

Review of

NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION'S

Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gap for Students with Disabilities

Prepared by

Dianne Davis, LP.D.

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Overview

In March 2020, the North Dakota Striving Readers Grant and the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) in partnership with the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) launched a year-long study to identify and scale best practices for students with disabilities. The NDPC engaged Dianne Davis, LP.D. to conduct a targeted review to learn more about the policies, practices, and initiatives that have resulted in students with disabilities being prepared for their post-school roles. The findings from this study will be disseminated across the state to highlight, share, and leverage efforts that work in improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

Based upon conversations with key stakeholders, the following guiding questions for this review were identified:

- What are the effective strategies currently in use to support the progress of students with disabilities that can be replicated statewide?
- Are there effective data-based decision-making processes in place to mediate dropout rates?
- What is the efficacy of current literacy instruction programs?
- How are the social and emotional needs of students being met?

Findings and Recommendations

The reviewer gathered qualitative data from members of ten districts by conducting a survey in which 158 respondents participated. The survey used both ranked choice and open-ended

questions. The responses are summarized here, and a more detailed summary of responses is attached to the Appendix.

Table 1: Roles of Survey Participants

Role	Count	Percent*
Special Education Director	8	5%
Special Education Coordinator	3	2%
Special Education Teacher	60	38%
General Education Teacher	16	10%
Speech Language Pathologist	16	10%
Occupational Therapist	2	1%
Physical Therapist	2	1%
VR Counselor	0	0%
School Psychologist	8	5%
ABA Therapist	0	0%
Principal	21	13%
Guidance Counselor	2	1%
Student	1	1%
Other (see below)	24	15%

* Percent of total survey submissions (158)

Overall, the respondents indicated a high level of engagement and care for students with disabilities. There were some gaps in their ability to articulate the foci of the literacy initiatives in their schools.

As a follow-up to the survey, the reviewer prepared interview questions using the elicitation technique phases summarized by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000). A variety of stakeholders from ten member districts were interviewed at times individually but, in most cases, in small groups. This provided a spectrum of experience, from classroom teachers to superintendents. The interviews were transcribed and included in the coding process that took place for the survey data.

In qualitative inquiry, a code is often a word or phrase that “symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute” to the data (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). The portions of data the reviewer coded consisted of the open-ended questions in the survey and the transcribed interviews. The coding assisted with the synthesis of 110 open-ended responses in the survey and over ten hours of transcribed interviews. The reviewer highlighted all the data and began to see themes emerge. The data was placed into tables to sort and create overarching themes, which are listed below.

Themes from Coding Across Participants

Table 2: Themes from Coding Across Participants

Finding 1	MTSS	<i>Data meetings were both formal and informal and had different names across respondents</i>
Finding 2	Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs	<i>Setting high expectations for students with disabilities and ensuring that stakeholders believe in their ability to make progress</i>
Finding 3	Collaboration	<i>Frequent collaboration among all stakeholders in formal and informal structures</i>
Finding 4	Individualization	<i>Creating unique structures and supports for students</i>
Finding 5	Relationships and Student Involvement	<i>Having strong relationships with students and families and involving them in the process</i>
Finding 6	Administrative Support	<i>Understanding and supportive leadership with data to support decision-making</i>
Finding 7	Inclusion	<i>Ensuring that students are not only educated in their least restrictive environment, but also included socially and emotionally</i>
Finding 8	Social/Emotional Learning	<i>Creating a strong SEL program particularly in response to the COVID 19 pandemic</i>
Finding 9	Literacy	<i>Research-based literacy programs that use data to track progress and provide interventions</i>

The following are representative samples from the data that support recommendations:

Finding 1: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Table 3: Quotes Supporting Need for MTSS

MTSS
<i>Our school continues to grow with the MTSS initiative. We have been gradually including components into our curriculum. By moving into the MTSS initiative steadily and building a solid foundation, we have not overwhelmed staff and move ahead confidently knowing how to be more effective educators for students with learning disabilities.</i>
<i>Collaboration and use of data to drive decisions and programing are two areas that stand out as ways our school supports the learning of students with disabilities.</i>
<i>We use data to help drive proactive decisions and planning for academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs. We have great support staff in place with our lead teachers</i>
<i>Since 2017 we have been working to implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Our staff meets monthly to discuss student progress and we develop intervention plans based on data and teacher observation.</i>
<i>We review data and adjust interventions based on the results.</i>
<i>We have accomplished this by developing a system of providing students with direct interventions. Students are identified both on testing data and teacher observation.</i>
<i>Our school has a strong MTSS team focusing on both Behavior and Academics. We work to collaborate as a leadership team with MTSS monthly. We are looking at finding curriculum and instruction that lends corresponds with what is happening in the general education system</i>
<i>We are always looking to improve and are currently building our MTSS programming to assist us in doing more/better for our students.</i>
<i>Staff have attended MTSS conferences to benefit ourselves and students to work closer on what that will look and run like to support our students with disabilities.</i>
<i>The administration keeps staff current on MTSS and other programs that will help students achieve the expectations of the student in the created program.</i>

The work around improving outcomes for all students begins with strong curriculum in general education. The goal for students with disabilities is to access and make meaning of the content. When the school has a very strong Tier I in academics and pro-social programming, all students benefit and those students at-risk are more easily identified.

More than 7,000 students drop out of high school every school day. “In the 2015-2016 school year, about 68% of students (13,617) with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) graduated on time, in contrast to about 90% of their peers without IEPs” (NDDPI, 2017). It is recommended that data teams be created that are empowered to review student data and implement interventions. The team should meet regularly with that time protected from any disruption. The team should use the NDMTSS Playbook making adaptations when necessary. Following the NDMTSS from early childhood can increase retention rates and prevent dropouts with targeted focus on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (<https://casel.org/>).

The NDMTSS Playbook sets the following questions for the teams to consider:

- How do we create a system where ALL STUDENTS can be successful?
- How do we create a system where ALL TEACHERS can be successful?
- How do we create a system where ALL INITIATIVES align to promote DISTRICT improvement and success?
- How do we create a system where ALL RESOURCES and SUPPORTS are allocated to support these overarching school improvement goals? (NDDPI, 2018).

When implementing recommendations, it is important to create a process for implementation and follow through with that process with fidelity.

1. Identify the Issue/Problem to be Resolved

Table 3: How often do you review data for student with disabilities with the intent of driving decisions?

Time spent reviewing data	Count	Percent
Once per week	65	41%
Once per month	50	32%
Once per quarter or trimester	20	13%
Two or more times per year	6	4%
I don't know / Does not apply to me	17	11%
Total Count	158	

- This issue/problem should be one that is data-driven and can be tracked using data points.
- There should be no more than three issues/problems to tackle at a time and those should be the school-wide focus.
- All stakeholders: families, students, staff, and administration should be able to articulate the school-wide initiatives.

2. Create and Empower a Team

Table 4: How often do you collaborate with other professionals regarding the delivery of instruction for student with disabilities?

Collaboration Time	Count	Percent
Every day	55	35%
More than once per week	36	23%
Once per week	27	17%
Two or three times per month	24	15%
Once per month	8	5%
Less than once per month	5	3%
I don't know / Does not apply to me	3	2%
Total Count	158	

- The team should consist of a variety of teachers, staff, and administrators.
- Every subject area (including physical education, art, etc.) should be represented to ensure a variety of perspectives and so that each department sees themselves in the work.
- This team will be the “think tank” of the district/school and will be responsible for the “roll out” of any initiatives.

- This team will be leaders in the district/school
- This team will be able to have difficult conversations together and will be able to share a unified message.

3. Monitor, Monitor, Monitor!

- The implementation of initiatives must be monitored with regularity and focus.
- Instructional rounds should occur regularly and have specific literacy skills and activities as the indicators of effective practice.

Finding 2: Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs

Table 5: Quotes Supporting Positive Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs

Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs
<i>Administration believes all students can learn, and they support the special education programs and what each teacher teaches.</i>
<i>This is becoming the culture of expectation for our school.</i>
<i>All staff is invested to provide the best opportunities for all of our students.</i>
<i>Caring Special Education staff -- teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, administrators.</i>
<i>We have an excellent team approach in which we all work together, under the philosophy 'Every Child, Every Day' and all take ownership for the learning and success of students.</i>
<i>Every student is everyone's student. We succeed by working together for all.</i>
<i>We are all educators and all staff are responsible for the education of all students, so the classroom teacher, the para, the principal, etc. are as responsible to support student learning and growth as much as the teacher delivering specialized instruction</i>
<i>We are all in it for ALL our students as a family</i>
<i>I believe that all students are valued and allowed to succeed</i>
<i>I truly believe our students with disabilities feel and know that everyone is on their side, including general education teachers, SPED teachers, administration, and parents</i>
<i>We also hold our students to the same standard of high expectations that we hold everyone to. Our staff works hard to hold students accountable and celebrate their successes.</i>

Students with disabilities can be educated in a variety of settings depending on their unique needs. Inclusion occurs when students are educated in the same setting as their typically developing peers. The goal for all students with disabilities is to receive instruction in the least restrictive setting. To the extent possible, students with disabilities should participate in the general education setting. This can be done using a partial or full inclusion model.

More than the setting, inclusion is a mindset about what staff, families, administrators, students, and other stakeholders believe about the achievement of students with disabilities. Again, “smart and disabled are not mutually exclusive” and students with disabilities should have access to high level content and expectations. While many students have learned dependence, the goal should be to create independence. When students are included in general education settings, they can benefit from highly skilled content teachers as well as getting their needs met from special education staff in a variety of models.

All means All: Going from MY kids/YOUR kids to OUR Kids

All stakeholders should take responsibility for the achievement of all students. When looking at data, the tendency is to “blame” a subgroup for bringing down the aggregate scores. However, when the data is carefully examined in item analyses, the students in subgroups (disability, English learners) often have the same dips on item analysis as their typically developing peers. However, the dips are more pronounced. When we discovered this at our school, we realized that a whole school focus was the answer. We also realized that every teacher, staff member, and administrator had to take responsibility for the outcomes of all the students. In our data meetings, all departments came to the table ready to discuss the best practices for all students. With whole-school initiatives, the focus of the special education department was to implement those initiatives in supported and meaningful practices.

