

DATE: 10/12/26

TITLE: Special Services Department Update

TYPE: Information

PRESENTER(S): Dr. Sarah Knudsen, Executive Director of Special Services

BACKGROUND:

The Special Services Department includes oversight of the following:

- Special Education Services
- School Health Services
- Student Support Professionals (School Counselors, School Social Workers, School Psychologists)
- Mental Health Supervision and Supports (internal and external)
- Oversight of education at Nexus Gerard's New Dominion School
- Oversight of education at the Austin Albert Lea Area Special Education Cooperative (AALASEC)

- ***Support and resources to ensure a safe and welcoming learning environment***
 - Held special education listening sessions and staff development to identify needs and build consistent practices across buildings.
 - Provided reevaluation training to strengthen compliant evaluation practices and documentation.
 - Continued CPI de-escalation and safety training, planning, and implementation.
 - Coordinated professional development for school nurses, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and student support professionals.
 - Supported Licensed School Nurse through the process of confirming students are appropriately vaccinated. The district is below five students who still need vaccination. The nursing department, led by Shaylie Meyer, has done a phenomenal job with this important work.

- ***Packer Profile for all learners***
 - Participated in district Packer Profile work to align Special Services programming with district learner outcomes and graduation criteria for students with disabilities.
 - Early childhood, transition, and related-service teams collaborated to improve student access and outcomes.

- ***District-wide multi-tiered systems of support for all learners***
 - Supported district MTSS leadership to align academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and special education systems.
 - Reviewed and revised SAEBRS screening procedures and use of screening data within MTSS teams, with a small implementation group of counselors and social workers.
 - Provided MTSS professional development for student support professionals to clarify roles and tiered supports. Training was provided by an MDE Consultant. This was the first of four sessions.

- Launched special education PLCs; participated in elementary, middle, and high school PLCs and Teaching and Learning/Special Education leadership meetings to support inclusive practices and aligned instruction.
- September 28 professional development training for all special education staff on Goalbook and developing standards-aligned, high quality goals and progress monitoring strategies.

- ***Excellence in Resource Management***

- Continued CEIS documentation and staff-time procedures to ensure accurate resource use and required reporting.
- Reviewed staffing, caseloads, evaluation planning, and service-delivery needs with district leaders to plan sustainable supports.
- Provided ongoing oversight of Nexus Gerard/New Dominion, AALASEC, and contracted service providers.
- Conducted building visits, program reviews, and administrative check-ins to monitor services and guide resource decisions.