



Sioux Falls School District Special Services Report EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of Report: To update the School Board on Special Services' demographics, wide range of services, new program additions, future goals, and current initiatives.

The Sioux Falls School District (SFSD) is committed to providing high-quality special education services for students aged birth to age 21, ensuring compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other federal and state regulations. The Special Services Department supports over 4,200 students with disabilities through a range of programs facilitated by more than 1,700 dedicated staff.

Special education services are available in all home attendance centers for students with mild disabilities, while specialized programming is offered at 26 locations for those with more significant needs.

A new focus area added this year is our behavioral support team, which includes BCBAs (Board Certified Behavior Analysts), Behavior Specialists, and Behavior Facilitators to support special and general education students, working to reduce special education placements.

In-district services are prioritized to maintain continuity and ensure cost-effective resource use, reducing out-of-district placements from 65 to 48 over the past three years. When external placements are necessary, the District monitors student progress and collaborates with partner organizations to support successful transitions back.

Community Campus, a key component of SFSD's special education framework, provides essential transition services for students aged 18-21 returning from residential programs or requiring post-secondary transition support. Using the Structured TEACCH approach, it partners with vocational rehabilitation services and 37 local businesses to provide hands-on work experiences that promote independence and employment readiness.

Data shows the number of students with special needs continues to rise annually.

Administrative Recommendation to School Board: Acknowledge the overview of the Special Services Report.

Sioux Falls School District Special Services Report

Purpose of the Report: To update the Board on Special Services' demographics, wide range of services, new program additions, future goals, and current initiatives.

Priority Area: Academic Success and Effective Use of Resources.

The number of students with special needs continues to rise annually. The student count of SFSD students with disabilities increased by 135 students from December 1, 2023, to December 1, 2024. Programs are provided across the district for students birth through 21, from mild disabilities to the most severe disabilities. The priority for this department is to provide support for academic success and effective use of resources across all age levels, program levels, buildings, and disability areas.

Explanation: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that supports Special Education. IDEA guarantees the following rights to children who have disabilities:

- The right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- Comprehensive evaluation paid for by the school district
- Services that support learning and appropriate progress in light of the student's disability
- Education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

There are a variety of other laws schools are required to follow for parents of children with disabilities. The SFSD is dedicated to ensuring that the laws supporting children with disabilities are followed and that services for students are provided that help them reach their fullest potential.

The Sioux Falls School District is committed to providing high-quality special education services for students from birth to age 21, ensuring that all students receive appropriate support regardless of their eligibility category or the severity of their disability. The district serves students with mild disabilities in their home attendance centers and provides specialized programming at 26 locations for students with more significant needs. A new focus area added this year is our behavior support team, which includes BCBA's (Board Certified Behavior Analysts), Behavior Specialists, and Behavior Facilitators. This team works within all levels of special education as well as general education students as pre-referral efforts to prevent students from qualifying for special education where possible.

It is a priority to meet the needs of students within district-operated programs when appropriate supports are in place to support their educational and developmental progress. In cases where a student's needs cannot be met within the district, we are financially

responsible for their education in an out-of-district placement. However, the district remains committed to serving as many students as possible within our programs to maintain continuity of services and ensure cost-effective resource allocation. Over the past three years, out-of-district placements have decreased from 65 to 48. While some external placements may be necessary, the district prioritizes in-district placements whenever possible. The Special Services Department monitors individual placements and partners with other organizations for successful transitions when students return.

The Community Campus program provides essential services for students. This progressive program incorporates different specialties, including the Structured TEACCH Program (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication-related Handicapped Children) approach.

The Community Campus serves as a vital transition point, especially for students aged 18-21 who may be returning from residential programs. The program is designed to support students as they move from a traditional school environment into adulthood, offering individualized pathways tailored to their needs. This includes both students reentering from residential placements and those who have completed high school but still qualify for transition services.

Community Campus collaborates with various agencies, including vocational rehabilitation services, and partners with our new host site, Sanford, for Project SEARCH. Additionally, we engage with 37 local businesses through the district's transition program. These partnerships offer students hands-on work experiences, helping them develop the skills needed for successful employment and greater independence.

The Sioux Falls School District is dedicated to continually refining and expanding its special education services to meet students' diverse needs while maintaining fiscal responsibility and maximizing student success.

Costs: Special Services operates with an allocated budget of \$66 million. This budget is managed across 23 distinct cost centers, each dedicated to various aspects of the department's operations and student support services. A percentage of Federal IDEA funds is targeted for pre-referral support to prevent students from requiring special education services in behavior and reading.

Revenue for Special Services comes from multiple sources, including state Special Education aid, Federal IDEA grants, Medicare reimbursements, local revenue, and tuition billing. These diverse funding streams ensure that the department can continue to provide high-quality, individualized services to students with disabilities while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Committee Participation: N/A

Summary: The Special Services department provides comprehensive support to over 4,200 students, ensuring equitable access to education through various services, including inclusion, special education resource services/classes, specialized programming, day programming, and, in rare cases, residential placements. This extensive support system is facilitated by a dedicated team of over 1,700 staff members who work collaboratively to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

The department's approach integrates specialized instruction and programming, allowing for differentiation and individualization in alignment with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These services ensure that each student's unique needs are met, promoting their academic success and well-being.

Additionally, Special Services utilizes federal funding to support pre-referral interventions to increase skill levels. These proactive measures are designed to prevent the need for special education services by addressing potential challenges early, thereby enhancing student outcomes and fostering greater independence.

Administrative Recommendation to the School Board: Acknowledge the overview of the Special Services Report.