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**Report of Southeast Island School District's  
Special Education Programming and Service Delivery Model**

**Executive Summary:** The purpose of this report is to inform the superintendent, district lead teachers, principals, staff, and school board members of the strengths, challenges, and recommendations for SISD's special education programming and service delivery model. This report will offer actionable insights for its improvement, thus ensuring that students with special needs receive the best possible services and support.

**Background:** Southeast Island School District has about 195 students in the entire district. Approximately 38 of the 195 students have special needs. Of the 38 students, 11 students receive intensive-level services. The district has 3 special education teachers and 6 paraprofessionals.

**Program Evaluation Methods:** In addition to site visits, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with at least 13 parents/staff. I had brief meetings with principals and lead teachers on a 1:1 basis. A few critical pieces of information were gathered from district-level staff and the previous administrator. I also had conversations with current related service providers (OT, SLP, Psychologist, and SESA specialist). Records in PowerSchool as well as the hard copies of students' confidential records were reviewed (ESER, IEP, testing results, etc.). Therefore, this evaluation result is based on various stakeholder's input and review of student records.

**Key Findings:**

**Strengths of the Program:** The district promotes many critical best practices for special education programs, thus providing the highest quality education and support for children with disabilities. Based on observation, SISD practices primarily an inclusion model to deliver services to students with special needs. The strength of this model is that students with disabilities are given opportunities to interact

with their typically developing peers. It fosters social and emotional growth, thus promoting positive interpersonal skills. This learning model develops the students' self-confidence, collaborative skills, and respect for other's points of view. Students learn to be part of a large community. This practice helps all children in developing the concept of acceptance and appreciation of diversity. The inclusion model helps students with disabilities grow academically because they can access the same curriculum as their peers.

In addition, the students learn to create a culture of empathy and understanding, thus reducing stigmas related to disabilities. Most importantly, the schools visited strongly promoted real-world instruction. It can sometimes be difficult for our students with IEPs to navigate the world outside of their homes and classrooms. It was observed that SISD teachers and staff are invested in preparing all students for real-life lessons in this ever-changing technological world.

Last but not least, I was very impressed with our teachers, paraprofessionals, teacher leads, and principals for working extra hard to help each other operate the day-to-day school instructions, activities, and events. I saw the "roll up your sleeves and ready to get to work" attitude amongst the staff.

**Challenges:** Although the district has many strengths in serving students with IEPs, several challenges were noted within the special education program.

- It was determined the district has contracted an independent itinerant speech pathologist, however, the contract is only for evaluating the students and providing teletherapy services (up to 20 hours for virtual IEP meetings and/or virtual screenings, consults, or evaluations as appropriate). This contract does not include direct speech/language services which are written in at least 12 students' IEPs.
- The district has a special education director position combined with the superintendent's position. It is likely that the combined position is less than ideal since the demands of the superintendent role often require significant time and attention. When combined with the director of special education role, it can lead to a reduced focus on special education programs, services, and compliance, which are critical for students with disabilities.

- Counseling services are lacking for students with mental health issues. The career guidance counselor is not available, therefore, the IEP students who lack credit continue to struggle to catch up with credits. This responsibility lies with the special education and general education teachers.
- No personnel are assigned to file all of the original paperwork and maintain the confidential reports. The original documents are stored at the elementary special education teacher's office and the responsibility of filing the documents lies with the special education teacher again. This is the district-level responsibility.
- There is a discrepancy between PowerSchool information and hard copies of records.
- The paraprofessionals perform multiple levels of duties, however, they need adequate training to deliver instruction. They also need specific training on meeting the needs of their 1:1 students.
- Special Education teachers must complete paperwork on PowerSchool but need more training on utilizing the platform.
- Special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and lead teachers have limited collaboration time, therefore the communication regarding the strategies, accommodation, and referral process is not shared frequently enough.
- Across the district special education teachers and paraprofessionals should create a master schedule containing the times they provide services to students with special needs.
- Lead teachers, principals, and general education teachers need help accessing IEPs on PowerSchool.
- Tier III curriculum materials for IEP students are not uniform across the district.

