

# **Executive Summary**

## **Prepared for Board of Trustees Meeting**

### **April 26, 2011**

#### **Evaluation of Services for Students with Disabilities (Stetson Report) Update**

##### **Purpose of Report:**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update of the 2010-2011 activities related to the recommendations noted in the “Evaluation of Services for Students with Disabilities” report.

**History:** In early fall 2009, DISD contracted with Stetson and Associates, Inc. to review services for students with disabilities for the purpose of continued growth. Evaluation activities included gathering information from key stakeholders throughout the district. Data from numerous sources were gathered and analyzed in order to capture the strengths and areas of concern regarding students with disabilities. Services were evaluated within the context of a framework of effective practices. Key findings and key recommendations were categorized in four distinct themes: Common Vision-A Unified System; Systems that Support Success; Sufficiency, Efficiency and Appropriateness of Staffing; and Quality Instructional Practices for All Learners.

**Status:** During 2010-2011, the Special Education Leadership Team and the Executive Director of Special Education have focused on recommendations within the four themes identified in the special education evaluation. Specific focus during this school year has been on improving communication and providing consistency related to special education procedures and program support.

##### **2010-2011 Activities to Enhance Communication, Consistency and Efficiency:**

In July 2010, the district employed the Executive Director of Special Education who is a member of the leadership team in the Department of Curriculum. To foster communication, coordination and collaboration the office of the Executive Director of Special Education was relocated to the Professional Development Center (PDC) where the Department of Curriculum leadership team offices. The Executive Director participates as an equal member of the department which has enabled collaboration, coordination and communication between the two departments. Additionally, the Executive Director of Special Education is now listed on the Department of Curriculum webpage which links to the Department of Special Education webpage. To increase access to decision-making and coordination, and improved communication the Executive Director of Special Education participates in weekly Superintendent Cabinet and Executive Council meetings which has allowed for relationship development with program directors and leadership within DISD. In addition to these aforementioned leadership meetings, the Executive Director regularly attends DISD School Board meetings. The Special Education Supervisors are members of the PDC distribution list which informs them of the district and Department of Curriculum information and functions. Furthermore, the special education leadership team and the special education support staff meet regularly at the PDC which has increase visibility of the special education department and has enhanced collaboration between the two departments.

Improved communication has been a focus for the Department of Special Education. Beginning summer 2010, the Executive Director began meeting with parents, special education staff and district staff to build relationships and to improve communication. Part of the relationship building, which improved communication and trust, has involved the Executive Director attending and facilitating district level and department level meetings. Attendance in the following meetings has enhanced relationships and communication regarding special education.

- Superintendent Cabinet and Executive Council. The Executive Director attends and participates in these meetings regularly.
- Campus Administrator, Leading Edge, Elementary PLC, and Special Education for Principals meetings are regularly attended by the Executive Director as well as the special education supervisors. During these meetings, the Executive Director has had the opportunity to address campus leadership in order to provide training, information and updates regarding DISD special education services. Agenda items have included: dissemination of staff responsibilities; the Stetson Report recommendations; campus allocations; staffing; caseload analysis; special education procedures and operating guidelines; RF Monitoring status; compliance; and training on various topics. Participation in these meetings serve as a regular communication link between the special education department and district campus administrators which has enhanced relationships and communication between the Department of Special Education and campus leadership.
- Special Education Leadership Team (SELT). The purpose of the weekly meetings is to provide and discuss department, district, state and federal information that directly impacts services and supports to students with disabilities. Meetings are a time to gather information, problem-solve, discuss and clarify the department position in order that the team provides consistent information and guidance to campus administrators, teachers and parents. Supervisors are expected to share the information with their staff at the next programmatic meeting. The Executive Director provides the team with the most current information and resources available. All supports and services have been agenda items throughout the school year.
- Programmatic Meetings. Special Education Supervisors meet regularly with their staff to gather input, problem-solve, provide programmatic and/or department information, and provide training specific to their area of discipline. Additionally, supervisors provide compliance information and training that has been identified during regular compliance reviews.
- Support Staff. Each month the support staff (educational diagnosticians, speech therapist, Licensed Specialists in School Psychology, related services staff, specialty teachers and supervisors) meet for the purpose of acquiring updated district, department and state information related to the educational needs of students with disabilities. Topics of training have included: ARD Committee Decision Making, Accommodations, Standards Based IEPs, Compliance, Operating Guidelines, and legal issues identified in TEA complaints or due process hearings. Often times training from other departments have been provided.
- Special Education Campus Contact. Special education supervisors meet collectively with a group of elementary teachers and secondary teachers from each campus. During this meeting they receive training, clarification, and updates from the department of special education. In turn, these teachers take the information back to their campuses to share with other teachers.

