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DATE: 11/9/26

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**
    - Staff Listening Sessions
        - Listening sessions are underway in every building to learn what is working, where barriers remain, and what support staff need.
    - CPI Training
        - CPI initial certification and recertification continued for staff.
        - We have approximately 30 staff yet to be trained; another session will be held
    - Cardiac Emergency Response
        - Health Services is implementing new 2026-27 cardiac emergency response requirements, including response teams, staff training and drills, and AED accessibility.
    - Special Services Resource Hub
        - Procedures, flowcharts, and checklists for IEPs, evaluations, and due process are centralized in one place for staff.

- **Packer Profile for all learners**

- **District-wide multi-tiered systems of support for all learners**
    - IEP Goals and Progress Monitoring
        - Training and building PLCs are moving staff from learning new goal-writing and progress-monitoring practices to consistent implementation.
        - Goalbook use continues to be refined based on staff feedback.
    - Reevaluation Process
        - October trainings introduced a more targeted, data-driven reevaluation process that starts with existing student information.

- Social-Emotional and Behavioral MTSS
    - Student Support Professionals are strengthening PreK-12 intervention planning and mental health supports.

- **Excellence in Resource Management**
    - Immunization Compliance
        - Health Services completed all required activities to comply with state vaccination requirements.
        - The team worked closely with families and building staff to reach compliance efficiently while keeping students in school.
    - Staffing and Financial Stewardship
        - Leadership is reviewing staffing, caseloads, and service models to build sustainable supports.
        - Reimbursement practices are being reviewed with district and cooperative partners to maximize eligible special education funding.
        - Successful completion of mandatory FY2026 year-end reconciliation process between SEDRA and UFARS. This lengthy process ensures only eligible expenditures are included in the aid calculation.
        - Special Pupil application submitted to the MN Department of Education to recoup funds for students who are Wards of State and/or Wards of Tribe attending New Dominion School on the Nexus Gerard campus.
        - Third Party Billing staff working with consultant to increase internal capacity and maximize billing.