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NSBA EXEMPLARY CASE STUDIES

NSBA SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADER: MSD WAYNE SCHOOLS, IN

NSBA SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE SERIES

School districts across the United States are expanding and improving educational opportunities for students with disabilities and their families. As Congress begins to focus on improving the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), NSBA is highlighting school districts that are demonstrating special education leadership or using unique models. The work in these districts offers useful insights for legislators seeking to better understand how the next IDEA can better help schools promote positive outcomes for all special education students. This edition of the profile series focuses on Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, IN (MSD Wayne Township).

SCHOOL DISTRICT OVERVIEW

MSD Wayne Township serves communities on the west side of Indianapolis. The school district enrolls 16,000+ students across 19 schools (1 preschool center, 11 elementary schools, 2 seventh and eighth grade centers, a freshman center, 3 high schools and 2 alternative schools). Approximately 64% of the district's students are minorities, nearly 73% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 13% are limited English proficient. Approximately 13% of the school district's students receive special education services.

We see 100% potential in every student enrolled in MSD Wayne Schools. Our administrative team works as a cohesive unit to ensure that every student has an access point into whatever pathway they choose to ensure a sustained and fulfilling life.

- Dr. Tara Rinehart, Director of Special Services

SCHOOL DISTRICT KEY STRATEGIES

MSD Wayne Township offers a wide variety of services for students with disabilities consistent with their Individualized Education Plans and emphasizes targeted special education strategies, including:

- **Professional Learning, policy development and procedural work in regards to creating safe learning environments for ALL.** The district's approach to creating safe learning environments has been a journey, which began with professional learning for the lead learners as well as staff throughout

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the district. The intentional curriculum matched to the district mission sets them apart and moving far beyond the status quo. This district's attention to reducing the potential for crisis is consistent with an objective of developing staff and increasing safety while reducing the use of restraint and seclusion practices. Policy development around Restraint and Seclusion occurred to match this new learning as well as the practices put into place to proactively respond to the needs of their community. A systematic approach has been communicated so that a collective responsibility for all stakeholders within MSD Wayne Township is visible.

- **Early Learning.** Indiana does not provide state early learning funding to schools, so the district created a preschool program using general fund dollars. The initiative includes a focus on providing early intervention services to special education students ages 3-5 years and leverages the limited federal special education preschool funding offered by Section 619 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- **Special Education Teams.** The district's strategy includes a growing emphasis on identifying and hiring effective special education teachers and other professionals, including a focus on speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and school psychologists. The district established special education teams in every building to embed proactive strategies at the classroom level. Importantly, the system is designed to serve not only student but also their families.
- **Student Transitions.** The district operates a dedicated transition center for 18- to 22-year-old special education students, including an offsite classroom for students to use as a "home base" while exploring their community for employment and service opportunities. The center offers instruction focused on helping them identify strategies for entering their community and preparing for their next phase of life.

MSD WAYNE TOWNSHIP: KEY SPECIAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES

- Growing impact of the opioid addiction crisis, including more children born with addiction-related issues, leading to increasing numbers of students with significant disabilities.
 - IDEA due process system is expensive and creates adversarial relationships between the district and parents.
 - Funding for special education services is insufficient for the level of supports truly needed to provide pathways.
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NSBA SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADER: MAGNOLIA SCHOOL DISTRICT, ANAHEIM CA

NSBA SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE SERIES

School districts across the United States are expanding and improving educational opportunities for students with disabilities and their families. As Congress begins to focus on improving the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), NSBA is highlighting school districts that are demonstrating special education innovation, improvement, and leadership. The exciting work in these districts offers useful insights for legislators seeking to better understand how the next IDEA can better help school districts promote positive outcomes for all special education students. This edition of the exemplar series focuses on the Magnolia School District in Anaheim, California.

