



Palos Heights School District 128

12809 S. McVicker Ave • Palos Heights, IL 60463
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Merryl B. Brownlow, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Memo

To: Merryl Brownlow

From: Dee Potempa

Date: 3/18/2026

Re: Special Education Programming

Over the past several years, our district has observed a clear trend in the changing needs of our special education population. Specifically, we are seeing an increase in students whose Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) require placement in self-contained instructional environments, rather than the co-taught or inclusion settings that previously served the majority of our students with disabilities.

Self-contained classrooms provide a smaller student-to-staff ratio, highly individualized instruction, and specialized behavioral and academic support for students with more intensive needs. As the number of students requiring this level of service continues to grow, our current staffing structure is becoming increasingly required to support student needs. Maintaining appropriate caseloads and ensuring the fidelity of services outlined in students' IEPs requires sufficient certified special education teachers and paraprofessional support.

The chart represents the number of students who require a self-contained classroom to meet student needs in the FY27 school year.

Indian Hill (Kindergarten Only)	5 students
Chippewa (1st-3rd)	8 students
Navajo (4th-5th)	6 students
Independence (6th -8th)	7 students

In response to these evolving needs, the district has already taken proactive steps by establishing three self-contained classrooms located at Chippewa, Navajo, and Independence. These programs have allowed us to better meet the individualized academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of our students while ensuring services are delivered in the least restrictive environment appropriate for each learner.

Based on continued enrollment trends and current student needs, we are recommending the addition of a fourth self-contained classroom at Indian Hill School. This is a need for an increase of 1 FTE special education teacher. This expansion would allow us to maintain appropriate student-to-staff ratios, provide targeted interventions, and ensure that students receive the level of support necessary to access the curriculum and make meaningful progress.

As students transition from preschool to kindergarten, the expectations of the school day change significantly. Preschool students attend for approximately two and a half hours and participate in highly structured, play-based learning environments with frequent movement and individualized support. In contrast, kindergarten is a full-day program where

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INDEPENDENCE JR. HIGH
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students are expected to participate in longer instructional blocks, whole-group lessons, and more structured classroom routines.

For some of our incoming students with identified special education needs, this transition can be particularly challenging. These students benefit from increased support, opportunities for movement, flexible seating, and individualized instructional strategies that are not always feasible within a traditional kindergarten classroom setting.

Establishing a self-contained kindergarten classroom would allow us to provide a supportive, developmentally appropriate environment where students can receive targeted instruction and interventions while gradually building the skills needed for participation in the general education setting. Through a structured plan, students can be integrated into the kindergarten classroom throughout the day—period by period—as they develop the readiness and independence necessary for success.

This model supports student growth, promotes successful transitions into the school environment, and ensures we are meeting the individualized learning needs of our youngest learners in a way that sets them up for long-term academic and social success.

Our district has also made measurable progress in supporting students as they transition from more restrictive placements back into their home school environment. This year, we have successfully transitioned two students from therapeutic day placements back to the district on a full-time basis. In addition, we currently have two other students who are in the process of transitioning back on a half-day schedule. These transitions reflect the intentional work of our teams to build the supports, structures, and interventions necessary for students to be successful in their home school setting. It also demonstrates our commitment to providing the least restrictive environment possible while ensuring students receive the behavioral, social, and academic support they need to succeed.

In addition to the need for expanded instructional programming, we are also seeing an increased demand for behavioral support services among our students and staff. Many of the students placed in self-contained classrooms and co-taught classrooms require intensive behavioral interventions to support regulation, engagement, and access to instruction throughout the school day.

To effectively meet these needs, the district is recommending the addition of 1 FTE Registered Behavior Technician (RBT). An RBT works under the supervision of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and provides direct behavioral support to students by implementing individualized behavior plans, collecting data, and assisting staff in reinforcing positive behavioral strategies throughout the day.

With the growing number of students requiring consistent behavioral interventions, an additional RBT would ensure that students receive the level of support necessary to remain engaged in instruction while also allowing teachers to focus on delivering high-quality academic programming. This position would strengthen our ability to proactively address behavioral needs, support staff in implementing intervention plans with fidelity, and ultimately help students build the skills necessary to be successful within the school environment.

Sincerely,

Dee Potempa
Director of Student Services
Indian Hill Principal

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