



August 2014

Department of Student Services Areas of Improvement

Following the Futures Education program review that was completed in April 2014, the Department of Student Services identified both short and long-term areas of improvement. Below is a prioritized list and status as of August 2014.

- 1. Psychologist/Social Worker – recalibrate role:** Over time, the roles of student services personnel have drifted away from their core responsibilities of providing services to students. This is particularly evident regarding students with disabilities (especially those with emotional behavioral disabilities). The purpose of recalibrating the psychologist and social worker role is to strike the appropriate balance of meeting the demands of students needing support with other systems level work. The program review noted that every school in the district has several students with very high social-emotional/mental health needs yet the vast majority do not receive individualized (or group) psychological/social work services. As a consequence, a small number of students can create an acute and significant need for additional resources (either behavior support teams or additional staffing). Providing regular on-going related services to our highest need students is an appropriate first step to addressing this need.
Status: Revised standards of practice have been developed for Student Services staff. Revised job descriptions will be shared with Principals in October 2014. The role recalibrations are expected to be gradual and will take place during the 2014-15 school-year.
- 2. IEP Goals, Objectives and assessment measures:** The program review identified annual goals and objective measurements to evaluate student progress as an area of need. Further, it was highly recommended the district return to the use of short-term objectives to assist in monitoring/evaluating progress. Short-term objectives are discrete measurable steps or smaller components of a larger overall goal. For the 2014-15 school-year, we will *highly encourage* the use of objectives with IEP goals but not mandate, except where legally required. Along with the return to objectives, the program review team recommended we dramatically improve the assessment measures to evaluate student progress on IEP Goals and Objectives (Quarterly Progress Reports). Specifically, the use of AimsWeb for progress monitoring in reading and math was recommended in addition to consistent/objective measures. Doing so provides IEP teams and in particular parents/guardians with relevant data to evaluate progress, programming, and placements.
Status: Programming changes have been made to allow for short-term objectives. Initial professional development activities have been created as well as examples by level (PK, elementary, middle, and high school).

- 3. Continuum of Environments and Array of Services – Instruction and intervention within the continuum:** While Madison has a strong history of inclusive education, the program review noted gaps in the continuum of environments and array of services. Related to this point, there is a heavy reliance on select co-teaching practices (particularly, one teaches/one assists and team teaching) which in many cases limits the ability of special educators in providing explicit instruction to students with disabilities. Inconsistent with MMSD’s inclusive education, the program review observed significant levels of clustering (students with disabilities) creating disproportionate classroom environments (in some cases the density of students with disabilities is greater than 50%). The recommendation is to heterogeneously distribute students with disabilities, adjust the team teaching/co-teaching practices to include additional models based on student need, and where necessary, utilize additional learning environments such as an “academic excellence center” where all students (but especially those with disabilities) can receive explicit skill(s) instruction outside the general education environment. This latter point recognizes that to the maximum extent possible, students with disabilities receive their education in general education and/or integrated environments. There are however times when, based on learning needs, students benefit from explicit skill instruction in smaller, distraction free environments on a time-limited basis. Doing so further enables educators to individualize programs, services, and instruction.

Status: A finalized guidance document will be introduced in the coming months. Introducing the continuum document and the recommendations specified therein will require dedicated professional learning time.
- 4. Alternative Learning Programs for Students with Disabilities:** The program review team strongly recommended dedicating an administrator to oversee all the alternative learning programs (for students with disabilities). These programs (e.g., LEAP, SBA, NEON) have grown over time yet administrative oversight has remained an additive duty of an assistant director. The review also identified the need for each program to have a detailed description, clear entry/exit criteria and progress monitoring tools to evaluate student growth (academic/behavior). Further, each program will have a unique identifier so information can be disaggregated, monitored, and evaluated using the district’s data dashboard.

Status: Jon Woloshin is our new Coordinator of Alternative Learning Programs/Services.
- 5. Communication and Information Transfer:** The program review identified communication and information transfer as an area that requires immediate attention. Specifically, they identified gaps and inconsistencies regarding communication and information flow causing confusion and limited implementation of required special education related responsibilities. The recommendation is to have alignment of message and clear communication with the Board of Education, superintendent/assistant superintendent, Student Services administration, PSTs, special and regular education teachers, SEAs. It is recommended the Board receive regular updates regarding students with disabilities (e.g., twice per year updates on student achievement/outcomes, programs, services, challenges and successes). Moreover, it is recommended the superintendent and assistant superintendents receive regular updates on the district’s special education programs, services, and student achievement/outcomes. District staff have made significant progress in creating a new Data Dashboard feature dedicated exclusively to special education (Sped STAT) services. This feature will assist both central office and principals in monitoring and evaluating special education programs and services. Central office administrators will use the Sped STAT to prioritize school needs and follow up with diagnostic reviews to determine root cause, needed supports and/or additional resources.

Status: Phase I of the SPED STAT reports are complete and are fully functional within the dashboard. The system allows for a district-wide view/prioritization as well as the ability of site-based staff to

drill down to the student level. Assistant directors will meet with principals in the beginning of the year and provide a brief tutorial. The district-level report has allowed for a prioritization of schools identified for diagnostic reviews.