MAGNOLIA SCHOOL DISTRICT OVERVIEW

Magnolia School District's nine schools serve over 6,000 students in kindergarten through sixth grade, including over 600 students with individualized education plans. Lead by Superintendent Dr. Frank Donovan, a former special education director, Magnolia's educators serve high percentages of low-income families (85%), English learners (48%), and homeless families (25%). Despite these demographic challenges, in 2018 Magnolia's special education students made progress toward the state's college and career ready standards in both mathematics and English language, and they performed above statewide special education student averages. Seven of the nine Magnolia Elementary Schools received the California Gold Ribbon Schools Award, and the Title I Academic Achieving Schools Award in 2016, and one school received the Exemplary Arts Education Program Award.

The Magnolia School District believes that all students can achieve their highest potential. We provide our students with equal access to all educational opportunities with a focus on inclusive settings in the least restrictive environment.

- Dr. Frank Donovan, Superintendent

MAGNOLIA SCHOOL DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

Magnolia closely monitors each special education student's progress and delivers additional, differentiated help using the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework. This tailored approach ensures that special education students receive high-quality instruction matched to their needs. The district's ongoing monitoring informs teachers' and aids' decisions and guides educational improvements over time, based on a student's response. All students receive rigorous standards-based instruction, one-to-one technology in grades two through six, and specially designed music and arts programs. Delivering this vision would not be possible without great educators and other special education professionals. As a result, Magnolia focuses on hiring highly skilled special education professionals and deploys them as part

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of intervention teams. Some Magnolia educators are not assigned classrooms, so that they can focus on delivering differentiated services, including intensive reading interventions, speech therapy, health services, occupation and physical therapy, and psychological services

The Greater Anaheim Special Education Local Plan Area (GA-SELPA), which includes five other Orange County school districts, supplements Magnolia's special education team and supports. The GA-SELPA is governed by six school board members, one from each participating school district, and aims to ensure that the appropriate services are provided on an individualized basis for every child with a disability. GA-SELPA works collaboratively with each member district's special education director to support their students, including offering supplemental services such as occupational therapy, autism specialists, and other resources. In addition to serving local students, Magnolia serves most students in the GA-SELPA region that qualify for medically fragile and orthopedic impairment support. Magnolia delivers these services in an inclusive manner and strives to ensure the students are involved fully in their school.

MAGNOLIA SCHOOL DISTRICT: MAJOR SPECIAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES

- Funding for special education services. Special education services consume 50% of the Magnolia's general education budget.
 - Current due process system is expensive and creates adversarial relationship between district and parents.
 - IDEA application to minor student needs takes away scarce resources necessary for students with more serious conditions.
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NSBA SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADER: FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS, GA

NSBA SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE SERIES

School districts across the United States are expanding and improving educational opportunities for students with disabilities and their families. As Congress begins to focus on improving the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), NSBA is highlighting school districts that are demonstrating special education leadership. The exciting work in these districts offers useful insights for legislators seeking to better understand how the next IDEA can better help schools promote positive outcomes for all special education students. This edition of the profile series focuses on Forsyth County Schools in Georgia.

FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS OVERVIEW

Forsyth County Schools (FCS) serves nearly 50,000 students, including over 6,000 special education students. FCS is the seventh largest of Georgia's 180 school districts. Approximately 75% of FCS students with individualized education plans graduate from high school with a regular diploma. FCS students with disabilities performed significantly above Georgia's proficiency targets on recent statewide English language arts and mathematics assessments. FCS also helps large percentages of preschool students with IEPs demonstrate improvements in social and emotional skills, including social relationships, and in the acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, including early language/communications and early literacy.

Parents of special needs kids often seem to feel isolated or alone.

FCSS reaches out and has great programs for our kids and families, starting with early childhood.

We also work closely with our local community and public library system to reach as many children as possible. I love the way we take the understandably nervous concerns of parents with special kids and put them at ease as that's the best we can do for them!

- Kristin Morrissey Chair, Forsyth County Board of Education, District 2

FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS SPECIAL EDUCATION STRATEGY

Engaging special education students' families is a central part of Forsyth's special education strategy. Forsyth hosts evening and Saturday parent training and workshops, which focus on a variety of topics that parents can select based on their needs. Recent parent training topics include the importance of play for preschool students, age appropriate language development, supportive instruction, and effective behavioral improvement strategies. Under Georgia's ASPIRE initiative, which aims to equip students with opportunities to develop self-determination skills, FCS also involves parents and students, whenever possible, in IEP meetings to offer parents an opportunity to hear their student's perspective and to empower students to be part of their learning plan.

