseloads, projected enrollment data, preliminary budget allocations, and feedback evaluation received during the 2024-2025 school year.
June 2025	The draft Staffing Plan is posted on the SMCPS Department of Special Education webpage and the CACSE website.
May-September 2025	Individual school caseloads/updated Special Services Information System (SSIS) data are reviewed for final staffing assignments to school sites for the 2025-2026 SY. The SMCPS Special Education Staffing Plan is presented to the Board of Education.

September 2025	Budget preparations begin for FY 2026. The Director begins the initial identification of special education staffing needs for the FY 2026-2027.
January 2026	The Board of Education begins public hearings and work sessions on the FY 2027 budget.
Jan-March 2026	The Director, Supervisors, and SMCPS Finance Department review current SSIS data for schools and verify current staffing. Infants and Toddler program staff and Pre-school special education staff conduct transition planning for three, four, and five-year-old students. Planning for program support needed for the 2026 - 2027 SY begins.

The Director meets regularly with the SMCPS CACSE for current information from the community. The Director also sits on the Division of Instruction Team. This team meets weekly throughout the calendar year to review and discuss issues as they relate to the departments of Human Resources, Curriculum and Instruction, Safety and Security, Accountability and Reporting, Title I and Family Engagement, Student Services, and Special Education.

LOCAL FUNDING

Evidence of Maintenance of Effort

During the budgetary process, the Director of Special Education works directly with fiscal services staff, special education supervisors, and school teams to ensure a continuation of baseline needs in special education and to identify additional supports that are necessary to support ongoing needs. The FY2026 budget planning works with the state and local funding sources to meet the identified needs related to students with IEPs, staff compensation, and increasing student enrollment.

Maintenance of Effort:

SFY 2024 IDEA MOE Option 3 (Actual)	\$37,046,130
SFY 2026 IDEA MOE Option 3 (Budgeted)	\$42,762,372

Summary of LOCAL Expenditures

Summary of Expenditures by Object	FY 2026 Approved Budget
7100 Salaries and Wages	\$21,299,160
7200 Contracted Services	\$1,940,609
7300 Supplies & Materials	\$81,501
7400 Other Charges	\$63,900
7900 Transfers	\$2,565,864
Total Special Education Category	\$25,951,034

Supplemental Funding Resources

State FFY 2026 IDEA Part B Allocations

IDEA Part B 611 State Grant Passthrough and CCEIS	\$3,825,854
Passthrough Proportional Share for Parentally Placed Private School Students	\$122,179
IDEA Part B 619 Preschool Passthrough	\$120,514
Preschool Passthrough Proportionate Share for Parentally Placed Private School Students	\$2,386
IDEA Part B State Grant Discretionary	
SE Advisory Committee	\$2,500
Family Support Systems	\$16,000
LIR Grants	\$228,004
<u>TOTAL Federal PART B</u>	\$4,317,437

Passthrough funds primarily support supplemental staffing for:

- 11.43 Special Education Teachers
- 2 Occupational Therapists
- 0.6 Physical Therapist
- 0.5 Audiologist
- 2 Psychologists
- 23.49 Paraprofessionals
- 2 Behavior Specialists (non-board certified)
- Therapists - Contracted
- 2 CCEIS Counselors

Medical Assistance Funding

The Maryland Department of Health manages the federal Medical Assistance program. With parental permission, the public schools may submit reimbursements to the Medical Assistance program for service coordination, transportation, and related services provided by the public schools. School systems bill, based on federal billing rates and student eligibility. The Department of Special Education is reimbursed for Medical Assistance eligible students at approximately 50% of the billable rate. The other 50% is rolled into the general funds to support special education.

The projected SY 2026 Medical Assistance budget is

\$2,691,878

Medical Assistance Funds support:

- Support Staff
 - 1 Behavior Specialist (Non-Board Certified Behavior Analyst)
 - 3 Speech Pathologists
 - 15 Special Education Paraeducators
 - Therapists - Contracted
 - Paraeducators and Enhanced Adult Support (ESP) Providers- Contracted
 - Substitute Coverage
 - Adult Facility Service Supplemental Pay
- Instructional Resources
 - Typing Program
 - Wilson Materials and Training
 - Boom Software
 - News 2 You
 - iReady
 - Everyday Speech
- Accessibility Resources and Equipment
 - Assistive Technology Equipment
 - TextHelp Software
 - Repair of Materials and Equipment
 - Translation Services
 - Braille Books
- MSDE Administrative Cost
- Staff Travel
- Staff Professional Development
- Camp Inspire
- Summer Program
- Goalbook
- Materials of Instruction
- Medicaid Billing Software and Services