- The referral process and procedures still need to be put in place. The child Find process needs to be articulated.

The above-mentioned areas can hinder our special education students' overall success and well-being if corrective actions are not taken.

## **Recommendation**

- 1) Immediately secure a contract with a speech pathologist who can provide 10-12 hours of virtual speech/language service for students with direct speech/language service on their IEP.
- 2) Consider budgeting for a full-time on-site Director of Special Education or a Coordinator of Special Education for next year. It might be possible to share this position with another district on the Island. The director plays a critical role in planning and allocating the budget for the district, setting staffing levels for school special education programs to provide services with fiscal efficiency, and collaborating effectively with district staff, families, special education teachers, and the community for planning, developing, implementing, maintaining, and evaluating educational services and/or programs. The director can help in writing and updating the District Board policy for special education as needed or required to assure program consistency and compliance with state and federal rules in all locations, etc. This is a position that can be combined with other **responsibilities** (such as testing coordinator) as designated by the superintendent.
- 3) Provide targeted professional development for special education paraprofessionals. The starting point can be SESA. They provide **free** training to staff upon request.
- 4) Provide PowerSchool Special Program training and access to principals, special education teachers, and lead teachers. With this training general education teachers and principals have immediate access to IEPs.

5) Immediately create district policy and procedures for the Special Education referral process and train all staff on the referral process.

6) Create a schedule for paraprofessional training. This is required by law. Every paraprofessional who works with students with an IEP must receive at least 6 hours of training. These must be documented.

**Paraprofessional Training**

*Under Alaska regulation 4 AAC 52.250, paraprofessionals (or, per the regulation, 'special education aides,' must be trained by districts in a variety of skills (bold added for emphasis):*

*"(a) A person employed as a special education aide shall be **trained** by a special education teacher or specialist certificated under 4 AAC 12.330 or 4 AAC 12.365, or licensed under AS 08.11, AS 08.84, or AS 08.86 to provide the services with which the aide will assist. (b) Before a special education aide assists in providing direct special education or related services to a child or children, or concurrent with providing direct special education or related services to a child or children, the district must provide and document a **minimum of six hours of annual training**, in the aggregate, to the aide regarding (1) the child's or children's disabilities; (2) the content of the IEPs; (3) the instructional and safety procedures to be used; and (4) confidentiality procedures."*

7) The district must conduct at least one Child Find per year.

Please refer to

*Alaska regulation 4 AAC 52.090 . Alaska regulation 4 AAC 52.100 requires the following child find activities (bold added for emphasis):*

*"(1) **annual public notice** that states the  
(A) type of disabilities that qualify as a disabling condition;  
(B) the educational needs of children with disabilities;  
(C) right to a FAPE;  
(D) special services available within the district;  
(E) confidentiality protections; and  
(F) person to contact for information and how to contact that person;*

*(2) a **screening program**, which may be operated in cooperation with other public agencies, to include health, vision, hearing, general development and basic skills, primary language and culture, and daily skills in home and community obtained through parental input; and (3) **referral for evaluation** of children suspected to be children with disabilities."*

8) Invest in paraprofessionals and create your special education teachers for retention purposes. Grow your own!

9) Include related service providers in IEP meetings whenever possible, especially for students with multiple complex needs.

10) Professional development for parents will be beneficial in mending some of the distrust feelings. I recommend arranging a parent meeting for each site at least once per semester. This will build trust amongst the staff and parents.

**Resources and Funding:** Special Education Service Agency located in Anchorage provides excellent instructional support and training to rural districts at no cost. The district already receives autism specialist support. I recommend setting up individual or small group training for paraprofessionals, parents, and teachers with SESA. They can provide virtual training and on-site training.

Using ESSER III funding, the district can secure Speech and Language services and counseling until the leadership team and school board decide how to continue supporting these two critical student services. These funds can also be used for professional development for the entire staff.

**Conclusion:** The recommendations outlined in this report provide a roadmap for enhancing our special education program and service delivery model. The report is based on observations, assumptions, and interviews. It is merely a suggestion for improvement that will positively impact the lives of special education students in our care.