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FCS's special education strategy also places a heavy emphasis on ensuring the development of effective IEPs. At the beginning of every school year, FCS requires new staff – regardless of their past special education experience – to complete an IEP “writing 101” course, which includes webinars, written resources, and more to help FCS professionals maximize each IEP’s impact on student learning. FCS also employs special education “facilitators” to provide supplemental IEP supports, including reviewing and offering feedback about IEPs. Each facilitator works with three FCS schools to ensure development of IEPs that promote student success and compliance with state and federal requirements. Recognizing the unique demands on special education teachers, FCS focuses on educator health by providing wellness activities, including yoga and relaxations sessions, hosting lunches, and offering special leadership and support services.

FCS also offers a range of related special education services to their students, such as speech therapy, social work services, occupational therapy, and assistive technology services, which are considered during the development of each student’s IEP.

FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS: KEY SPECIAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES

- Rapid growth in the number of special education students and facilities demands.
 - Identifying and recruiting special education teachers and other professionals.
 - Funding special education services.
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NSBA SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADER: SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MO

NSBA SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE SERIES

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SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT OVERVIEW

The Special School District of St. Louis County, MO (SSD) provides special education services for approximately 23,000 St. Louis County students with disabilities. Nearly all special education students who receive services from SSD staff attend their neighborhood school in an inclusive classroom, but approximately 750 students with the most significant disabilities attend one of five SSD special education schools. SSD also serves St. Louis County students with disabilities who attend private, parochial, and independent schools, home-schooled students, and students homebound for medical or other reasons. SSD benefits from a separate tax levy to fund the district's operations, which provides the district greater financial stability and promotes equity. SSD's leadership is supplemented by a Parent Advisory Council comprised of five parents or guardians – one member and four alternates – from each of the 22 St. Louis County school districts and from each of the five SSD special education schools. In 2015, SSD won the Excellence in Missouri Foundation's Missouri Quality Award for performance, excellence, and continuous improvement.

As a school board member and parent of two children who have received services from Special School District, I am tremendously grateful to have SSD as a resource for our district's students. Educators from SSD and Webster Groves seamlessly collaborate to support students in our district's classrooms when possible. In addition, SSD is able to provide a wide variety of placements and services, from tailored behavior intervention strategies, to post-secondary transition planning, to intensive therapies for students with significant physical or cognitive disabilities. Through our collaboration with SSD, our school district is able to meet the diverse needs of all our learners.

- Amy Clendennen, President, Webster Groves School District Board of Education

SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT KEY STRATEGIES

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SSD annually performs more than 75,000 screenings and diagnostic evaluations for St. Louis County families. SSD provides a wide range of targeted special education services, such as adaptive physical education, audiology, homebound, speech therapy, assistive technology services, and many more options for families, which are considered during each student's IEP planning process. In delivering this array of services, SSD continuously accounts for each student's age and developmental needs. This part of the work includes, but is not limited to, placing an emphasis on St. Louis County's youngest learners and those students planning for life after high school.

Early learning is an important element of SSD's special education strategy. The district provides early childhood special education services to 1,300 students at 14 of the county's 22 public school districts. Students are referred to SSD by the child's school district, either through the Parents as Teachers or First Steps programs for children from birth to age 3 years. In addition, St. Louis County parents can refer their child to SSD for evaluation. After a child is referred to SSD, they are evaluated by expert diagnostic staff. If the young learner qualifies for special education services, SSD writes an IEP connected to targeted services. Twenty percent of the students who graduated from the SSD early childhood program in 2012 went on to kindergarten requiring no further special education services. Many other participating early learning students are able to be placed in less restrictive environments when they reach grade school, and the chances of a child having to receive special education services long-term are greatly reduced.