Finding 3: Collaboration

Table 6: Quotes Supporting Collaboration

Collaboration
<i>A team that collaborates often and is always changing and working towards bettering the students success!</i>
<i>As a school team, we collaborate, coordinate, and cooperate to support and promote success for our students both with and without disabilities.</i>
<i>Collaboration among the SpEd team is helpful in programming for students as well as supporting GenEd teachers.</i>
<i>Highly trained special education staff, collaboration daily with general educators, administrators, and supporting staff to support carryover of skills to the classroom</i>
<i>Teachers collaborate to make the learning process successful. Constant feedback and interaction with teachers, students, and parents make learning work!!</i>
<i>We work cooperatively and collaboratively together to ensure we are meeting the needs of each of our students.</i>
<i>I feel my special education team has developed consistent communication with general education teachers and parents and feel support from our administration. This allows for staff to have confidence making decisions regarding intervention as a team and empowers the special education staff to go above and beyond for our students.</i>
<i>Teachers and special educators collaborate together about our students once a week and we work together to make decisions about learning instruction for our students.</i>
<i>This communication and collaboration is the foundation for support and learning in our district of students with disabilities.</i>
<i>The collaboration between general education teacher, special education teacher, and administration and other stake holders is key to our success. Everyone is on the same page.</i>

Effective outcomes for students with disabilities rely on the ability of a wide range of experts, including families, to share varied perspectives about students. The collaboration should focus on:

- Communication
- Professional competence

- Respect
- Commitment
- Equality
- Advocacy

While implementing the principles of collaboration, the team must focus on differing communication styles and preferences while respecting cultural differences (Council for Exceptional Children, 2017, p.34).

Student-Driven IEPs

Most students are aware that they learn in a different way than their peers, but that does not mean they are less smart. Smart and disabled are not mutually exclusive. Students should have opportunities to know their disability, how it impacts their learning, and to share in the generation of, and monitoring of progress towards IEP goals.

Finding 4: Individualization

Table 7: Quotes Supporting Individualization

Individualization
<i>Every child is unique and has a different way of learning. Our school also offers a variety of classes/programs that meet the needs of all students. We work with students, parents, and teachers to strive and do the best for the students. Decisions are based on what will work best for each child.</i>
<i>Interventions are geared towards what skills are lagging. These occur daily in the elementary during WIN (What I Need) time and all students receive some type of intervention</i>
<i>We attribute our graduation rate to our one-on-one support for students. In all aspects of education, we provide building those relationships between adults and students is critical. Teachers and administration reach out directly to students who are struggling</i>
<i>It is important that student who excel in one program but need remediation in another are allowed.</i>

We collaborate on various topics relating to each of our students on an individual level and break down their schedule and education plans to equip them with the tools they need to be successful in their learning environment.

We strive to meet the unique needs of all students. There is not a single student in our school that has the same plan as another student.

Our Special Education Team works with regular education staff to provide the most effective individualized education programs for our special needs students by working together, communicating regularly, and sharing student progress.

As a staff we encourage student growth by reteaching and offering individualized instruction in our classrooms daily.

We tailor individualized instruction to a student's specific needs.

All stakeholders must be flexible and strategic using current evidence-based research to create unique and individualized programming for students with disabilities. Special educators are able to create goals and objectives based on an understanding of general education standards and the unique needs of the students. Special educators take into consideration the students' culture, economic status, race, ethnicity, and incorporate these into their planning for the unique needs of their students.

Putting the "I" Back in Individualized Education Programs (IEP)

Unintentionally, IEPs can become formulaic and difficult to implement with fidelity. Sometimes the document contains good teaching practices that are not specialized nor directly related to the student's disability. The document should be meaningful, allowing all stakeholders to apply the contents and special education staff to collect data on progress. Throughout the survey data and the interviews, the importance of creating unique plans, schedules, and opportunities for students with disabilities was repeated. All stakeholders must be flexible and strategic using

current evidence-based research to create unique and individualized programming for students with disabilities.

It is important that the IEP “matches” the student’s disability and the unique characteristics of the disability and how it impacts that student directly. The unique characteristics require accommodations that are unique to that student and are separate from good teaching strategies. The accommodation implementation should be easily understood by the reader.

- The disability drives the goals, the goals drive the services, and the services drive the placement. Ask:
 - What are the goals that this student needs to be working on to make effective progress in the general education setting?
 - What are the direct services that will help this student achieve the goal(s)?
 - What is the placement that allows the services to be delivered with fidelity?

Finding 5: Relationships/Student Involvement

Table 8: Quotes Supporting Relationships/Student Involvement

Relationships/Student Involvement
<i>Build on the relationship with the student, empower student efficacy, and prepare them for post-high school world.</i>
<i>Our school also strives on developing relationships with students and parents. We feel relationships with families is one of the keys to a successful learning environment.</i>
<i>We have a commitment to communicating with and collaborating with parents and view them as a valuable asset on our teams</i>
<i>The school IEP team must develop high levels of relational capacity by putting human needs first, advocating for the student and family, and being transparent regarding every detail, including the details which are not always positive</i>
<i>The first step to being successful in education is to build relationships. That is hard to measure in a survey, but it is evident in our school with our students and staff.</i>
<i>It is important to form positive relationships with these students and as a result, they tend to work that much harder as a student.</i>

<i>The expectation is that all students come first in our decision making.</i>
<i>Our staff, administration, and families are all invested members in the education of each student.</i>
<i>Constant feedback and interaction with teachers, students, and parents make learning work!!</i>
<i>Our school is all about relationships! Specifically, we stress filling the buckets of one another. We inspire our students to lead the school in a way they are pleased with. We talk about growth mindset, being resilient and persevering in all our students do.</i>

Students with disabilities have unique learning profiles that require stakeholders to have deep understanding of their strengths and teach to those strengths. The staff working with the student should understand students' backgrounds and interests as that information is as important as their academic and cognitive abilities. Students with disabilities tend to develop low self-esteem based on low performance and set low expectations for themselves. When positive relationships are established expectations and collaboration between all stakeholders, most importantly with the student, can be established. Knowing each student and their unique story allows the stakeholders to make connections in that reverse the negative thoughts. When students know and feel that their teachers care about them and believe in their abilities, they are able to build a strong foundation on which to build their learning.

Finding 6: Administrative Support

Table 9: Quotes Supporting Administrative Support

Administrative Support
<i>Administrative support is SO important!</i>
<i>Working in collaboration with the school leaders to implement the best outcome for all students.</i>
<i>Finally, administrative support focused on student needs is critical.</i>

We have very strong administrative support for our special education department and students with disabilities. We have a strong, dedicated special education team that includes administrators, teachers and paras.

Our administrators are quick to support students with behavioral disabilities and are often called out of their office to assist with behaviors

Our administration is open and supportive of the staff and they provide assistance, materials, and curriculum supplements to help teachers provide differentiated lessons in classrooms.

If things are not followed through, we have solid administrative support to step in

Our administration is fully invested in making sure EVERY student has opportunities and does what is best for EVERY student

Along with our caring administration, whose doors are always open for not only the students, but the teachers and paras who work with the students as well. They are so eager and willing to help in any way they can.

The principals at our school support and encourage the learning of students with disabilities, and it makes all the difference!

As with all school practices, the administration must be delivering the message and upholding the commitment made to the work of the team. It is imperative that the administration supports the work and maintains the focus and follow-through of all initiatives. There are several key strategies that work:

- Do everything to protect time for teacher collaboration and the initiatives the team determines are the most important in order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Capitalize on the time allotted for meetings and use them for instructional time. Use every available moment to focus on the initiatives established by the team and send everything else not relevant to that focus via emails.
- Collaborate and share feedback with the team often and listen to their insights.
- Model expectations by creating objectives for each meeting and articulating expected outcomes for success.

Finding 7: Inclusion

Table 10: Quotes Supporting Inclusion

Inclusion
<i>I love the way our school supports the learning of students with disabilities because they are included in the classroom as much as possible. I love the way our special ed. teacher push into the classrooms rather than pulling students out</i>
<i>Inclusion, Adequate number of special ed staff hired to cover needs.</i>
<i>I believe that having a continuum of services and classes offered is a large contributor to success for all students.</i>
<i>No percentage can be given for how much time they spend in the general education setting because some students only need help for one class and some students are in the special ed setting all day except for music or one general ed class.</i>
<i>One of the main goals... is to include ALL students in every aspect of school. This includes students of all types of diagnoses, even if there is no specific diagnosis. Many of our regular education teachers are comfortable with push in services</i>
<i>Our students cheer on the Special Olympians in their events, they include students at their tables at lunch and our students work to include everyone in social events in our school.</i>
<i>Students with disabilities are given every opportunity to succeed. They are in the regular classroom with support from the teacher and the special education teacher. They may get pulled to work on skills or the special education teacher may come in to support the student in the classroom.</i>
<i>We strive to have most of our students in regular courses as much as possible. This is obviously not always appropriate, but we absolutely try to include all of our students in courses they wish to take.</i>
<i>We strive to include all students in regular classroom activities, as much as possible. We tailor individualized instruction to a student's specific needs.</i>
<i>As a result, all students, including those with disabilities have confidence and a sense of belonging in their school. I think this is one of the biggest reasons why our students with disabilities perform so well.</i>

Inclusive education is so much more than classroom placements. A truly inclusive environment places high value on diversity and celebrating the unique qualities students bring with

them to school. Students and families should be included in making decisions that impact them. They should help generate their own goals and progress monitor with the ability to share at their IEP meetings. Truly inclusive schools provide training and support to all stakeholders so that students feel welcome and supported.

Finding 8: Social/Emotional Learning

Table 11: Quotes Supporting Social/Emotional Learning

Social/Emotional Learning
<i>We use evidence-based practice and research supported Social Emotional Learning curriculum with unified language and activities. Students experience the same activities and learning opportunities across classroom settings and grade levels.</i>
<i>We have developed a team approach. We continue to work on training all staff on Trauma-Sensitive practices while having a team that responds when needed. It is critical that we put the best staff in front of the students during any difficult times.</i>
<i>All General education teachers teach an SEL curriculum, school counselor also does lessons to classrooms and small group social skill instructions. In addition, special education teachers provide daily social skills instruction and other professionals like SLPs and school psychologist.</i>
<i>All of our staff is learning Zones of Regulation and Second Step programs to make sure we are all utilizing the same language and each student has the best academic and social/emotional support needed.</i>
<i>As a team when we meet on a regular basis, we are always talking about each of the students in regard to their social-emotional wellness and how it effects them with the learning process.</i>
<i>The school/unit employs a clinical counselor and a social worker to address student social and emotional wellness. Social Skills are taught daily (Zones of Regulation) in order to improve success in the regular education classroom. FBAs/BIPs are created upon concern in order to create a plan to ensure student success and overall improvement.</i>
<i>Classroom teachers conduct weekly social skills instruction with the second step curriculum. We make sure that all students are present for those lessons. Our school counselor works collaboratively to support and instruct this curriculum as well.</i>

Special education incorporates the use of the "Zones of Regulation" with many students. The students are taught different strategies to deal with whatever their emotions/feelings may be and how to move to a more optimal zone

Our counseling staff are great collaborators with the special education teachers and case managers. They work hard to understand the emotional disabilities and needs of our students and help general education teachers implement the behavior plans and strategies.

Our school and district have provided a concentrated effort to provide social/emotional professional development and implemented strategies, programing and support in this area. This school year, our district hired a positive behavior strategist who is shared amongst our three elementary schools. She is in place to support all staff and students were needed.