- To provide a regular communication link, the department participates in creating the electronic “post-card” which is disseminated regularly by the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Staff Development.

In order to provide consistency and communication in decision making for students with disabilities, the Supervisor of Evaluation has reviewed student eligibility folders for compliance. As issues of non-compliance or inconsistency arise in individual student folders, the supervisor addresses the issue immediately with staff. Systemic issue of non-compliance are viewed as teach topics that the Supervisors for Evaluation and Speech Therapy will address at the next scheduled meeting; however, when a system issue has arisen that must be communicated immediately, they use electronic mail to disseminate the information. These two supervisors work closely to provide consistent information and training in areas of compliance as well as updated evaluation procedures. At least monthly, evaluation personnel are required to review PEIMS reports for accuracy and timeline compliance. Throughout the year, the Residential Facilities (RF) team has worked to correct areas of non-compliance identified by the Texas Education Agency. Campus administrator, support staff and special education campus contacts have been informed of the non-compliance and are aware of how non-compliance impacts the decisions made on their campus, the district and services for students. As non-compliance is identified during a folder review, the appropriate staff is contacted immediately to correct the concerns within legal parameters. In early fall 2010 the Special Education Supervisors became active members of the RF team to assist with the correction of non-compliance. Originally, the team consisted of a two staff; however, the group was expanded in order to include staff directly impacted by residential facilities campuses. In early fall 2010, “*District Residential Facilities Procedures*” were created and disseminated to support staff and campus administrators. Campus administrators, support staff and the RF team received training related to these procedures.

Supervisors’ responsibilities were reviewed and reorganized in early fall. However, throughout the school year the Executive Director, with guidance and input from the Assistant Superintendent and input from special education staff, has continued to study the current structure of the department. A proposed restructuring that will enhance leadership to teachers and campus administrators as well as support and services for the students with disabilities will be presented to the superintendent for the school year 2011-2012. Restructuring will enable the department to continue to redesign and strengthen department processes, disseminate operating procedures, provide consistent information, and provide quality support services to students and campuses. Throughout the school year, the department leadership has begun creating or revising department procedures and operating guidelines. Revised procedures and operating guidelines have been presented to campus administrators and support staff.

To address the theme of “Sufficiency, Efficiency and Appropriateness of Staff”, the Executive Director reviewed campus allocations and revised amounts to be equitable based on program support needs. The revised allocations along with timelines for expenditures and guidelines for allowable use of funds were sent to campus administrators and the special education campus contact electronically. The Executive Director will continue to review department expenditures, specifically the use of outside consultant.

In early fall, the department conducted a special education campus staff audit which assisted the department in verifying staff dedicated to providing special education support and services at each

campus. Soon thereafter, the process of reviewing and analyzing support staff caseloads began. As a result of the analysis, caseloads of support staff will increase; however, supports and services as documented in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) will continue to be provided by highly qualified staff.

**Future Activities:**

The Executive Director of Special Education will continue to collaborate, coordinate and communicate with district department directors to improve relationships, communication and procedures that directly impact students with disabilities.

To date plans exist to continue with the following projects for the remainder of the school year and through the next school year. Activities include:

- Create and disseminate the district's special education vision,
- Create, train, distribute "Quality Standards for Special Education Services and Supports" in order to "provide a floor of equitable services", ensure a continuum of service options, and to ensure scheduling of services is based on individual student needs,
- Restructure the Department of Special Education,
- Develop and/or revise procedures,
- Analyze special education staff to ensure adequate staff to implement individual education plans (IEPs),
- Analyze the efficiency of the department expenditures.

**Summary:**

In conclusion, the Department of Special Education, under the leadership of the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Staff Development are moving forward with the recommendations noted in the Evaluation of Services for Students with Disabilities Report. The Executive Director has collaborated and coordinated with the district leadership in the areas of RTI, Dyslexia, Career and Technology, Counseling, Early Childhood, PEIMs, and Curriculum to improve communication, and to enhance program and support services for students with disabilities.