



**DATE:** 6/8/26

**TITLE:** Special Services Department Update

**TYPE:** Information

**PRESENTER(S):** Dr. Sarah Knudsen, Executive Director of Special Services

**BACKGROUND:**

The Special Services Department includes oversight of the following:

- Special Education Services
- School Health Services
- Student Support Professionals (School Counselors, School Social Workers, School Psychologists)
- Mental Health Supervision and Supports (internal and external)
- Oversight of education at Nexus Gerard's New Dominion School
- Oversight of education at the Austin Albert Lea Area Special Education Cooperative (AALASEC)

**Support and resources to ensure a safe and welcoming learning environment**

- Special Education Mentoring Project funded by Region 10:
  - 2025-26: The Austin Public Schools Special Education Mentoring Program demonstrated strong early success in building educator capacity, confidence, and collaboration among participants. The program included five mentors and nine mentees who participated in three group sessions and individual meetings. Mentors and mentees reported high satisfaction and engagement, with mentoring identified as the most impactful form of professional learning. Strong mentor-mentee relationships were established, and job-embedded learning supported growth in key areas such as IEP development, data collection, progress monitoring, and compliance. Mentees showed increased confidence and ability to apply skills in practice.
  - 2026-27: Grant has been developed and submitted
- Shaylie Meyer, Supervisor of School Nursing, is working with Cabinet to develop a newly required Cardiac Emergency Response Plan.
- Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) met for the last time this year. Dr. Knudsen shared a presentation overviewing the programming and demographics of special education at APS.

**Packer Profile for all learners**

**District-wide multi-tiered systems of support for all learners**

- A subgroup of School Support Professionals met with Dr. Baskin and Dr. Knudsen to explore and gather feedback on the MTSS framework in the area of Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Learning. The team also met with an MDE consultant who will be available to provide resources and training during the next school year.

- A SAEBRS workgroup met in May to finalize implementation plans and develop resources for school buildings. SAEBRS is a brief universal screening tool used to identify students who may be at risk for social, academic, or emotional difficulties. It will be implemented in grades 4–7.
- Goalbook early adopters completed their onboarding and exploration of the Goalbook tool. The process included training and two virtual discussion and feedback sessions. 21 Special Education teachers participated in the early adopter's cohort.

### **Excellence in Resource Management**

- Each year, MDE requires file reviews to analyze and verify compliance with specific due process requirements. Six indicators were monitored through a review of 14 student IEPs, and the results were reported to MDE. The final compliance review results will be available in the fall.
- Hiring has continued throughout May and June. Current open positions include:
  - Special Education Teachers (AHS, Southgate, Oakland, CLC)
  - Mental Health Practitioners (Banfield, Oakland)
  - Special Education Paraeducators (positions across the district)
- The Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) grant will be developed and submitted in late June. This grant allows for up to 15% of federal special education allocations that can be spent providing pre-special education intervention. This year, the grant will focus on providing paraeducator support to implement evidence-based behavioral interventions. This service will occur at the elementaries and IJ Holton. The grant will also support additional professional development to behavior interventionists and the CEIS paras.