Establishing clear, consistent, and positive learning environments increases the academic and social success of students (Council for Exceptional Children, 2017). Educators should provide direct instruction in social/emotional learning, provide multiple opportunities for practice, and provide feedback with data. The focus should be on increasing motivation, independence, and engagement. Students, along with their educators, should create their goals and monitor their progress toward those goals.

Finding 9: Literacy

Table 12: Quotes Supporting Literacy

Literacy
<i>Between 2017 and 2019 we ranked second in the state for growth scores in Language Arts.</i>
<i>Reading has been one of our strengths with regard to student growth.</i>
<i>Some classes showed as much as 2 years' worth of growth on average based on the STAR assessment.</i>
<i>Our school really focuses on Reading and provides interventions as needed</i>
<i>We have had a strong focus on writing</i>

Although some respondents were able to articulate their literacy program in their schools and districts, many were not. Lemov (2010) asserts that reading is “*the skill*” (p.249). Literacy skills should be practiced in every classroom every day.

Strategies for Students with Disabilities

Improving outcomes and closing the gaps for students with disabilities is a challenge for all schools and districts. Schools and district practices do not always align with the goal of making those improvements. However, the best practices for students with disabilities must be implemented in order to close the achievement gap for this subgroup. As a bonus, these strategies will support other subgroups/struggling learners and students who do not have exceptionalities.

Student Data: Look at Best Practices without Adding “Extras”

Rather than adding more staff and more hours of service, look at effective practices. Too often the response to struggling students is to purchase expensive programs when the best interventions are from teachers and are individualized for the student with disabilities. Teachers can track the interventions, collect data, provide interventions, and monitor the interventions’ effectiveness. The most effective practices include:

- Small group instruction
 - Whenever possible, students with disabilities should be instructed in small groups. This allows for careful application and monitoring of interventions. Teachers can quickly assess learning outcomes and make appropriate changes. With more students participating in the general education setting, redesigning the structure of the traditional classroom supports this goal. The groups can be heterogeneous or homogenous based on the lesson and the needs of the students, but the same students should not be grouped all the time.
- Centers/Station Teaching
 - To support small group instruction, centers and station teaching should be implemented. The students rotate through the stations receiving direct instruction that is differentiated and tailored to meet the needs of the students.

- Flexible Scheduling
 - One size does not fit all. Students with disabilities require different interventions at different times throughout the day. The traditional scheduling may not work for some students and there needs to exist the flexibility to provide motor breaks, unstructured time, subjects taught at different times of the day, etc.
- The Least You Need to Know Method
 - Without modifying the content, teach students the most important take-aways and “big ideas” first ensuring they have a grasp of those before moving on.
 - At the same time, be sure to “chunk” the concepts into a manageable workload.
- Pre-teaching/Re-teaching
 - Offering opportunities for a student to be “ahead of the game” by previewing material and getting access to upcoming lessons, students with disabilities will have a jump start on the key objectives
 - Using ongoing formative assessments, teachers can identify those gaps that need closing and provide direct instruction
- Technology
 - The use of assistive technology is allowing students with disabilities to demonstrate proficiency and knowledge that they have always had but were unable to show. If a student is struggling with computation but is able to problem solve and understand high level concepts in math, the use of a calculator is an effective intervention.

Summary

Improving outcomes for students with disabilities is a challenge that many states and districts are facing. Besides being the “right thing to do,” there are also federal and state mandates for those districts receiving funding. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ensures that “all children with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2021). Over the last decade, more and more emphasis has been placed on closing the gaps for students with disabilities as high-stakes testing

reveals substantial differences in the performances between them and their typically developing peers. “We must rethink special education in America...’Rethink’ means everyone questions everything to ensure that nothing limits any student from being prepared for what comes next.” (Collett, 2018).

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Appendix

Closing the Achievement Gap

(Final Report – July 22, 2020)

N = 158

I am completing this survey as a (select all that apply):

Role	Count	Percent*
Special Education Director	8	5%
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ABA Therapist	0	0%
Principal	21	13%
Guidance Counselor	2	1%
Student	1	1%
Other (see below)	24	15%

* Percent of total survey submissions (158)

Other Roles:

- *Administrative Assistant*
- *Assistant Superintendent*
- *Guardian*
- *Library media specialist*
- *Paraprofessional*
- *Paraprofessional*
- *Paraprofessional*
- *Parent of Special Needs Student (that graduated last year)*
- *School Social Worker*
- *School Social Worker*
- *School Superintendent*
- *Social Worker*
- *Social Worker*
- *special education paraprofessional*
- *Special education teacher/CTRE*

- Superintendent
- Superintendent of Schools
- Superintendent, Elementary Principal, MTSS Coordinator, and 504 Coordinator
- Teacher Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Teacher: Blind/Visually Impaired
- Title 1 Teacher
- Title I Reading specialist
- Transition Coordinator

1. As it relates to your school, please identify your level of agreement with each statement below.

Statement	Strongly Agree Count	Agree Count	Disagree Count	Strongly Disagree Count	I Don't Know Count	Total SA/A Percent
a. High expectations are set for students with disabilities.	69	84	1	2	2	97%
b. The general education teachers take responsibility for the outcomes of students with disabilities.	40	98	16	3	1	87%
c. The administration is invested in the outcomes for students with disabilities.	80	74	1	1	2	97%
d. Students with disabilities can describe the high expectations set for them.	18	103	20	2	15	77%

2. How many hours in the 2018-2019 school year did you spend on professional development related to the best practices for teaching students with disabilities?

Number of hours	Count	Percent
Less than 1 hour	5	3%
1 to 2 hours	12	8%
3 to 5 hours	14	9%
6 to 10 hours	33	21%
11 to 25 hours	49	31%
26 to 50 hours	27	17%
More than 50 hours	5	3%
I don't know / Does not apply to me	13	8%
Total Count	158	

3. How often do you collaborate with other professionals regarding the delivery of instruction for student with disabilities?

Collaboration Time	Count	Percent
Every day	55	35%
More than once per week	36	23%
Once per week	27	17%
Two or three times per month	24	15%
Once per month	8	5%
Less than once per month	5	3%
I don't know / Does not apply to me	3	2%
Total Count	158	

4. What is the model(s) for teaching students with disabilities in the general education setting? You may select more than one model from the list.

Model(s)		
Co-teaching (a general education teacher and special education teacher teaching together consistently on a schedule)	54	34%
Push in (a special education teacher comes into the classroom as often as required on the students' IEPs)	97	61%
Pull out (the student with disabilities leaves the general education setting to receive direct instruction)	139	88%
Other model (see below)	13	8%

* Percent of total survey submissions (158)

Other Models:

- *A combination model to include push in and pull out, customized to individual student needs. Also, online offerings are available.*
- *Core plus more*
- *Hybrid model- One that fits the individual student best. We have multiple options in our district.*
- *I have a self-contained classroom, so if it doesn't work to push in, I have gen ed peers come to my room for some activities. For the question below, that pertains to my students and not the general special education population.*
- *MTSS Alternate Core and Core plus more*
- *Para assistance*
- *Preschool*
- *Regular Education students are pushed into courses generally considered Special Education - used as partners, teachers' aides, etc...*

- *Resource study hall -- support from a Special Education teacher during specific times of the day and as needed during other class periods.*
- *Some pull out MTSS classes*
- *Students needs are met through a combination of push in and pull out supports. It is important to us to meet the students' needs that can require a individual setting at times and also push in at times to encourage growth in a peer model environment.*
- *Students receive small group instruction outside of the general education setting but is still getting push in services with para assistance to best meet the needs of the student.*
- *Transition Program*

5. What is the percentage of time that students with disabilities spend in the general education setting?

Time in general education setting	Count	Percent
0 to 20%	3	2%
21 to 40%	9	6%
41 to 60%	12	8%
61 to 80%	51	32%
81 to 100%	60	38%
I don't know / Does not apply to me	23	15%
Total Count	158	

6. Please identify your level of agreement with each statement below.

Statement	Strongly Agree Count	Agree Count	Disagree Count	Strongly Disagree Count	I Don't Know Count	Total SA/A Percent
a. There is an intervention system in place to help students with disabilities who are struggling academically.	82	72	3	1	0	97%
b. There is an intervention system in place to help students with disabilities who are struggling behaviorally.	61	86	10	1	0	93%
c. The intervention system is well articulated.	35	104	15	1	3	88%
d. The intervention system is well understood by all stakeholders at my school.	16	101	29	3	9	74%
e. Students with mild to moderate disabilities are included in extracurricular activities at our school.	97	57	2	1	1	97%
f. Students with severe disabilities are included in extracurricular activities at our school.	58	72	12	3	13	82%
g. Technology is used regularly in the classroom.	93	64	0	1	0	99%
h. I incorporate data regarding the performance of students with disabilities into my lesson planning.	69	63	3	1	22	84%

7. How often do you review data for student with disabilities with the intent of driving decisions?

Time spent reviewing data	Count	Percent
Once per week	65	41%
Once per month	50	32%
Once per quarter or trimester	20	13%
Two or more times per year	6	4%
I don't know / Does not apply to me	17	11%
Total Count	158	

8. What makes your school stand out as one that supports the learning of students with disabilities?

- *A strong MTSS system*
- *A team that collaborates often and is always changing and working towards bettering the students success!*
- *Administration believes all students can learn, and they support the special education programs and what each teacher teaches. Students are included in the classroom activities. Teachers are also looking for ways to help a student with a disability be more independent and successful.*
- *Administrative support is SO important! The administration is on board with doing everything we can to support our students. This is becoming the culture of expectation for our school.*
- *All staff are dedicated to supporting all students.*
- *All staff is invested to provide the best opportunities for all of our students.*
- *As a school team, we collaborate, coordinate, and cooperate to support and promote success for our students both with and without disabilities.*
- *At our school, we strive to meet the needs of each student on an individual basis. Every child is unique and has a different way of learning. Our school also offers a variety of classes/programs that meet the needs of all students. We work with students, parents, and teachers to strive and do the best for the students. Decisions are based on what will work best for each child. Our school also strives on developing relationships with students and parents. We feel relationships with families is one of the keys to a successful learning environment.*
- *Build on the relationship with the student, empower student efficacy, and prepare them for post-high school world.*
- *Caring Special Education staff -- teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, administrators.*
- *Collaboration among the SpEd team is helpful in programming for students as well as supporting GenEd teachers.*
- *Collaboration and use of data to drive decisions and programing are two areas that stand out as ways our school supports the learning of students with disabilities.*
- *Comment on #5: I could have chosen each one of those % of times; the time in/out of a classroom (LRE) depends heavily on student needs. #8: Our commitment toward all students*

and appreciation for diversity make our school top notch in supporting all students with a variety of needs. We have an excellent team approach in which we all work together, under the philosophy "Every Child, Every Day" and all take ownership for the learning and success of students. We have a commitment to communicating with and collaborating with parents and view them as a valuable asset on our teams. We have a very knowledgeable staff with great systems in place to adequately find ways to meet student needs.

