



Special Education 2017-2022 Strategic Plan

“Spotlight on Excellence”

Services and supports for students with disabilities have changed dramatically since PL 94-142 was passed in 1975, guaranteeing a free and appropriate education to all children with disabilities. Although this law was designed to prevent the exclusion of students from the education system, inclusion of these students in all aspects of the school community continues to present a challenge for educators. There is clear evidence that active participation in the general education settings accessing the state standards is a predictor of success for students with disabilities.

The vision of Mesa Public Schools is “unprecedented excellence in education.” We embrace our role in contributing to this vision through unprecedented excellence in special education. The theme of “spotlight on excellence” reflects our strengths-based approach in recognizing and sharing practices that result in positive outcomes for our students, both during their time in school and after they graduate.

Managing limited resources and shortages of personnel with the pressures of increasing demands has created a need to examine existing practices and priorities to ensure the effective and efficient use of the resources we have. From March through June of 2017, the special education leadership team collected and reviewed data from stakeholders including special education teacher/staff focus groups and surveys, ADE performance and indicator data, parent survey results, and district quality service survey results. These results were reviewed and analyzed to identify trends and themes for improvement. The following 5 outcomes were identified as priorities for the next 5 years:

- Attract, retain, and support qualified educators to meet the needs of students with disabilities
- Increase parent partnerships in the special education process
- Increase the social emotional learning students with disabilities as measured by attendance, discipline, and placement changes to more restrictive settings.
- Increase the percent of students in general education for 80% of the day or more
- Increase the percent of students with disabilities who graduate in 4 years.
- Reduce the district special education population through robust general education interventions and supports.

The focus of the special education strategic plan is to ensure access to general education content and environments to the maximum extent possible for all students with disabilities who attend Mesa Public Schools. We believe that by focusing on the “5

Cs of Excellence”, we can move toward our vision of access and learning for all, and achieving the outcomes listed above. These 5 C’s include Competence, Connection, Collaboration, Creativity, and Cultivation. While not mutually exclusive, all of these characteristics need to be integrated into a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning. The plan will focus on building connections and competencies at all levels of the organization including teachers, parents, principals, superintendency, and the governing board.

YEAR 1 :Competence



Competence means doing the right thing and doing things the right way. It is having the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to success.

Some basic core competencies needed to address the needs of students with disabilities include:

1)The implementation of universal design for learning and multi-tiered systems of supports through general education personnel to address the needs of all students. 2) Knowledge of the assessment and delivery of specially designed instruction and related service to address the effects of the disability 3) Implementation of the evaluation and IEP process to

identify and meet the needs of individual students. 4) Skills in understanding the use of data for progress monitoring, formative assessment, and reporting. 5) The values and attitudes that enable high expectation and a growth mindset for students with disabilities.



YEAR 2: Connection



Unprecedented excellence require connections.

Teachers connecting with parents...special education teachers connecting with general education teachers... adults connecting with students.

Teachers who experience close relationships with students reported that their students were less likely to avoid school, and appeared more self-directed, more cooperative and more engaged in learning (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004). Teachers who use more learner-centered practices (i.e., practices that show sensitivity to individual differences among students, include students in the decision-making, and acknowledge students' developmental,

personal and relational needs) produced greater motivation in their students than those who used fewer of such practices (Daniels & Perry, 2003).

<http://www.apa.org/education/k12/relationships.aspx>

YEAR 3: Collaboration



Collaboration involves working together in partnership to achieve common goals. The Special Education Department will continue to grow our collaborative processes including MAPSS (established in the 2014-15 school year) to improve post-school outcomes, PLCs and communities of practice to bring teachers together to learn from one another and improve their skills for special populations, principal conversations about Special Education Practices, and increased parent -school collaboration through increasing and recognizing parent expertise. Co-teaching and shared responsibilities for students with disabilities will continue to be the focus.

YEAR 4: Creativity



The focus for this year will be on creating opportunities for innovation and creativity. School and district teams will be provided with opportunities to develop and showcase new models of interventions that support student learning. Professional development will address skill development in innovation and change, program evaluation, and developing systems for sustainability.

YEAR 5: Cultivation



Sustainable change needs to be nurtured and cultivated to change culture. The final year of the strategic plan will focus on cultivating and sustaining positive practices that result in high achievement and learning for all students.