Summary of Findings

Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gap for Students with Disabilities

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

National Dropout Prevention Center

September 2021

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 study to identify and scale best practices for students with disabilities.

NDPC conducted 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. This review included statewide surveys as well as virtual interviews with district leaders from 10 selected LEA’s across North Dakota.

Findings and Recommendations

Overall strong levels of engagement and care for students with disabilities was found throughout North Dakota. There were 9 Key Findings highlighted areas of best practice for serving students with disabilities:

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

- Data meetings were prevalent across North Dakota with both formal and informal approaches.
- The ND MTSS Playbook should be at the center of the approach making adaptations as appropriate.
- A 3-Step Approach is recommended to focus on:
  1. Identify the issue/challenge to be resolved for each student
  2. Create and empower a team to support the students
  3. Monitor and adjust as needed

Values, Attitudes and Beliefs

- Students with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment
- High expectations with the goal of creating independence is central to success
- ALL stakeholders must take responsibility for ALL students

Collaboration

- Tapping the expertise of all stakeholders including families and students
- Collaboration must be driven by: Communication; Professional competence; Respect; Commitment; Advocacy
- Student Driven IEPs empower and support collaboration
Individualization

- Using evidence-based research and tools to create individualized programming can drive successful individualization
- Unique plans, schedules and opportunities should be provided for each student
- A student’s disability should drive the established goals. Those goals should drive the appropriate services. Those services should drive the placement of the student.

Relationship / Student Involvement

- Educators should strive to understand students’ background and interests
- Connections with families, caregivers and the community are vital
- Educators should take a growth/strength-oriented approach to drive understanding of each students’ unique learning profile

Administrative Support

- School, District and State Leadership are vital partners in this work
- Protecting time for teacher collaboration while maximizing the use of time for instruction are key areas of focus
- Leaders can also support the work by modeling expectations, collaborating and sharing feedback across functions and teams

Inclusion

- Inclusion is more than a setting – it is a mindset
- Students and families should be participating in setting their own goals and monitoring progress
- Inclusion extends beyond instruction to participation in the school community with access to extracurricular activities and non-academic pursuits

Social-Emotional Learning

- Vital to establish clear, consistent and positive learning environments
- Focus should be on increasing motivation, independence and engagement
- All efforts must be evidence-based with unified language and approaches

Literacy

- Literacy is the foundation of improvement efforts
- Appropriate identification of needs must lead to effective research-based interventions
- Literacy skills should be practiced in EVERY classroom EVERY day