- *Cooperation of the staff working together.*
- *Our career experience program gives students work experience and helps them build employability skills - everything from filling out applications/interviewing to maintaining employment skills. There are also classes that help students work on daily living and adulting skills (finding apartments, budgeting, etc.), which helps them be prepared for life after high school.*
- *Every student is everyone's student. We succeed by working together for all.*
- *First, it is about relational capacity with the student and family. The school IEP team must develop high levels of relational capacity by putting human needs first, advocating for the student and family, and being transparent regarding every detail, including the details which are not always positive. In addition, we do not have a "special education" unit at our site. We are all educators and all staff are responsible for the education of all students, so the classroom teacher, the para, the principal, etc. are as responsible to support student learning and growth as much as the teacher delivering specialized instruction. Finally, administrative support focused on student needs is critical.*
- *Great team and great culture. We are all in it for ALL our students as a family. We use data to help drive proactive decisions and planning for academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs. We have great support staff in place with our lead teachers and COOP teachers that communicate well to understand and execute plans in the best way possible. We always work to seek first to understand, then to be understood with all stakeholders. We also work closely with families to make sure they are a big part of the process as well.*
- *Highly trained special education staff, collaboration daily with general educators, administrators, and supporting staff to support carryover of skills to the classroom, specifically designed instruction to match the students' needs, high value placed on relationships with students, and inclusion in the general education setting to the highest extent possible.*
- *Highly trained staff, good systems in place to help support students with disabilities. Building leaders are invested in the success of students with disabilities.*
- *I am a preschool Special Education Teacher who also teaches the preschool class the my SPED kids are in. This gives me lots of time to work with my SPED kids.*
- *I answered this question from the perspective of our whole school, so the answers provided by our special education staff may be more specific. Between 2017 and 2019 we ranked second in the state for growth scores in Language Arts. I attribute this to our school-wide intervention program. In 2014 we were recognized as a National Title I Distinguished School for North Dakota. In the 2014-2015 school year, we were recognized as a Nationally Recognized Title I School. In 2016-2017 our Title I coordinator was recognized as Exceptional Title I Educator. Reading has been one of our strengths with regard to student growth. We have accomplished this by developing a system of providing students with direct interventions. Students are*

identified both on testing data and teacher observation. Interventions are geared towards what skills are lagging. These occur daily in the elementary during WIN (What I Need) time and all students receive some type of intervention. This has been expanded this past year by adding an additional time in the day and including mathematics in our intervention program. Some classes showed as much as 2 years' worth of growth on average based on the STAR assessment. Since 2017 we have been working to implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Our staff meets monthly to discuss student progress and we develop intervention plans based on data and teacher observation. There is no requirement for students to qualify for these supports, just that a need is present. This includes both behavioral concerns as well as academics. We review data and adjust interventions based on the results. If students need more than just classroom support, we involve parents. We attribute our graduation rate to our one-on-one support for students. In all aspects of education, we provide building those relationships between adults and students is critical. Teachers and administration reach out directly to students who are struggling to collaborate to put in

- *I believe our school stands out in our ability to support students with disabilities because of the team oriented approach our SPED team takes, tenacity, and relationship building. The first step to being successful in education is to build relationships. That is hard to measure in a survey, but it is evident in our school with our students and staff. I truly believe our students with disabilities feel and know that everyone is on their side, including general education teachers, SPED teachers, administration, and parents. We also hold our students to the same standard of high expectations that we hold everyone to. Our staff works hard to hold students accountable and celebrate their successes. Also, our staff does a great job of getting all general education teachers on board with IEPs and intervention strategies. It is communicated frequently and thoroughly. If things are not followed through, we have solid administrative support to step in.*
- *I believe that having a continuum of services and classes offered is a large contributor to success for all students. We have (in no particular order) established advance placement, MTSS, AVID, CTRE, ELL, and special education programs that communicate and work together to provide the best education possible. It is important that student who excel in one program but need remediation in another are allowed. It is also my belief that assisting special population students, that do not otherwise fall into a support category, is critical. Our guidance counselors are over-taxed. We have number of students that fall into these categories that are at-risk to graduate. Continuing and expanding the CTRE position as our schools and population increases is important. This program allows exploration and support to enter the work force and better find resources that are specific to their needs.*
- *I believe that we are consistent when working with our students. Teachers collaborate to make the learning process successful. Constant feedback and interaction with teachers, students, and parents make learning work!!*
- *I feel like the team supports the families and students to help them do better.*
- *I feel my special education team has developed consistent communication with general education teachers and parents and feel support from our administration. This allows for staff to have confidence making decisions regarding intervention as a team and empowers the special education staff to go above and beyond for our students.*
- *I love the way our school supports the learning of students with disabilities because they are included in the classroom as much as possible. I love the way our special ed. teacher push into the classrooms rather than pulling students out. Teachers and special educators collaborate*

together about our students once a week and we work together to make decisions about learning instruction for our students.

- *I work at 5 secondary schools and they all do a great job of teaching our students with disabilities. These questions are hard to answer because every student is unique and their IEPs and 504s are all unique. Each special ed team at each school tailor the education for every student with disabilities. No percentage can be given for how much time they spend in the general education setting because some students only need help for one class and some students are in the special ed setting all day except for music or one general ed class. Very difficult questions to answer. The same goes for which model is used for teaching. We use them all!*
- *In our school we have set aside team time for all core teachers to discuss their students. Students with disabilities are brought up on a regular basis.*
- *Inclusion*
- *Inclusion, Adequate number of special ed staff hired to cover needs.*
- *Individual learning plans are created for each student. Parents, teachers, paras, and administrators are all on board and communications for the most part is the key. Paras work closely with each student organizing and supporting them in various ways to promote success. If the student is on board themselves, success is almost always apparent in our school. I am familiar with grades 7-12.*
- *My school has gathered a team that doesn't see our students with disabilities as "those kids" or someone else's kids. Administrators, psychologists, special education teachers, general education teachers and specialists all work together to support these kids as we do all of the students in our school. We take on each student's individuality and solve any barriers they may have like a puzzle that needs to be solved collectively.*
- *Many of our regular education teachers are comfortable with push in services, but they also understand when pull-out services would be better for a particular student. Two years ago, our school decided to make a sensory room, as it seemed that more and more students needed assistance to regulate their sensory systems in order to benefit from their regular education in the classroom. School administration agreed that a sensory room was a priority for our students. As such, a room was secured, and materials were purchased. Our Occupational Therapist was included on all decisions regarding materials. A few of these students actually have a sensory impairment diagnosis, but most do not. Special education personnel, along with regular education personnel, make the decision as to who would benefit from regular use of the sensory room. Those students are then scheduled into the sensory room from one to four times each day. Another project our school is thinking about doing is building a "sensory hallway". This would be something that every single student in the school could utilize.*
- *Our administration is fully invested in making sure EVERY student has opportunities and does what is best for EVERY student*
- *Our administration, teachers and paraprofessionals work hard to meet the students where they are at and to provide interventions. We focus on the least restrictive environment for students.*
- *Our administrators are quick to support students with behavioral disabilities and are often called out of their office to assist with behaviors. Academically, I think our school stands out because we have multiple supports in place at each tier of intervention to benefit our students.*

- *Our general education teachers trust the special education teachers and are willing to try any extra supports/accommodations/modifications we ask them to implement. Our special education team is relationship-based, and data driven!*
- *Our greatest supports come in the form of a systematic approach to interventions and a relational approach between case managers and general educators.*
- *Our school actively searches for students who are struggling in order to provide interventions where needed.*
- *Our school district has strived to ensure staffing support, providing the necessary resources for student success in regard to professional and paraprofessional positions. While the school district has seen its population of students with severe disabilities increase the past several years; the efforts to provide high quality education and opportunities for these students has remained and increased over that period of time. Collaboration between the administration, teachers, and special education departments has been essential to work through challenging situations and remove obstacles when present. The school district continues to pursue opportunities to improve the communication between stakeholders and to ensure the intervention plans for special education students are known and acknowledged by all stakeholders. The school district hopes all children, special needs or otherwise, feel welcomed in our school district and families believe their student is getting the highest quality educational experience in our school buildings.*
- *Our school does a great job of seeing and servicing every student regardless of ability. We have great interventions set in place for students that need it and staff is wonderful at working together to put the students best interest first.*
- *Our school has a strong MTSS team focusing on both Behavior and Academics. We work to collaborate as a leadership team with MTSS monthly. We are looking at finding curriculum and instruction that lends corresponds with what is happening in the general education system. Teacher teams have the opportunity to collaborate with Special Ed. teachers often.*
- *Our school has teachers and para-educators committed to the expectations that has been set for our students. The expectation is that all students come first in our decision making. All employees understand that we are going to serve all students by meeting their educational needs regardless of their educational classification. Resources for students with disabilities are allotted at a much higher per student basis for students with disabilities compared to regular education students.*
- *Our school is all about relationships! We inspire our students to lead the school in a way they are pleased with. We talk about growth mindset, being resilient and persevering in all our students do. Our students cheer on the Special Olympians in their events, they include students at their tables at lunch and our students work to include everyone in social events in our school. Special Education students are not singled out in our classrooms as we announce to classes the Para Professionals and the Special Education teachers in the classroom to assist all students who may need their help. We have a residence on our campus which houses students who are higher needs Special Education students. Some of these students come from other districts after they have graduated. Our students welcome these kids into our school right away. We strive to have most of our students in regular courses as much as possible. This is obviously not always appropriate, but we absolutely try to include all of our students in courses they wish to take. We are always looking to improve and are currently building our MTSS programming to assist us in*

doing more/better for our students. Our Special Education teachers and students are a key component in the success of our school.