Consolidated Local Implementation Grant (CLIG) Infants and Toddler Program

State Fiscal Year 2025 IDEA CLIG Allocations	\$681,499
Projected SY 2025 Medical Assistance Infants and Toddlers budget	\$240,401

CLIG and Infants and Toddlers Medical Assistance Funds Support

- 1 Speech Language Pathologist
- 1 Special Education Teacher
- 1 Secretary
- 1 Paraeducator
- Social Worker (through DSS Agency Partner)
- Occupational, Physical, and Speech Services
- Family Support Network Parent - Contracted
- Preschool Partners Parent - Contracted

- Materials of Instruction
- Supplemental Pay

Special Education Priority Areas

Early Intervention Services

SMCPS continues to collaborate with the Maryland State Department of Education to implement a process to meet the staffing needs to provide continuous and ongoing services for Infants and Toddlers with seamless transitions to Part B services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Federal laws and the state of Maryland require that services for Infant and Toddler families, as well as the Extended Part C Option families, are provided on a continuous, year-round basis. Unlike services for school-aged children (3-21), summer services are not determined on an individual basis as in Extended School Year (ESY) Services. In order to provide a coordinated system of early intervention and early childhood education that allows children with disabilities to receive all the prescribed services necessary to develop their abilities to achieve school readiness as they enter kindergarten, the Department of Special Education (DSE) has braided local, state, and federal funds and programs to provide these supports and services to children and families. Infant and Toddlers service providers now work throughout the summer so that students will receive consistent services. On July 1, 2014, SMCPS assumed "Lead Agency" in the partnership between the St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD) and the Department of Social Services (DSS). Through an interagency agreement with all three agencies, roles and responsibilities have been outlined and agreed upon. This increases the capacity of SMCPS to maximize programming, to ensure our children are school ready.

State data indicates that work is needed in the areas of Social, Emotional Skills. Research supports the critical need for an inclusive environment and experiences for key learning portions of each day. The Flexible Funding section of the Local Application of Federal Funds will support the expansion of increased collaborative partnerships between both general and special education pre-school teachers. Experience has demonstrated that children learn best from each other. When typical peer experiences are part of each day, children can engage with and learn from one another.

The Harvard Family Research Project focuses on the need for strong family and community involvement in creating programs that address social skills development as well as early language, literacy, and mathematics skills to provide a strong foundation on which to build future learning. The Frog Street Program provides these opportunities and incorporates Conscious Discipline, a social and emotional classroom management system that provides teachers with the discipline skills they need to address the emotional and social needs of children in the twenty-first century. Another critical aspect of the program is that it provides built-in modifications to allow children with disabilities to receive the differentiated assistance they need to access learning in the general education environment with their typical peers. Opportunities for success are greater when children are afforded consistent expectations in behavior and pre-academics as they transition through their pre-school experiences.

This collaborative partnership will support the foundation on which to increase opportunities for all young children in St. Mary's County Public Schools to learn in a more inclusive setting and build on the relationships that provide success for all children.

Family engagement is always an essential element to achieving school success. Research shows that families who are engaged have children who are more invested in attending school

and doing well while they are there. Families will be provided opportunities to attend activities that promote early learning and provide an opportunity for parents to receive information to assist their children in learning the necessary prerequisite skills that promote school success.

Academic Interventions to Close the Achievement Gap

The Early Childhood grant and One Time Supplemental grant are focused on increasing the rate of progress for students with disabilities in order to narrow the achievement gap. (A brief explanation of these grants will be included in the final Staffing Plan). Included in our efforts to decrease the gap are opportunities for our staff members to engage in professional development activities that address multiple areas that support student success.

SMCPS continues to work to braid funds and blend programs to provide opportunities for children with disabilities to engage with their typically developing peers. We continue to strive to build strong partnerships with families and to engage parents in becoming strong partners in the educational programming for their children.

Professional Development

- Development of Standards Aligned IEPs
- Learning Language and Loving It
- iReady
- Tier II behavior intervention
- Training and Rating Child Outcome Summary Process
- Hot topics for special education staff
- IEP department chair
- Early Learning Assessment Training
- Equity in Educational Settings
- Hanen Takes Two to Talk, Hanen Spark
- Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning
- Picture Exchange Communication System
- Conscious Discipline
- Goalbook
- Visualizing and Verbalizing Training
- Focused and Targeted Professional Development
- Key2Ed

Staffing Patterns of Service Providers

The St. Mary's County Public Schools' Blueprint Plan, Annual Update, and the MSDE Self-Assessment of Public Agency Performance on IDEA Part C and Part B Indicators, provide a comprehensive, integrated, countywide plan, identifying the school system's goals and strategies for meeting them, and the methods of evaluating achievement of the goals and objectives.

