

**Special School Board Meeting
Thursday, February 27, 2025, 6:00 PM
Pipestone Area Schools
Conference Room 1148 MS/HS
1401 7th St SW
Pipestone, MN 56164**

AGENDA

- 1. Call Meeting to Order**
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Approval of Agenda**
- 4. Special Education and 504 Discussion - Presentation by SWWC**
- 5. Adjourn**

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In case of inclement weather, regular school board meetings will be held the next day, Tuesday, at 6:30pm.

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Special Education Overview for School Boards

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Special Education Process

Special Education Process: Pre-Referral

1. Recognition & Initial Concern
2. Information Gathering
3. SAT Team Discussion
4. Implement Interventions (2)
5. Referral for Special Education
6. Evaluation
7. Development of Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Due Process Paperwork

Evaluation Report (Initial and Tri-Ennial)

Individualized Education Plan (Initial and Annual)

Progress Reports

IEP Team Roles & Responsibilities

Parents: A parent on an IEP team advocates for their child, shares insights about the child's strengths and needs, and collaborates with educators as part of the IEP team.

Special Education Teacher: In Minnesota, a licensed teacher in the student's disability area must be part of the IEP team. Ideally, the case manager holds this license, but if not, another licensed team member must participate and provide consultation and indirect services to the teachers involved.

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General Education Teacher: General education teachers speak to grade-level expectations and the student's areas of relative strength and weakness. This information contributes directly to making decisions about what types of supplementary aids and services (e.g., accommodations, modifications, assistive technology, or paraprofessional support) the student may need to be successful in the general education setting and achieve their IEP goals.

Qualified District Representative: IDEA defines this individual as someone qualified to provide or supervise specially designed instruction for students with disabilities, knowledgeable about the general curriculum and available resources. Typically, building administrators fill this role, but they can designate others in the building if needed. Contact your building administrator for specific details.

Student: If of transition age (beginning at 9th grade), the student should attend their IEP meeting in order to advocate for their own educational programming.

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SWWC and Special Education

Contracted Services

1. Director of Special Education
2. Due Process Specialist (DPS)
3. Occupational Therapy (OT)
4. Speech Language Therapy (SLP)
5. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)
6. Deaf & Hard of Hearing (DHH)
7. School Psychologist

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Caseload Recommendations

Estimating Caseloads

Based on Pipestone's model (having a SEAT team and SpEd secretary), here are some estimates:

- 20-25 is reasonable for most setting I/II SLD/EBD teachers
- 12 to 15-ish for a setting III teacher
- ECSE (the only area of special education with established caseload limits)¹⁰ would be approximately:
 - 12 for a special education teacher serving your Part C (home visit) students
 - 12-15 for a special education teacher serving your Part B (preschool) students
- A full-time SEAT teacher

Quick Comparisons

District A:

- Caseloads are around 20 students
- Full-time special education secretary
- Full-time school psychologist
- Full-time SEAT (assessment) teacher

District B:

- Caseloads are around 20 students
- Full-time special education secretary
- 2 Full-time school psychologists
- Full-time SEAT (assessment) teacher

District C:

- Caseloads are around 20 students
- Full-time special education secretary
- Full-time school psychologist
- Full-time SEAT (assessment) teacher

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Tips for Running a Successful Special Education Program

Indicators of Success

- Adhering to state and federal regulations surrounding special education
- High-Quality Professional Development
 - SWWC Provided: Monthly Due Process Meeting, New Teacher Cohort (3-year model), PD On Demand
 - Strong In-District Mentorship Opportunities
- Ensure Adequate & Appropriate Staffing
- Family & Community Engagement
 - Strong parent partnerships
 - Foster community partnerships
 - Parent education
- Administrative Support
 - SWWC Provided: Monthly Coffee Hour Training, Superintendent's Meetings
 - PAS Specific: Monthly meeting with building administrators, district administrative meeting

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Supporting Your Special Education Department

swwc.org

Supporting Special Education

Appropriating Resources: Ensuring that sufficient funding is allocated for specialized services, staffing, and equipment.

Policy Development: Establishing policies that promote inclusion, equitable services, and best practices in special education.

Engaging the Community: Fostering collaboration between schools, parents, and community organizations to meet students' needs.

