



**DATE:** 11/12/24

**TITLE:** Special Services Department Update

**TYPE:** Information

**PRESENTER(S):** Sheri Willrodt, 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**

- Paraprofessional hiring update: We are down to 6 unfilled special education paraprofessional positions, 4 of which are at our setting IV coop.
- We recently welcomed two new virtual speech clinicians to the district, one replacing a September resignation and one covering a maternity leave. They are being supported by 3 new paraprofessional speech facilitators for our virtual speech stations. This will support students, SPED teachers, gen ed teachers, and speech clinicians and will ensure students get the services they need.
- Our Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) held its inaugural meeting of the year on October 16. We had a great turn out, including several new parent representatives. The group set their direction for the year by identifying several topics they would like to study during our monthly meetings.
- At their October 14 meeting our Student Support Professionals (School Counselors, School Social Workers, School Psychologists) heard from Mower County Human Services about a new Mental Health First Aid opportunity, discussed ideas for Bullying Prevention Month, discussed strategies for supporting students in today's political climate, reviewed the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) data from the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS), reviewed the Procedure for Mandated Reporting, and discussed the Professional Development calendar for the year.
- County Collaborative/Gerard Mental Health Initiative: 16 referrals processed so far this school year. Reminder that these are currently virtual services provided at AHS and Oakland Education Center only.
- We had one response to our Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit additional partnerships for school-based mental health services. We are working with the Mower County Collaborative to try to get a contract in place with this applicant to provide School-Based Mental Health Services in more of our buildings.

- We are working with the Department of Homeland Security and local law enforcement to consider if any interior filming of glass needs to be considered in our buildings (particularly Holton) to allow students/staff to get out of sight in the event of an intruder. Law enforcement typically recommends keeping glass clear in order to be able to clear buildings quickly, however there is a fine balance to strike with our buildings with excess glass.
- Our Health Services department has stayed on top of necessary home and school communications regarding identified cases of pertussis and varicella.

### **Packer Profile for all learners**

- On Tuesday, November 12, the Work Experience Program and Austin Transition Program traveled to Mankato for the Construct Tomorrow program at the Mayo Center. This program exposes the students to careers in the construction industry. They then stopped at Akkerman manufacturing in Brownsdale for a tour of their manufacturing facility on their way home.

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

- Our District MTSS Team is working on goal setting and establishing data review templates for use at buildings.
- Our partners from CAREI (Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement) are spending time visiting a sampling of Student Support Team (SST) meetings at our sites to provide feedback and guidance to refine our processes.
- We have made some scheduling adjustments at the elementary level in order to provide for smaller group sizes in our special education intervention groups in order to deliver interventions more effectively and with greater fidelity.

### **Excellence in Resource Management**

- We submitted a number of Special Pupil applications to MDE in order to recoup funds for students who are Wards of State or Wards of Tribe attending New Dominion School on the Nexus Gerard campus.