- Our school strives to create individual plans for each student to meet their unique needs. There is not a single student in our school that has the same plan as another student. We take a team approach in every aspect and ensure that the student receives the necessary support as they move through their school day.*
- Our school works very closely together. Staff have attended MTSS conferences to benefit ourselves and students to work closer on what that will look and run like to support our students with disabilities. Having General Education Teachers understand what each student needs and is very understanding and supportive when it comes to our special education students. Second, having great, hardworking, and respectful Paraeducators working with our students and teachers every day and wanting to make a difference in our students lives. Third, supportive, respectful, and understanding administration make a world of a difference when you are working with students with disabilities at all different levels. Fourth, having parents that support and want the best for their child is important.*
- Our small class sizes allow regular education teachers and special education teachers the ability to work with all students one-to-one or in small groups. Also, our daily communication with each other is beneficial for students and their success.*
- Our SPED Department works together with each of our SPED students through Push In & Pull Out modes of Instruction. SPED teachers and caseworkers also schedule IEP meetings with Parents, Admin and Teacher allowed to attend in all meetings. Our SPED Department participates with our MTSS / RTI / CHAT / WIN teams and assists with their expertise with our regular education students as well. Our SPED Department provides Professional Development for all staff and assists with de-escalation and programs to assist in a team format. Our SPED Department shares Data and Assessment results with our classroom teachers and assists in making sure each student has the most effective and exactly what needs the student has.*
- Our staff are creative and ambitious. Our administration actively ensures that students with disabilities are receiving the services they need. Our culture of high expectations is helpful.*
- Our staff cares about all of our students, regardless of needs and/or disabilities, and strives to provide the best educational opportunities for all of our students.*
- Our teachers really understand the curriculum as well as the needs of all of our students. They seek out help as needed for students. I feel that we work well together as a team to identify students that need a bit of extra support as well those students that need more intensive supports. Our school really focuses on Reading and provides interventions as needed. However, I feel that we need additional supports in the area of Math interventions.*
- Programs such as Unified PE, Unified Sports, Peer to Peer class, and Best Buddies. Staff that is passionate about teaching. High standards.*
- School staff all work with our students with disabilities from the office, to lunch to all teachers and paras within our building. We have a high population of students with disabilities and low-income families and our staff is so caring and supportive. Most teachers welcome our students with disabilities in the classroom and find ways for our students to be successful within the room when possible.*

- *Smaller school district and communication. With the size of our school district we are fortunate that our staff and special education teacher can plan and communicate daily on student needs, interventions, lesson plans, assessments, and student needs. This communication and collaboration is the foundation for support and learning in our district of students with disabilities.*
- *Staff is invested in student success. They provide guidance for both staff and student improvement for successful students.*
- *Students in our school with learning disabilities are provided with assistance to succeed. The classroom instructor works with the special education coordinator to create a curriculum that addresses the needs of each student. IEP meetings are held to keep all stakeholders current with the student's success and areas in need of continued growth. Paraprofessionals who work with a student are welcomed in the classroom and a student who must leave the classroom for assistance are allowed to do so without being ostracized. The administration keeps staff current on MTSS and other programs that will help students achieve the expectations of the student in the created program. Our school is a title wide school which enables all students to receive the necessary help to be successful.*
- *Students with disabilities are given every opportunity to succeed. They are in the regular classroom with support from the teacher and the special education teacher. They may get pulled to work on skills or the special education teacher may come in to support the student in the classroom.*
- *Supporting not only the student(s) but the family with all educational roles and processes.*
- *Team work*
- *The administration...which includes the special education director, the superintendent, principals and educators.*
- *The collaboration between general education teacher, special education teacher, and administration and other stake holders is key to our success. Everyone is on the same page.*
- *The entire staff want the student to succeed. Other students within our school actively work with students with disabilities as friends.*
- *The fact that everyone works together. If something is wrong, you just go and talk to the teacher and things get resolved. Everyone has a voice in what is being done to provide the best education to the student*
- *The Intervention and Enrichment Block is dedicated 60 minutes daily for interventions where students do not miss out on core instruction. Screening provides a pathway to early intervention as quick as possible. MTSS system allows for students need for alternative instructional methods to be met.*
- *The main difference with our school is the intent on meeting students where they are and understanding them as individuals. The staff and administration truly care and find ways to bring opportunities for success and a feeling of personal value for students. Student accomplishments are celebrated on an individual basis.*
- *The relationship between administration, faculty and students and their ability to communicate with one another. Everyone in the school observes when a student is having difficulty and will address it in the MTSS process.*

- *The shared ownership of all students and the belief that each educator makes a difference every day. We are a large district and we work hard to be a system where learning is not left to chance.*
- *The small student population allows teachers to work closely with all students, especially those with disabilities. We are able to adjust and reassess what and how we are providing instruction and make changes almost immediately. As a staff we encourage student growth by reteaching and offering individualized instruction in our classrooms daily. The school building itself is small allowing staff to meet and discuss student achievements, successes, needs, and behaviors often. The smaller size of our building also allows specialists to observe students in their classrooms because the specialists are nearby at all times. Our administration is open and supportive of the staff and they provide assistance, materials, and curriculum supplements to help teachers provide differentiated lessons in classrooms.*
- *The Special Education team meets regularly to assess and determine resources and strategies to provide optimal behavioral and academic outcomes for students. The Special Education is willing to provide support and resources to any student in our building, non-disabled included. The students really respond positively to the SPED team and you see the students feel physically and emotionally safe in their presence.*
- *The staff and the students work together. Also, with it being a small school we are all working together for the better of the students*
- *The staff are willing to go above and beyond to support students and each other.*
- *The students with disabilities in our school have their needs met on a daily basis through the regular education classroom and the special education classroom. We have paraprofessionals who interact frequently with these students to ensure their success. We also have regular education teachers who are aware of the needs of these students and strive to meet them. Our administration is involved and take an active role in ensuring the needs of these students are met and all IEPs are followed.*
- *The team work approach is strong and effective.*
- *There is excellent collaboration with all special education personnel and regular education staff with support from administration. I feel all staff works well with each other and there is good communication in regard to reaching goals established by a child's team and their families.*
- *Working with school administrators and special educators on a weekly basis has been a great way to support students with disabilities and general education teachers.*
- *We have a norm of how we go about things, but as you know all students (whether or not the student has disabilities or not) end up in unique situations or have unique issues. That norm gives us a starting point on how to proceed and then we make changes as the situation dictates. Our teachers go above and beyond to help students with disabilities. They freely communicate with the special ed teachers, guidance counselors, admin, and others to make sure we do what we can to help the student succeed without necessarily enabling poor decisions and harmful routines.*
- *We are a small town school and are able to have one on one with special needs students. We also have great specialist to guide the teaching.*

- *We as a school have a very good support from all the regular education teacher, administration, and all personnel that are part of the education of students who are on an IEP.*
- *We do a tiered intervention approach and not all schools in our district do. Kids are often getting what they need before qualifying for special Ed services.*
- *We have 4 special education teachers at our school. Of those 4, one teacher case manages students with disabilities where their behavior is the highest need. She manages a room where students can go to when needing a quiet place to learn, with the option of returning to the classroom when they are regulated. Students can also earn time in this room for meeting expectations. This greatly reduces disruption in the classroom setting and provides a safe place to give students what they need to meet their behavioral and special education needs.*
- *We have a collaborative team that meets weekly to discuss students, their progress, and interventions. We also have an amazing district level team that make sure there is equity across buildings with interventions and supports.*
- *We have a great sensory room that provides students with the necessary sensory breaks. Additionally, we work very closely with each individual student and family to support each student as best as possible.*
- *We have a solid generalized MTSS system that helps form academic and behavioral instruction. We have an MTSS-B committee working hard to build the interventions and tiers to support teachers. Most students with disabilities have access to the general education setting for a majority of their school day.*
- *We have a staff that is all in when it comes to supporting all students including those with disabilities. It is important to form positive relationships with these students and as a result, they tend to work that much harder as a student. We are a small school; therefore, students are less apt to "fall through the cracks" like you would see more often in a larger school. When a student struggles, interventions are immediately implemented whether it be in regular ed, 504, MTSS or Spec. Education.*
- *We have amazing staff members who do whatever they can to help students. We also have access to a variety of resources that help students with their specific needs.*
- *We have an amazing administrator. We all work together so well as a team because we all care so much about our students. We run all of our programs collaboratively and with fidelity. We have a great support system within the district if we need additional assistance with our individual caseloads.*
- *We have great administration that sets the expectations and standards for our teachers who work with students with disabilities.*
- *We have great leadership in our coordinators and director. They do a great job helping us with curriculum and scheduling to best meet student needs. They also let us provide feedback and work with us so that we have input on any decisions regarding instruction or planning. Also, special education and general education are working together to make sure the core curriculum is available to all students. Our special ed staff is receiving some of the same trainings as our general ed staff and that helps us to make recommendations to modify in the classroom or support that instruction in the resource room.*

- *We have had a strong focus on writing behavior plans and on using research-based curriculum and interventions. Behavior seems to be a huge impactor of education for many students and equipping staff with the tools to write and implement behavior plans, collect data, and review data has been helpful. We also have a choice of classes we can sign up for each semester for extra learning opportunities. We have strong school-wide interventions for behavior and academics in place. Math might be an area of need since we are not a title school and don't have a specific intervention teacher for math. One thing that has been a nice change, is that for the past 5 years or so, on the district PD days, special ed is more focused on special ed topics rather than joining the district for the PD that the general education teachers get.*
- *We have high expectations for all of our students, and we do not allow students with disabilities to use their disability as a reason for not doing something. Sometimes the instruction, process, or final product may need modification, but in many cases students with disabilities can be as successful as others in the classroom.*
- *We have high expectations for all students regardless of disability status. We provide tools to help all students meet expectations.*
- *We have made great progress with our intervention methods and developed systems to reach students before they fail.*
- *We have moved towards a team approach for students it is vital that we all believe in the plan in place. We have started the implementation of the MTSS model as an academic intervention tool, this has improved our district vision in meeting students where they are.*
- *We have staff that value the inclusion of students with disabilities. We have a strong administrator that has high expectations of staff and all students. We work collaboratively to support the needs of our students.*
- *We have two excellent Special Education teachers along with our caring administration, whose doors are always open for not only the students, but the teachers and paras who work with the students as well. They are so eager and willing to help in any way they can. We are always told that if we make connections with kids, the learning will come naturally/easier. The Team that our school has put together wants nothing but the best for all kids who come through the school doors. Our goal is to make all the kids feel safe and loved so they can learn and grow to be the best people they can possibly be.*
- *We have very strong administrative support for our special education department and students with disabilities. We have a strong, dedicated special education team that includes administrators, teachers and paras.*
- *We have weekly PLC meetings that are data driven. Monthly we have PLC meetings that include special education teachers and our speech and language pathologist. These teachers also visit with me frequently about the students' progress in our classroom.*
- *We meet with PLC's every week with general education and special education staff. The special education team has a PLC twice a month to discuss issues that come up.*
- *We offer many different means of learning and inclusion for our students. We have incorporated student mentors to work with our students with disabilities and continue to grow and foster ways for students with and without disabilities to work and play together.*

- *We strive to include all students in regular classroom activities, as much as possible. We tailor individualized instruction to a student's specific needs.*
- *We strive to meet the unique needs of all students.*
- *We work as a team when deciding what is the best approach for our students. Our students' needs come first in all decision making and approaching decisions as a team has made a huge impact.*
- *We work hard to keep the students with disabilities engaged and give them the support needed to feel successful.*
- *Work with students' parents and teachers for positive results*
- *Working in collaboration with the school leaders to implement the best outcome for all students.*

9. What makes your school stand out as one that supports the social/emotional wellness of students with disabilities?

- *A counselor is always a part of the support system within our school. For the most part, all parties involved are very vested in the students.*
- *A social emotional curriculum is taught every day. We make changes to their school day to fit their needs.*
- *Advisory*
- *Again, we have developed a team approach. We continue to work on training all staff on Trauma-Sensitive practices while having a team that responds when needed. It is critical that we put the best staff in front of the students during any difficult times.*
- *Again, I think our sensory room helps with this. Additionally, our special education teachers do an exceptional job of working individually with students to meet their needs both academically and socially/emotionally.*
- *Again, the special education director, superintendent, principals, educators and counselors take a vested interest in best outcomes for students.*
- *Again, we are able to concentrate the necessary amount of time and attention to all students and have developed positive rapport and relationships for them to feel comfortable. This helps us determine the wellness of the student.*
- *All 5 schools do a great job with social emotional wellness. They have been well trained, and we have great specialists who assist with this training.*
- *All General education teachers teach an SEL curriculum, school counselor also does lessons to classrooms and small group social skill instructions. In addition, special education teachers provide daily social skills instruction and other professionals like SLPs and school psychologist.*
- *All members work together to support the emotional and social wellness of students with disabilities. We provide services and strategies to meet their needs.*
- *All of our staff is learning Zones of Regulation and Second Step programs to make sure we are all utilizing the same language and each student has the best academic and social/emotional*

support needed. We are also given the opportunity to work with SPED on PREPARE and Nurtured Heart trainings to improve our work with SPED, as well as regular ed, students. After school trainings are also provided to assist students in Yoga, settling down, and calming techniques for each student.

