



DATE: 3/9/26

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

- The Special Education Advisory Council was held on February 18th. The content presented was information about assistive technology in special education. Chelsea White, Elementary Case Facilitator, presented.
- A small group of Student Support Professionals (SSPs) are meeting to review district crisis response protocols using the PREPaRE tools and framework. This workgroup will meet three times, followed by sharing their results with the larger team and making suggestions and recommendations to the District Response Team.
- A district-wide Restrictive Procedures Team meets monthly to review, analyze, and provide feedback regarding the use of a restrictive procedure. This team is required by MDE. This is a multi-disciplinary team. The team recently noted marked decline in restrictive procedures over the last several years.

Packer Profile for all learners

- Work Experience Program:
 - 15 students participating in community job placements (paid and volunteer)
 - 15 business partners for community job placement
 - Partnership with Austin Parks & Recreation that could lead to possible part time employment for students
 - 20 students participating in PAES (Practical Assessment Exploration System) lab simulated work experience (On Track building on Main Street; also used for Austin Transition Program in the afternoon)
- Austin Transition Program
 - Partnership with Riverland in AM for use of classroom and cafeteria
 - Work sites second half of morning

- Lunch and lesson in On Track lab on Main Street
- Other community exploration built in (Community Rec Center, Community Library, etc.)
- Partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation Services, DEED (Department of Employment and Economic Development), Semcac, Cedar Valley, and Mower County for support services into adulthood

District-wide multi-tiered systems of support for all learners

- District paraprofessionals completed their required Read Act training on February 16th.
- Dr. Knudsen has collaborated with Ellis and AHS principals regarding our coteaching model. This model is designed to increase participation in general education for students receiving special education services. We continue to analyze and evaluate its effectiveness to increase student outcomes.
- Goalbook, a web-based platform to support special education teachers in the development of IEPs, including standards-aligned goals and progress monitoring tools, was introduced to all special education staff in February. An early-adopter group will begin using the tool in late March.

Excellence in Resource Management

- Special services implemented a revised process for requesting specialized transportation.
- Specific planning for extended school year (ESY) services is underway. Placement of students and recruiting teachers and support personnel is occurring.
- The mandatory Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) has been lifted for 2026-27. We are no longer required to have a CEIS plan for disproportionalities in special education. This is monitored and determined on a yearly basis.