

## 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

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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
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## **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
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