- *As a school with a small student population students are together in the same classroom from Kindergarten to 6th grade. The students learn and grow together every year and build a bond with one another. As a result, the students accept and support each other, not because they have the same interests and abilities, but because they have the same foundation and school experiences. To further support student's social development, the school administration and staff plan and participate in several cooperative events throughout the school year. This allows students to interact socially across all grade levels from kindergarten to grade 12. Students of all ability levels are supported and encouraged to participate. We have nearly 100% student participation in these events in part because the students are so supportive and accepting of each other.*
- *As a smaller school district, we have great collaboration and communication amongst all individuals involved. We work together as a staff, counselor, administration, and parents to support the social/emotional wellness of our students.*
- *As a team when we meet on a regular basis, we are always talking about each of the students in regard to their social-emotional wellness and how it affects them with the learning process.*
- *At the preschool level we communicate a lot with families. We practice social skills within the school setting.*
- *The school/unit employs a clinical counselor and a social worker to address student social and emotional wellness. Social Skills are taught daily (Zones of Regulation) in order to improve success in the regular education classroom. FBAs/BIPs are created upon concern in order to create a plan to ensure student success and overall improvement. The district/unit also has an excellent Transition Coordinator that addresses students overall needs such as: person hygiene, daily routines, physical activity, community involvement, self-advocacy, and life skills. Parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, and administration all attend team meetings, as frequently as every 2 weeks in order to ensure an open line of communication and improve student success.*
- *Classroom teachers conduct weekly social skills instruction with the second step curriculum. We make sure that all students are present for those lessons. Our school counselor works collaboratively to support and instruct this curriculum as well. Special education staff are trained and/or familiar with the curriculum to support in small group. Special education staff are also highly trained and are pro-actively seeking out material to support the social/ emotional needs of our students. We also take a proactive approach in working with students with behavioral concerns; creating partnerships with parents to prevent, teach and reinforce lagging social skills.*
- *Excellent administration and counselors*
- *Extensive professional development and school-wide SEL curriculum and training.*
- *Full time special ed staff and school counselor. Necessary referrals to outside agencies for psychological evals, counseling, and play therapy. Special Ed social worker hired part time. MTSS team meets several times a week. New SEL curriculum.*
- *Having a support school counselor and school psychologist to ask questions and help find the resources our students need. The general education teachers, para's, and administration are all*

supportive to each individual student needs different resources, so always finding and trying new things to benefit our students.

- *I feel the hiring of nurses and social workers are needed and were first employed this past year in the district.*
- *I feel there is consistent discussion in regard to social/emotional wellness at meetings with family and regular education staff. The school counselor is utilized when needed and is regularly involved with special education students.*
- *I think having a strong base at elementary and middle school grows students better able to handle the challenges at/during high school. If they reach high school without the skills or have not been identified until high school things are more difficult. Those who move through our system K-12, I believe would say they have supports and know who to access for support, if in need.*
- *I think it is because we all care about the students. We work together on professional development and follow through with new programs continually to help our students. We also get together socially occasionally.*
- *In our school each teacher has connection students who we check up with to see how they are doing socially and emotionally. We also meet with our connection students once a month to play a game or just talk about life and how school is going for them.*
- *It doesn't affect the way people treat me.*
- *It seems like the staff really get to know their students and truly care about their wellbeing.*
- *Items I just mentioned, plus we have building wide tier 1 supports in place that are consistent for all. Our counselor and her program/lessons are integral to SEL. We also go above and beyond with things like implementing a House System so that ALL students feel included and valued and a part of something bigger than themselves. Team and togetherness are powerful drivers at our school.*
- *It's so important to recognize the students that may need extra assistance, especially in the areas of social/emotional needs. Our special education staff does a fabulous job of working with all staff members, including our counselor, administration, and teaching staff to keep everyone on the same page.*
- *Special education incorporates the use of the "Zones of Regulation" with many students. The students are taught different strategies to deal with whatever their emotions/feelings may be and how to move to a more optimal zone. School administration started "connection groups" a few years ago. Each staff member, from principal to bus drivers to teachers to paraprofessionals are chosen by students to make connections with during monthly connection meetings. This ensures that every student has an adult they can go to with any problems they may be having. Connection meetings are 30 minutes once a month. Also, we try to connect with the students in other ways throughout the month.*
- *Meeting students where they are and understanding the importance of taking care of physical and emotional needs as being central to learning. There is also tremendous support from agencies and community entities. If students need bus tickets, or food, there are people who bring the help. We have students who are parents, and the team wraps around them with additional support for emotional and basic needs before anything else.*

- *Mental health is at the forefront of our Educational System. We help students understand their emotions and work through their battles.*
- *Our counseling department really takes a large approach in the SEL area and makes it known to all students that they are there to help but also there to support us teachers.*
- *Our counseling staff are great collaborators with the special education teachers and case managers. They work hard to understand the emotional disabilities and needs of our students and help general education teachers implement the behavior plans and strategies.*
- *Our counselor and school psychologist are heavily evolved with the special education team and students. They are a wonderful asset to the special education team, and I consult with them frequently.*
- *Our school and district have provided a concentrated effort to provide social/emotional professional development and implemented strategies, programming, and support in this area. This school year, our district hired a positive behavior strategist who is shared amongst our three elementary schools. She is in place to support all staff and students were needed.*
- *Our School Counselor uses data to determine students that need a check-in/check-out system. As a Speech Language Pathologist, I love working with students that need social and/or emotional supports. It is so rewarding to put a system in place to see the student grow! Providing a bit of extra support to review daily expectations and then meeting at the end of the day to review how s/he did. This is a great way to reflect student decisions and providing an incentive (choice board) if s/he met his goal!! Personally, it is so rewarding to watch the daily data trend line move from a negative trend to a positive trend!*
- *Our school district has made efforts to expand its social/emotional curriculum and programs over the past few years. The addition of two social workers, school nurse, and school resource officers has helped to promote social/emotional initiatives for all students, including special education students. The school district is attempting to develop a model of which the RBT concept can be emulated for other buildings and grade levels. The school district has also invested in the Second Step curriculum that is utilized in grades K-8. This is part of the special education programming as well to cultivate social/emotional well-being for students.*
- *Our school has a social-emotional curriculum in place and a solid set of behavioral expectations that have been clearly articulated and students understand and can express. Students are held accountable to follow those expectations. We have intervention and data collection in place to measure student success for those that are needing additional support to follow those expectations for any reason at all. As students are monitored, we can determine if intervention is effective or if they need additional supports. We are all on the same page, meaning there is consistency in expectations across the school building and within classrooms.*
- *Our school has implemented a behavior room. It is run by a teacher with para support. In this room kids are able to take breaks (earned or resets) and do social skills. This is also a room where a kid can do work if needed to be out of the room more (showing extreme and frequent behaviors). This allows for academics to not be interrupted as much due to behavior.*
- *Our school implements Second-Step in direct-instruction as well as instruction in the general education classroom. Our school counselor provides calming down strategies and tools for every teacher in the building. Our counselor is also our main tier 2 support as she teaches groups for*

kids that are not on an IEP, does a lunch buddy group, as well as check-in and check-out. Our school follows MTSS protocols for academic and behavioral concerns for students not on IEPs.

- *Our school psychologists have many small groups, and our special education staff is implementing more SEL items into the resource room and other classes.*
- *Our school tries to meet the needs of every student on an individual basis. Students know they are always welcome to discuss any issues or concerns with the special education staff or with the school counselor. Our school also has access to Ripple Effects, which is a program that will help guide students in making the right choices based on a variety of scenarios.*
- *Our school works collaboratively as a team to ensure we are taking the necessary steps for all of our students to be successful. When behavioral/social/emotional issues arise, we collaborate and establish a plan so that we can determine the problem and find a solution. We improvise and review these plans to ensure our staff is on the same page and carrying out a plan that enables our students to be successful. Our school is also equipped with a sensory room to meet the needs of students. We also have had multiple trainings in trauma and other interventions that have also been great resources in this area.*
- *Our school works very hard to establish opportunities for students to connect. Not only with other students but with other staff also.*
- *Our staff develops strong relationships with our students. This allows the students to feel comfortable in reaching out and accepting assistance from all staff members.*
- *Our staff is trained to support our students by providing individual support, support in the classroom, and support at home.*
- *Our student has a terrific student transitional coordinator. She supports the students' academic, social/emotional, and vocational needs. Our school has created a BOB (Best of Buddies) group to provide social events for students with disabilities. It is not uncommon for students with disabilities socializing among our regular education students during the school day.*
- *Our teachers strive to support all students. They have continuous training in working with students with emotional disabilities. They try to work with other staff and families to make learning fun. They do not quit when things get difficult and they are always trying new things to work with students.*
- *Our whole school participates in a social emotional learning curriculum as many of our students come from backgrounds with trauma. In addition, we have multiple social skills instruction groups from resource room teachers, the school psychologist, and school counselor.*
- *Pets in the classrooms. Flexible seating. Advisory curriculum. A relational approach to discipline.*
- *Relationships are built with the students. Students have supports in their learning needs (academic/mental awareness).*
- *Restorative practices*
- *Same as above, the administration is supportive and "get" our students with this type of need. They also have sought out outside services to come to the school to help in this area.*