The DSE has collaborated with the MSDE to implement a process that addresses the staffing challenges for 12-month services. The DSE has braided Federal Passthrough funding, grants, and Medical Assistance monies with local funds to meet the needs of children and families in 12-month programs.

Each year, the Staffing Plan for the current school year is reviewed and revised based on system census information, caseload information, and input from school administrators, site based instructional staff, program coordinators, and appropriate stakeholders in the

community. SMCPS utilizes a staffing plan for providers based on student IEP needs, student census, and instructional collaboration with general educators. Through this model, students in SMCPS have their IEPs implemented in the Least Restrictive Environments (LRE). This plan has been refined and expanded to include related service providers. It also offers an appropriate and equitable basis for all schools, with individual additions of staff based on student and/or IEP needs.

The number of students served by an individual service provider may vary based on the needs of the students, the location of the service, and other duties required of service providers. Other duties that must be considered are assessments, IEP meetings, service coordination, medical assistance requirements, support to access community resources, job development, and travel time for itinerant staff between schools. The schools must make every effort to provide services in the student's LRE. The school-based team considers the needs of each student and the support and services necessary to provide access to the general education curriculum.

All personnel used to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities are included in this staffing plan. They include:

- Special Educators to include Vision, Audiology, and Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Paraeducators
- Related Service Providers (OT/PT/SLP)

Based on the considerations stated above, guidelines have been developed to operationalize the assignment of special education staff to schools.

Summary Guidelines

Elementary School Special Education Teachers

- General Education enrollment with an average of 1 special education teacher for every 200 general education students enrolled in grades K-5.
- *Per the negotiated agreement*, all elementary school teachers will have a minimum of 225 minutes per week, within the students' day, for planning. Planning periods should be in not less than 30-minute blocks.
- Each teacher will have a duty-free lunch.
- When developing their individual schedules, teachers should be mindful of instructional interventions and compliance requirements (assessments, case management, etc.).
- *Average* caseloads of 18 students per special education teacher.
- Assignment of full time paraeducators determined by average caseloads and support of LRE.

Recommendations for Scheduling Students with a Disability (SWD) in Elementary Schools

- Concentrate resources for co-teaching in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- Class enrollment should be reflective of proportional representation, as closely as possible by limiting the number of SWD to approximately no more than 12 percent SWD in the general education classes.
- Limit classes that include SWD and supported instruction to no more than 25 students per class with proportional representation.

- Provide interventions beyond the core curriculum during guided practice or designated intervention times in order to maximize the time SWD are directly engaged with a professional.
- Minimize the assignment of "extra" duties such as bus, cafeteria, and recess duties. Case management is the special educators' "extra duty".
- The DSE has worked with the Technology Department to allow access to Schoology and TAC for special educators to facilitate a more efficient case management system for special education teachers to access student progress and achievement information.

Middle School Special Education Teachers

- General Education enrollment with an *average* of 1 special education teacher for every 150 general education students enrolled in grades 6-8.
- *Per the negotiated agreement*, All secondary school teachers will normally have a minimum of five planning periods per week. Each teacher will have a duty-free lunch.
- When developing their individual schedules, teachers should be mindful of instructional interventions and compliance requirements (assessments, case management).
- *Average* caseloads of 15 students per special education teacher.
- Assignment of full time paraeducators is determined by average caseloads and support of LRE.

Recommendations for Scheduling SWD in Middle Schools

- Concentrate resources for co-teaching in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- Class enrollment should be reflective of proportional representation, as closely as possible, by limiting the number of SWD to approximately no more than 12 percent SWD in the general education classes.
- Limit classes that include SWD and supported instruction to no more than 25 students per class with proportional representation.
- Provide interventions beyond the core curriculum during guided practice or designated intervention times in order to maximize the time SWD are directly engaged with a professional.
- Minimize the assignment of "extra" duties such as bus, cafeteria, and recess duties. Case management is the special educators' "extra duty".
- The DSE has worked with the Technology Department to allow access to Schoology and TAC for special educators in order to facilitate a more efficient case management system for special education teachers to access student progress and achievement information.