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Staffing Shortages

Addressing Staff Shortages in Special Education

- Offer competitive salaries and benefits (including incentives)
- Focus on teacher retention
- Consider alternative staffing options:
 - e.g. virtual due process paperwork support, virtual mentorship for Tier 1 and Tier 2 staff
- Support flexible licensing pathways
 - Paraprofessional to SpEd Teacher Programs
 - Teacher Pipeline Grant
 - Currently there are 8 PAS employees participating in the Pipeline grant

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Thank you!

504 and IEP: What is the Difference?

School districts are required to both understand the distinctions between a 504 Plan and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and properly administer those to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate support. Both plans are designed to assist students with disabilities but differ in their legal foundations, processes, requirements, and funding mechanisms.

Legal Foundations and Eligibility

- **504 Plan:** Rooted in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the 504 process is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. To qualify, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. This definition is broad, encompassing various disabilities that may not necessarily impact academic performance but affect other life activities. Some examples may include a temporary situation such as a student concussion or a student impacted by a short-term disability from a car accident.
- **IEP:** Established under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the IEP process is mandated under federal law ensuring services to children with disabilities. Eligibility requires the student to have one or more of the specific disabilities listed in IDEA and, as a result, need special education and related services. The disability must adversely affect the child's educational performance. Minnesota has requirements that exceed the federal requirements for the service of students with disabilities under IDEA.

Process and Implementation

- **504 Plan:** The process involves identifying students who may need accommodations, typically through a referral by teachers, parents, or other school staff. Evaluations are conducted to determine the nature of the disability and necessary accommodations. While a formal meeting isn't always required, it's best practice to involve a team familiar with the student to develop the plan. The plan outlines specific accommodations, supports, or services and designates the individuals responsible for implementation. Unlike an IEP, a 504 Plan doesn't mandate a written document, but documentation is advisable for clarity and accountability. The team should review the plan annually.
- **IEP:** This process is more structured and involves several procedural steps that must be followed:
 1. **Referral:** Initiated by a teacher, parent, or other concerned party.
 2. **Evaluation:** Comprehensive assessments to determine the child's eligibility and educational needs.

3. **Eligibility Determination:** A team, including parents and professionals, reviews evaluation results to decide eligibility.
4. **IEP Development:** If eligible, the team develops a written IEP outlining specific educational goals, services, accommodations, and the least restrictive environment for implementation.
5. **Review and Revision:** The IEP is reviewed at least annually to assess progress and make necessary adjustments.

Legal Requirements and Protections

- **504 Plan:** Schools are required to provide appropriate accommodations to ensure students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities. While parental consent for evaluations is required, the procedural safeguards are less comprehensive in the 504 process than those under IDEA requirements. However, parents can challenge decisions through grievance procedures or by filing complaints with the Office for Civil Rights. 504's are less regulated than IEP's.

- **IEP:** IDEA requires and provides robust protections, including prior written notice of meetings and changes, detailed procedural safeguards, and the right to dispute resolutions, mediation, and due process hearings. Parental involvement is a cornerstone of the IEP process, ensuring that families have a significant role in decision-making. Decisions on student placement and service are ultimately made by the entire team. From time to time, there may not be consensus and may require some sort of resolution process.

Funding

- **504 Plan:** Section 504 doesn't provide additional federal funding to schools. Accommodations are funded through the school's general fund budget.

- **IEP:** Schools receive federal funding under IDEA to support special education services. These funds assist in covering costs associated with specialized instruction, related services, and compliance with IDEA requirements. However, it's important to note that while federal funds contribute, they may not cover all expenses, and schools often need to allocate additional resources. This has been a particularly significant issue in Minnesota, resulting in large "cross subsidy" amounts in the state. Many districts have pursued operating levies to help offset the cross subsidy amounts between the costs of required services and the available funding to support the special education staff and students.

Considerations for Rural Minnesota Schools

In rural settings, challenges such as limited access to specialized professionals, budget constraints, and smaller student populations can impact the implementation of both 504 Plans and IEPs. Collaborative efforts, such as sharing resources among districts, utilizing teletherapy or virtual consultations, and ongoing professional development, are vital strategies to ensure all students receive the support they need.

Understanding these distinctions enables local school districts to develop practices and procedures that effectively address the diverse needs of students with disabilities, ensuring compliance with federal laws and the provision of appropriate educational opportunities.

As a district, we have a 504 Coordinator identified at the middle school/high school level and we also have a 504 Coordinator for the elementary level. The Director of Special Education is a collaborative effort between the Pipestone Area Schools and the Southwest West Central Service Cooperative.