- *Same as question 8, except I forgot to mention the relentless use of data driven instructional practices and the use of curriculum and instructional practices which have been vetted and withstand academic research scrutiny.*
- *Second Step*
- *Since we are a small school, we are all there to support the students*
- *Since we are such a small school, we are on top of monitoring our students at school and in their daily lives.*
- *Small school with low class sizes. Strong parental involvement.*
- *Social skills classes on many different levels. Ramp up classes specified to our students' needs.*
- *Special education teachers, counselors, and all other teachers make sure all students and succeeding. We work together for the success of all students.*
- *Staff cooperation.*
- *Students are mainstreamed in the regular education classroom. In situations where students need one on one help or help outside of the classroom, the paraprofessional is available to help the student. The para and classroom teacher work together to modify assignments and assessments for the student. The student feels empowered as decisions are based on his/her strengths. The student's self-esteem and emotional needs are met when the student achieves success.*
- *Students have individualized plans that meet their needs. They have visuals, personal supports, and schedules that fit them and their needs.*
- *Teachers work closely with the necessary school staff to determine appropriate lessons and, if needed, behavior plans.*
- *That the students are open with all the teachers and if they need something, they know they can ask no matter what the situation is.*
- *The collaborative staff and open communication, along with strong leadership.*
- *The counselor and school psychologists are key members of our MTSS team, and we are also implementing practices to support students with disabilities through our participation in the Building Compassionate Schools cohort.*
- *The counselors work closely with all teachers.*
- *The school counselor is willing to see the students with disabilities for counseling sessions. Teams try to figure out what is best for each student.*
- *The staff are willing to go above and beyond to support students and each other.*
- *The students know that there is a staff member in the building that they can go to if they are having any issues. Each child has someone that they are connected to and feel comfortable taking to.*
- *There are counselors, social workers, school psychologists and staff that work together to determine goals and how to achieve them.*

- *There has been quite a bit of focus on the social/emotional wellness of all students with extra attention paid to crisis training.*
- *These students have been a part of the classroom since day one, so their classmates are familiar with them making them more likely to socialize with them. We also have a Best of Buddies program that helps to encourage social and educational outings for students with disabilities.*
- *They are included in all we do. They attend the assemblies, they participate in Homecoming Week, Prom and anything else going on in our building. When they have Special Olympic activities, the regular education students show up in droves to support their efforts. The students with disabilities have access to the counselors as any other student would. I would say the biggest thing in our school is all of our students are treated the same. I do not believe our students with disabilities are treated differently than any other students in our building.*
- *Too many to list ... PD alignment, inclusion opportunities, highly structured pathway for all areas, SEL is building goal and PD and practice align with the goal*
- *Two years ago, our school adopted the Second Step curriculum that is a social emotional curriculum for all students. Teachers teach these weekly lessons teaching a variety of skills and then reinforce the skills throughout the week.*
- *Utilizing second step, collaboration with outside professional center staff, development of MTSS for PBIS, excellent counselors and community as well as supports, caring concerned staff that communicate effectively with parents.*
- *We are a small school and all students kind of look out for each other. Many of our students have known each other for most of their lives, they don't see the disability.*
- *We are able to use a variety of curriculums to meet the students' needs. Also, we have a range of supports and students can move along those supports depending on where they are with their needs. These supports can range from check-ins in the resource room to a separate setting if determined by the team.*
- *We are tight with our families and talk with parents often regarding student wellbeing.*
- *Our teachers give our students a Social-Emotional test and then it is scored. Those with scores that indicate the student needs help then start to get help in various ways. We have staff that share the names of students that they think are also seeming to have needs in the Social-Emotional arena. We MTSS together and come up with ways to try and help the students. We even use some internet-based psychology with professionals through a distance learning type arena.*
- *We believe that all behavior is communication. Our job is to hear the child. This is often hard and can often harm relationships amongst stakeholders. Our job is to educate the whole child.*
- *We do social emotional lessons every week with all students. We offer Peer to Peer which teaches students without disabilities how to be friends and work with students with disabilities. Additionally, it allows students with disabilities to practice social skills. We have Unified Sports that are attended by a large group of the student body cheering. We offer social skills classes for our students with disabilities. We encourage full inclusion or as much as possible for our students with disabilities. Our school has multiple clubs and activities that are open to all students.*
- *We focus on the SEL for ALL students. No student gets overlooked.*

- *We have a committee to look at TIER 1 dedicated instruction with the counselor as well as morning meeting with classroom teacher. We use CICO for our TIER 2 students who have been identified through a screening measure SAEBERS. We daily/weekly direct instruction in social skills with students in Tier 3*
- *We have a counselor that serves K-12. They provide one-on-one, small group, and classroom counseling. They are a part of our intervention process as well and is directly involved in our MTSS process. They are part of the team that puts into place behavioral interventions and supports. This can include targeted counseling lessons on specific lagging skills if that is identified as why a student is struggling, not ability. We also have a low teacher to student ratio. We value building relationships and get to know the students individually. We work with parents to implement supports and meet student needs, that extend beyond academics. We have also begun to implement Sources of Strength and have made some of our student's student leaders. We have all students in the high school periodically for what we call CAT time. This time is for planning activities with our elementary students. We pair certain grade levels in the high school and elementary to help build relationships across grade levels. Again, building positive connections is what we put most of our efforts into doing.*
- *We have a good team of administration, teachers, social workers and counselors to support our students for their social and emotional wellbeing.*
- *We have a program called Sources of Strength where we focus on a different theme each month. Some of the themes we have worked on have been Empathy, Mentoring, Mental Health, etc. With these themed lessons, all of the kids have seen how we all learn from each other and that each of us has different strengths. I have seen students with disabilities teach their classmates as many things as they learn from their classmates. Every student at our school has an adult staff member that they get to choose as their "Connection". We have designated Connection Time each month where each staff member gets together with their 4-6 connection kids for games, projects, or circle time, often including treats. The kids in my group of five this year were from Kindergarten, 1st Grade, and 2nd Grade. Often times the kids know their own classmates well, but maybe not the kids in other grade levels. From my own observations of my connection kids, they have gotten to know each other better in small groups. In my opinion, when kids get to know the students with "disabilities" from other grades, they find out they are like themselves in so many ways, that they don't treat them differently than their other classmates.*
- *We have a strong school-wide PBIS system. We have a strong focus on focusing on each child individually and considering that we don't know what happens at home, we know that we need to be the safe place at school and be supportive at school. We have a strong morning meeting time where all students are included (special education students with severe disabilities as well). We have morning activities that students can attend (yoga, STEM, computer lab, reading room, etc.). We have a focused curriculum for SEL (Second Step). Our PTO is strong and plans monthly activities in the evenings which builds a strong sense of community. One thing that stands out at my current school is that the staff are very positive and supportive. When you feel supported by your co-workers, it is easier to support the students.*
- *We have a veteran team that has implemented a lot of different interventions based of functions of behaviors and experience. We work well together both problem solving and celebrating successes.*
- *We have a yearly training that gives us ideas and reminders for working with children's social emotional health.*

- *We have behavioral teams with great resources and strategies. Some schools also have sensory rooms or hallways that they provide to students!*
- *We have daily advisory periods that include lessons in social/emotional learning for all students and students with disabilities participate in that. We also teach social skills for those students that show a deficit.*
- *We have developed a team approach for our social/emotional students. We are continuing to implement the MTSS-both behavior and academics into our district. We have been training all staff with Trauma-Sensitive to best meet the needs of these specific students.*
- *We have excellent communication with the special education department at our school. The special education lead works very hard to ensure success for all students with an IEP. We work in close coordination with her to develop plans for how that student will learn in the classroom, complete homework, and be assessed.*
- *We have focused on tier one SEL for students with a curriculum and proficiency expectations for our students. We have plans for intervention for tier 2 and 3. Our staff has started to focus on Restorative Justice and looked at CASEL core competencies, with the understanding that for many students these are lagging skills,*
- *We have great Social Workers and counselors in our school. We work very closely with other entities in the community to make sure our students are getting the services they need.*
- *We have implemented an SEL curriculum for all children, with additional supports for students with disabilities our school has participated in Compassionate Schools training to better understand students' trauma needs and how we can support them*
- *We have incorporated the Second Step Social Emotional Program into our Homerooms. Our school counselors are consistently in our classrooms providing social/emotional lessons to our students.*
- *We have recently implemented a period in our school where all students are paired with a home room teacher to receive extra support in school. This period also includes weekly lessons on grit and resiliency. These students are paired up with teachers that they have a relationship with, which allows them to have a safe place and person to help with tough situations in their life. We have also started the process of becoming a Trauma Sensitive School, which we will continue at the start of the 2020-21 school year. These two changes have allowed for staff to change their mindset to help improve the social/emotional wellness of students.*
- *We have school psychologists that do a very accurate job of testing and making recommendations. We are fortunate to have mental health providers in the community to support students. We have caring teaching staff that are in tune with mental health concerns. We have a special education social worker to assist students.*
- *We have two Structured Learning Community programs in our building and the students appear to gain or have emotional control.*
- *We incorporate weekly SEL lessons in all classrooms using a data driven curriculum and provide interventions through our MTSS plan to meet all students social and emotional needs. Our SPED teachers work with our school counselor to provide social skills groups weekly to many groups of students requiring additional lessons through their IEP.*

- *We just developed a three week social emotional curriculum that all students will be engaged in during the school year. This curriculum will also be touched on throughout the school year.*
- *We now have a Behavior Interventionist who visits all of our schools. She works with students in social groups, individually, and provides training and support for teachers and paraprofessionals.*
- *We provide individualized behavior plans and support as needed. We completed functional behavior assessments to assist with planning and programming.*
- *We try to build strong relationships with our students.*
- *We use evidence based practice and research supported Social Emotional Learning curriculum with unified language and activities. Students experience the same activities and learning opportunities across classroom settings and grade levels. Social Emotional Learning is presented in whole group, small group, and individually in the general education setting. Students with disabilities then have the opportunity to learn the information again, modified for their learning level, as well as practice the skills in the special education (small group) setting with teacher assistance (coaching), prior to joining the whole group setting. Re-teaching and differentiated instruction is provided based on student performance, observational data, as well as teacher, parent, and student reports. Additionally, home communication is provided at the district, school, and classroom teacher level.*
- *We use the 2nd Step Curriculum as a way to model SEL. We also use several other programs that assist with the development of our students. If a child needs extra support in the area of SEL, we also have two sensory rooms, one that is more for gross motor activities and the other one is for the fine motor and other sensory items.*
- *We work on determining the function of the behavior in order to intentionally respond. PBSPs are built around best practices in decreasing negative behavior while increasing positive behavior. We have school psychs lead much of the behavior program development at each school, this supports program fidelity.*
- *Weekly social emotional learning lessons provided to all students by all members of the staff including office staff, kitchen staff, and custodial staff.*
- *When the school is small the faculty has the ability to know every student and will seek appropriate help.*
- *With our school supporting many low income families, there are many social/emotional needs that our staff has been trained on in ways to support this area. It can be overwhelming with how many needs there are, but our staff is aware of things to put in place when needed. Specific behavior plans are written for most of our students with significant behavior needs which allows teachers to have a guide when working with our students with disabilities.*
- *Work with students families and teachers for positive results.*

10. Is there anything that you would like to share regarding special education best practices in addition to the issues covered in this survey?