High School Special Education Teachers

- General Education enrollment with an average of 1 special education teacher for every 200 general education students enrolled in high school.
- *Per the negotiated agreement*, All secondary school teachers will normally have a minimum of five planning periods per week. Each teacher will have a duty-free lunch.
- When developing their individual schedules, teachers should be mindful of instructional interventions and compliance requirements (assessments, case management).
- Assignment of full time paraeducators is determined by average caseloads and support of LRE.

Recommendations for Scheduling SWD in High Schools

- Priority should be given to supported instruction classes and scheduling for freshmen English, Algebra, and Study Skills classes
- Refine the use of credit-bearing study skills classes for SWD to differentiate the types of support provided to students who require organization and study skills from those who require instructional remediation and intervention.
- Class enrollment should be reflective of proportional representation, as closely as possible by limiting the number of SWD to approximately no more than 12 percent SWD in the general education classes.
- Limit classes that include SWD and supported instruction to no more than 25 students per class with proportional representation.
- Minimize the assignment of "extra" duties such as bus, cafeteria, and recess duties.
- Case management is the special educators' "extra duty".
- The DSE has worked with the Technology Department to allow access to Schoology and TAC for special educators in order to facilitate a more efficient case management system for special education teachers to access student progress and achievement information.

Infant and Toddler Programs

To the maximum degree possible, all infants and toddlers receive services in their natural environments. In addition to natural environments, children have the opportunity to receive services at regionalized programs located in two elementary schools: one in the northern area and one in the southern area of the county.

- One teacher for an average of 25 infants/toddlers

Preschool Special Education

Three-year-old students recommended to receive classroom instructional services receive their instruction in half-day programs clustered in one of two elementary schools and in community pre-school programs. Children who are three may also participate in playgroup opportunities. Students receiving single services may receive them in their home schools. Specially designed instruction is provided in preschool special education classrooms, as well as the general education classrooms. Four year old children who are income eligible may receive a seat in a general education prekindergarten program if space permits. Four year old children who require specially designed instruction for a greater portion of their day would receive services in a regional preschool program with opportunities to join their typically developing peers for portions of their instruction.

- One special education teacher and two paraeducators are assigned to regional preschool classrooms, with an average of 10 students
- Special education teachers support students who are placed in their home schools for less intense special education services.

Regionalized Programs

Teaching Independence and Developmental Skills to Early Elementary Students (TIDES)

The TIDES Program encompasses teaching independence and developmental skills to students in the primary grades in an environment with multiple opportunities for repetition and spiraling of foundational early academic skills with embedded behavioral supports. Students will be enrolled in a classroom with a smaller teacher to student ratio, with opportunities for inclusion in the general education environment as individually appropriate based on academic and behavioral readiness.

- One special education teacher and one paraeducator for an average of nine students per session for intensive need students
- Additional Support Staff

Supporting Academics and Independent Living (SAIL) Programs

The SAIL Program is designed to provide special education services to students who have documented significant cognitive disabilities and have been identified as needing an alternative, adapted, and functional curriculum. SAIL classes are located in each high school, middle school, and in two regionalized programs at the elementary level. In all settings, students have opportunities to interact with their typical peers. The following guidelines are considered when assigning staff:

- One special education teacher and one paraeducator for an average of nine students
- Additional support staff

Learning Adjustment (LAP) Program

Most students with emotional/behavioral factors that interfere with their learning receive their services within a continuum of services provided at their home school. For those students who require a highly structured behavioral program with a small student to teacher ratio, SMCPs maintains LAP classes at two elementary cluster sites, two middle schools, and two high schools. At all sites, SWD are provided opportunities to interact in the general education setting with typical peers. The following guidelines are considered when assigning staff:

- One special education teacher and one paraeducator for an average of nine students
- The LAP program team includes 2 LAP Counselors to meet the social/emotional needs of our students
- Additional support staff

Community Promoting Academic and Social Success (COMPASS)

Most students (6-21) with autism spectrum disabilities (ASD) receive their special education services within a continuum of services provided at their home schools. For those students who require a highly structured behavioral, academic, and socially engineered program, SMCPs maintains a continuum of services that includes cluster classes at each level. These classes provide services for behavior, communication, and social needs. Currently, there are specialized classroom programs at elementary, middle, and high school levels. Specialized support is available across the system. Additionally, central office-based staff in the form of a

Supervisor of Special Education and an Inclusion Instructional Resource Teacher will provide system wide services and embedded staff development for school-based teams.

- One special education teacher and one paraeducator for an average of nine students
- Additional support staff

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Students with hearing impairments are served primarily in their home schools.