6. **Adjustments in the role of the Assistant Director:** The recommendation is to ensure the assistant director is the primary contact for special education and Section 504 questions/issues in their area and that they partner with the chief of schools to better support schools. Specifically, they strongly suggest the assistant directors accompany chief of schools during walkthroughs and deep dives; use data dashboard/other relevant data to tier or prioritize their schools for different levels of support; create an individual support plan for each school, and meet with John Harper every other week to track progress and problem solve.
Status: The Student Services administrative team has developed a new process for prioritizing school needs (for students with disabilities) and identifying/providing necessary support. This revised process will be implemented during the 2014-15 school-year.
7. **SEA Professional Development:** The program review team strongly encouraged the district to create more job embedded learning opportunities for SEAs. Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, each SEA will be provided 25 hours per year (of paid employment) to support professional learning activities. This may be used to attend after school professional learning activities or collaborate with teaching staff. With assistance from the assistant director, the principal of each school will devise a plan that meets their school needs. As suggested by the review team, Student Services will also be adjusting the content of our induction and after school learning opportunities to include classroom accommodations and modifications to reduce over-reliance on staff and increase student independence.
Status: The Department of Student Services will provide the funding. Within the first 2 weeks of school, each assistant director to meet with principals in their area to map out a professional development plan.
8. **Assistive Technology (AT):** The program review team determined that the district possesses an appropriate amount of assistive technology devices however, actual student use and/or application is below expected levels. Their recommendation is to streamline the process to make it easier for students to receive assistive technology devices they need to benefit from their educational program.
Status: An initial review of internal processes is underway.
9. **Administrator Professional Development on Special Education:** The program review team concluded that historically, principals have had little district provided professional development in the areas of special education and Section 504. Starting next year, the district must develop principal capacity to effectively lead schools in improving the outcomes of students with disabilities. Recommendations include a “boot camp” or institute for school leaders on special education and Section 504; create on-line units or modules on special education and Section 504 topics; provide greater depth of professional development for the new principal induction process; utilize current principals/assistant directors/executive director in leading professional learning opportunities at principal meetings.
Status: As a first step, a 45 minute professional development module at the Legal Services Institute (July 16, 2014). Additional professional development sessions are being created/planned, some in collaboration with UW-Madison (Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis).
10. **Local Education Agency Representative (LEA Rep) recertification** (every 1 - 3 years): Local Education Agency Representative or LEA Reps is a required member of the IEP team. The essential

function of the LEA Rep is to assist the team in reaching consensus on the district's offer of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for a student with a disability. Currently, all eligible LEA Reps are required to attend a single two hour training. Based on the program review team's strong recommendation, the Department of Student Services should develop and implement an LEA Rep recertification process (every 1 to 3 years). Doing so will keep LEA Reps current on district, state, and federal requirements/practices.

Status: A team from Student Services has already begun the development of modules with implementation expected during the 2014-15 school year.

11. Special Education Teacher Professional Development – Special Education Teacher Team Meetings:

While many schools already have monthly special education team meetings, the expectation is that all schools will do so. These professional development meetings will be primarily led by the building-PST (and in collaboration with high school Department Chairs and principals). The PST will work with you and the special education teacher team to identify a consistent meeting time. The expectation is that all teachers will attend a monthly meeting which takes place during contract hours and focused on specific special education related topics.

12. Begin Implementation of an Integrated Rtl/IDEA- Section 504/Document Storage System:

With the current district created electronic IEP system aging and the state moving away from the Student Intervention and Management System (SIMS), we've moved ahead with the purchase of a commercially available electronic system that integrates an Rtl management/documentation system with a new IDEA/Section 504 system which stores/archives student records. The implementation of this new system will be phased in over the next 12 months. The highest priority in terms of implementation is the new Rtl system which will capture and document both academic and behavior interventions/data. The latter has been heavily customized to meet the needs of our Behavior Education Plan (BEP). The projected timeline for transitioning to the new IEP/504 system is July 1, 2015.

Status: Work on the Rtl system, specifically the academic/behavior intervention-documentation component is well under way and is scheduled for completion by August 25th. A professional development module is also being produced by Oasys to accompany the introduction of this new system. Oasys is concurrently making Madison specific customizations to the IEP/504 system and projects to have that completed by mid-fall. A trainer of trainer model of professional development will follow sometime in winter.

13. Develop special education teacher capacity to teach reading:

Reading proficiencies for students with disabilities continue to be an area of concern. While growth is being realized, the gap between students with disabilities and those without continues to widen, especially at the secondary level. Throughout the 2013-14 school year, Educational Services, now Student Services staff began creating a plan to aggressively address this issue. To begin, a week-long conference style Reading Institute was created to ground staff in fundamentals and introduce specialized practices. Further, the Student Services team pursued a collaborative relationship with two area organizations to provide reading professional development for students with dyslexia.

Status: The first cohort of teachers (approximately 10) begin their two year training in August. The Reading Institute is scheduled for mid-August (2014) and is open to all special education staff and reading specialists/interventionists.

14. **Improve Access to High Quality Curriculum and Instruction (Universal Design):** The review of special education programs identified curricular access as an area of need. Specifically, the report urges the district to utilize Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a scheme for unit/lesson design thus increasing the accessibility of high quality curriculum to students with disabilities.
- Status:** Given our current capacity, this is a long-term recommendation and as a first step, Student Services has made strategic hires to develop internal capacity.