- *A good relationship between regular education personnel and special education personnel is essential for students to learn and feel good about themselves.*
- *Absolutely. I have been teaching special education for 16 years and paperwork has not positively impacted the education of students with disabilities. The amount of time special education teachers spend on paperwork to show accountability to parents and the state takes away from the time we can spend collaborating and problem solving with colleagues, tweaking lessons and behavior plans, and takes away time spent from our own families in the evenings or late at night. I spend a lot of late, late nights, because there is not enough time in a day, drafting paperwork to present at meetings leaving me completely exhausted. As educators, we tend to give our students our best and then our families are left with the very little we can give them because there is not fuel left in our tank. (Adding an after school yoga session as a "focus on self-care" does not help; it just adds to our plate.) The great majority of parents bear with us as we go through paperwork at meetings and don't even give it another glance once we have sent out final copies. On two occasions, of 16 years of teaching many students, I have had a parent ask for changes in present levels of an IEP or ask questions about how an assessment was conducted to initially qualify a student for special education services. As a Department of Public Instruction, I would challenge you to find ways for special education teachers to concisely relay individualized education plans to the majority of parents without spending hours upon hours of time on paperwork.*
- *ALL staff must understand, be trained, and embrace special education as a whole. It is not any one person's job! ALL staff must be a part of the solution on how to best help ALL students. Building relationships is the key and every member of the staff must be a part of the positive culture promoted within the building. Custodians, cooks, secretaries, teachers, paras, etc. .. all must embrace the culture we attempt to build in our school. The students must feel empowered by staff to truly be leaders in the school. I say continuously, "This is your school. Lead it the way you want. We only need rules to adjust to what the students are accepting as okay. If you do not want more rules, ensure you are leading your school in a way which is acceptable, and you are proud of."*
- *The leadership has been outstanding and is always doing what's best for students. Families are heavily involved in long term planning and the improving our community and school for the better. As a parent I couldn't imagine a better school system to send my own children.*
- *As an administrator, I think it is really important to have the right people in place to carry out the duties required of the special education department. Our SPED teachers have energy, grit, and a caring hearts. That is truly what separates them from others.*
- *Being a team has been a pivotal change in our environment that has allowed us to put student needs first. We continue to work on keeping our practices current and developing a strong methodical approach to our students.*
- *Being in the special education field can be very challenging, but in the end, it is one of the most rewarding fields. I love seeing all of the accomplishments that my students strive to achieve.*
- *Best practices can be constant and ever-changing dependent on student and staff needs. The goal for each and every student to succeed is evident at the door of the school and throughout the school each and every day.*

- *Communication is key! IEP meetings are very helpful in setting up a specific plan for instruction and learning for each student. General education teachers should be aware of each student's plan and needs.*
- *Communication is of utmost importance when working with students with learning disabilities. Every person that is part of the team has to communicate information all the time while working with these students. Showing empathy towards these students goes along ways with students with learning disabilities when working with them.*
- *Our school is a non-traditional, alternative high school. The staff here take the time to help students with what they need in life and not just for what they need regarding their IEPs. It has a personal feel, and students are accepted for who they are and what they contribute.*
- *Education professionals know what supports students with disabilities need, but a barrier is always time and not enough resources. Our SPED teachers have high caseloads of more kids with unique and challenging needs. We need more funding and resources to not spread our teacher so thin, reducing burn out, and increasing students with disabilities engagement and success.*
- *I am very proud to work in this school district and special education unit. The support from the community, administration, and staff does not go unnoticed and it has allowed me as an educator to continue to grow and learn in this field. It has also allowed the students that I work with to flourish and have success in the learning environment. This staff's mission is to empower their students to allow them to find themselves as individuals. Our goal is to be adaptable, flexible, and reflective of our work to ensure we meet the needs of all students within our building.*
- *I appreciate the consistent training and support from the special education coordinators.*
- *I believe that our school setting allows for students to get additional help and services that not all schools can provide. Our small size creates an environment for stronger connections and more time to meet the needs of students with disabilities.*
- *I believe working as a team helps tremendously when working with special education. Being on the same page with everyone when making decisions about our students' needs will only help them and make them successful. We do what is best for our students to reach their highest potential.*
- *I feel the continued communication of our staff regarding our special needs students is top notch!*
- *I feel there is strong support from the district's administration as well as the special education director. All staff know the students well and they are aware of their specific needs. I feel the school has a strong desire to see all children succeed at all levels.*
- *I feel very fortunate to work in the school that sets up all of our students for success. Our staff invests time into our students to allow all of them to grow both academically and socially.*
- *I feel very lucky to be working in a district and school that supports students with disabilities with such integrity.*

- *I have been at this school for many years and one of the characteristics that I am always proud to share with people whether it be adults or students is that we serve all students no matter their skill level. We have a resource room in our secondary level, and you will find "A" students, the valedictorian of the class or the lower skilled students. Students are welcome and they do not have to feel slighted or demeaned for being in that room. As a result, all students, including those with disabilities have confidence and a sense of belonging in their school. I think this is one of the biggest reasons why our students with disabilities perform so well.*
- *I think it would be beneficial to have a Tienet/special education paperwork webinar each fall that goes over any changes to paperwork timelines/rules and then have that webinar on the DPI site to watch whenever needed. I think more PD would be useful-like a "teacher's convention" for special education teachers. There used to be a summer institute that was free in Bismarck several years ago. I used to attend those and learned so much. It would be nice to have something like that again.*
- *I thought the daily schedule and the things they worked out will truly help them in the future.*
- *In our school, Special Education has always seemed to be very supported and high attention has always been placed on their achievements.*
- *Not only do we have wonderful special education teachers in our school, but our paraprofessionals are awesome! They have huge hearts and wants what is best for all of our students.*
- *One of the previous questions referenced how much time students with disabilities spend in the general ed classroom. It varies depending upon the student's disability and service time. That was a hard question to answer because only one choice was allowed so I picked the one that I figured was the average.*
- *Our administration ensures that there is adequate staffing for students with needs. Our staff are caring and also have good relationships with the parents of students on IEP's. Our administration has high standards for the staff working with our students with disabilities.*
- *Our district has invested in hiring school psychs to help with interventions, behavior planning/support, and support IEPs to ensure we do our best to support students our district offers multiple trainings for our special ed teachers to support them as well*
- *Our district sped team and support is very good and should be noted. We are always strapped for money and tough to get enough support, but those are budget issues and they work with us to listen and problem solve as best we can.*
- *Our school continues to grow with the MTSS initiative. We have been gradually including components into our curriculum. By moving into the MTSS initiative steadily and building a solid foundation, we have not overwhelmed staff and move ahead confidently knowing how to be more effective educators for students with learning disabilities.*
- *Our special education director has been instrumental in providing teachers and para-educators with professional development, educational resources, and best practices suggestions. She has brought passion and energy into the special education department and matched the high expectations that had already existed with our school.*

- *Our special education program is interwoven into our title and MTSS program. These parts work together to ensure the best possible outcomes for our students. We provide all students support and in doing so reduce the social stigma that can be associated with getting extra help.*
- *Our special education staff need training in TIER 3 methods of Instruction for best practices in SPED, so they can help guide teams in alternative interventions rather than more of the same instructional methods used at TIER 2.*
- *Our special education team continuously looks for better ways to give instruction in order to engage all students.*
- *Our SPED staff provides everything each student needs, and works with parents, students and staff to make sure all support is provided for our students. Our Caseworkers work beyond the norm, and really treat each child as if they were their own. Our SPED Department takes great pride in their success and work with each student. They know each family and student extremely well and work together with everyone to have the best experience and understanding of what each of our SPED students need.*
- *Our teachers are very open to learn, to read, to share and try new strategies. Anything for the sake of the child.*
- *Our team of special education teachers and paraprofessionals work very collaboratively with regular education staff to provide the best for our students. We have a very inclusive school where all children are regular education classroom students first, with support from special education.*
- *Spend significant time discussing the goals and instructional practices utilized during an IEP, in addition to the IWAR data. Parents can read this again, what they can't get again is the same folks all gathered as one to get a true understanding of what is taking place at school.*
- *Superintendent agreed with a vision to develop a "transition classroom" for teaching daily and independent living skills. This room was accessible and used throughout each school day by elementary, junior high and high school students. For the past school term, this classroom was used most frequently by adult students that participated in social graduation. In addition, speech pathologists and paraprofessionals used the classroom for weekly group speech "cooking class".*
- *The implementation of RTI Academics in earlier grades is vital to the continued education of students. Data needs to be taken and monitored with fidelity. Students need to be educated by highly qualified teachers using research based curriculum. Without the consistency and rigor at elementary and middle school our math and reading systems would not be able to educate all levels. If this is emphasized at the middle school level, then students will be ready and able to take elective classes at the high school level that are said (repeatedly by students) to be rewarding and engaging. It is important that caseloads and demands of special educators continues to be reviewed. The duties and complexity of paperwork timelines continue to grow, and the availability of highly-qualified individuals seems to be decreasing. There is a significant amount of stress that is associated with this role!*
- *The individual(s) plan is not like the next. It is shaped and planned out to meet the students' needs as well as to help them set and achieve realistic goals.*

- *The special education teacher has proven when you set the standard high, the student will attain it.*
- *The staff cannot do this alone, the students also need to be an active part*
- *The willingness and flexibility of the staff to try something new to help our students.*
- *There are so many things that are happening behind the scenes with intervention such as coordination with general education, support with scheduling students, adopting research based practices, and much more.*
- *There are two main gaps in special education that need to be closed. 1. Gap in the number of special education jobs and qualified candidates. 2. Gap in knowledge of special education terminology in the minds of our regular educators. We are working hard to address both of these gaps. I would love to discuss further about how we are doing this. Perhaps you can help us to do it even better. Thank you for the recognition and the support.*
- *There are unrealistic turf issues with special education in this school and those staff are not willing to explore behavioral expectations that would be meaningful to students and the behaviors of the special needs students are accepted rather than are taught so that they are socially accepted in a safe and civil school. The special education teachers accept the disregard for rules that the students display and are defensive and territorial when students are held to differing expectations such as general rules.*
- *We have a special education staff that is very hard-working, and we have regular education teachers who are willing to work hard to see their students achieve success.*
- *We strive to keeps parents involved as well.*
- *When students are supported with the right amount of adult assistance, I have seen students grow exponentially. With that said, the assistance should fade when possible to develop the independent skills needed for life.*
- *While it will always be a work in progress, I feel that we've had great leadership that keeps the needs of students first.*