- One teacher of the hearing impaired
- Two educational interpreters

Gateway to Independence Program

Students who are working toward a Maryland Certificate of Completion have program entitlements through the age of 21. As part of their transition planning, they may be considered for the Gateway to Independence program. These students meet at the College of Southern Maryland for the classroom component and spend the second half of their day on job sites with the support of a job coach, as appropriate. Students who have transitioned from this program have all been employed, with or without job coaches, in community job sites, and have received travel training. The following guidelines are considered when assigning staff:

- One special education teacher and two job coaches for an average of 18 students
- Additional job coaches are assigned based on student needs

Staffing for Related Service Providers

Staffing for speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, teachers of the visually impaired, sign language interpreters, LAP counselors, and itinerant teachers of the hearing impaired is based on the following considerations: number of students, number of sites served, frequency of services, and professional duties and responsibilities. The Director of Special Education recommends to the Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Fiscal Services and Human Resources, the amount of central office support required to monitor the provisions of special education service to schools, to implement programs designed to enhance student performance and to supervise and support school based and itinerant staff. In determining the number of special education support staff required, the Director considers:

- The number of schools and programs to be supported
- The number of special education staff to be supported, giving special consideration to new staff needs
- Support to students transitioning to post-secondary work, training, and/or schooling
- The number of students requiring assistive technology
- DSE needs as determined through the Self-Assessment of Public Agency Performance and Annual Updates
- Internal/state monitoring of the implementation of services and the staffing needs

Caseload Review Process

Despite efforts to ensure that all positions are filled, a vacancy may occur due to emergency or medical leave, childcare issues, or the lack of available qualified personnel. Vacancies most

often occur in the areas of related service providers (OT, PT, and SLP). In the case of a related service provider, typically, a contract provider is hired until the positions are filled. When vacancies for a site-based teacher or paraeducator occur, either a long term substitute is hired, or a redistribution of existing staff occurs while SMCPs tries to fill the position. If the vacancy causes a temporary lapse in the delivery of special education services and the services cannot be made up, compensatory services are provided.

Principals and/or parents may make requests in writing for additional staff due to special program needs or unusual circumstances. An IEP program review for the individual child will be scheduled. The Department of Special Education will:

- Confirm the request
- Verify the specific need or unusual circumstance through an IEP program review and consultation with the Special Education Supervisor
- Review the existing data
- Review the staffing patterns to ensure that the school resources are utilized to the maximum extent appropriate
- Agree or disagree with the request

If the IEP Team determines the need, the Director of Special Education follows up by securing the funding and assigning the additional staff. If a need is not verified, the Director of Special Education confers with the principal to resolve the concern.

Parentally Placed Students in Private Parochial Schools

SMCPs provides Child Find activities for all students residing in St. Mary's County. Private and Parochial schools' representatives from each school located in St. Mary's County are invited to attend two meetings annually. SMCPs shares information from the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the Maryland State Department of Education. Comments and concerns are invited. After consultation with the private/parochial schools' representatives, SMCPs agreed to provide articulation and language services to parentally placed private school students, who require speech/language services, grades PreK-5. These services are agreed upon and reviewed with all participants annually through a Provision of Proportionate Share Services agreement. This agreement is posted on our website each year.

Monitoring for Continuous Improvement

IEP Chairpersons meet monthly, where professional development is held as a proactive measure to ensure IEP Chairpersons receive training in the most current instructional initiatives, compliance, and procedural information. Special Education Department chairs meet five times a year to receive identified trainings to assist and build strengths within the IEP process. The expectation is that these school-based leaders provide the information and training to their teams at the site-based level.

SMCPs uses the Maryland State Online IEP program for program evaluation, detailed compliance monitoring and state and federal reporting. Technology training with the software is combined with the IEP Chairperson trainings. The DSE conducts ongoing compliance audits as part of self-assessment activities and provides detailed monthly reports to each school. Additional professional development is provided to individual sites and/or individual staff if non-compliance persists. These audits also help the DSE identify systemic areas of concern to correct non-compliance as quickly as possible.

If a complaint or Due Process request is filed, SMCPS investigates immediately and works with the MSDE investigators to correct the complaint.

Evaluation of Plan Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the staffing plan is reflected, in part, in the progress toward meeting the standards and goals identified in the *MSDE Self-Assessment of Public Agency Performance on IDEA Report*. Improvement planning includes not only the staffing planning but also the identification of outcomes and strategies that are most likely to result in systemic changes and improved results.

The DSE uses Federal Passthrough funding to provide supplemental staffing needed to implement special education services. Special Education Supervisors work closely with building principals and site-based classroom teachers to ensure special education programs are providing appropriate services and opportunities for inclusion with typically developing peers.