The SSD special education system also emphasizes each student's transition from adolescence to adulthood, given the process's "added importance and complexity" for students with disabilities. When an SSD student reaches age 16, a transition plan is developed as part of the student's annual IEP process. This step includes a focus on identifying the training and supports the student will need as an active adult in the community. The comprehensive transition planning process features five steps, includes a focus on each student's post-secondary goals for education, training, employment and community living. The planning process examines the student's present level of academic and functional improvement and establishes goals to measure the student's progress.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOL DISTRICT: KEY SPECIAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES

- Certified special education teacher and other special education staffing shortages.
 - Increasing incidence of severe behavioral problems.
 - Stability of Medicaid funding for the 9,700 eligible students across St. Louis County.
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NSBA SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADER: GREENVILLE COUNTY SCHOOLS, GREENVILLE SC

NSBA SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE SERIES

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GREENVILLE COUNTY SCHOOLS OVERVIEW

Greenville County Schools (GCS) is a unified, county-wide school district in Greenville, South Carolina, serving over 76,000 students in 106 schools and centers. As the largest school district in the State and 44th largest in the nation, GCS serves more than 10,000 students with disabilities. The District's signature initiative, Graduation Plus, focuses on providing engaging opportunities for students to earn college credit and/or industry certifications while completing their high school coursework. Students begin developing areas of interest in elementary school through related arts programs, clubs, a vibrant school-choice program, and project-based lessons that build skills in collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. The GCS vision is, "Students inspired, supported, and prepared for their next opportunity in life, education, and employment."

GREENVILLE COUNTY SCHOOLS SPECIAL EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

As a district committed to preparing students for whatever comes next in life, education, and employment, GCS has long looked for opportunities to provide a path for students with special needs to claim a place in the community where they can contribute their skills and abilities in a meaningful way. More than 20 years ago, Greenville County Schools created the Occupational Diploma program to help special education students build confidence, develop evidence of employability, and achieve economic stability through training for occupations in a wide range of fields. Though the title "Occupational Diploma" was a bit of a misnomer, since completing the program did not result in a diploma, Occupational Diploma completers could walk at GCS graduation ceremonies and were celebrated for successfully achieving their individual education goals.

For many years, individuals in Greenville County and throughout the state touted the benefits of a credential or diploma that recognized in a meaningful way special needs students' career preparation. In 2015, as part of the South Carolina Education Policy Fellowship Program, work group members Chuck

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Saylor (Trustee, Greenville County Schools) and Traci Morris Hogan (Assistant Superintendent, Greenville County Schools) led a conversation on developing a uniform system for special needs students that could be supported by the South Carolina Department of Education and utilized by districts throughout the state. The goal was state-wide uniformity and a more rigorous framework resulting in greater credibility for the marketable skills of those with special needs.

Finally, during the 2017 South Carolina Legislative Session, efforts to create an “Employability Credential” gained traction, thanks to collaborative efforts between members of the Policy Workgroup, the State Department of Education, the Association of School Administrators, and individuals throughout the state who contacted legislators about the importance of this legislation. The result was a bill that was signed into law on May 19, 2017. This law created a uniform, state-recognized SC High School Credential aligned with the State’s Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. It also set expectations for a new course of study for students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines the Employability Credential is appropriate.

Special education leaders have worked diligently to write appropriate curricula for students seeking the employability credential and have partnered with neighboring school districts to ensure consistency and uniformity in rigor and expectations. The concerted efforts and collaboration help promote the value of the credential to future employers.

To ensure that students transition into job placements with the appropriate employability skills necessary to be successful, Greenville County Schools also created building-based enterprises within our high school settings. Each high school business has an embroidery machine, garment press, vinyl cutter, mug press, sublimation printer, and a hat press for students to practice business skills and work practices.

While the Greenville County School system employs over 700 outstanding educators, we also boast an award-winning food and nutrition program that serves an average of 80,000 meals and after-school snacks each day. Students seeking the employability credential who have an interest in food service have many opportunities for hands-on training with our chefs and service experts. The school board has even approved a 2,000 square foot, \$500,000 kitchen/dining area to be added to the Roper Mountain Science Center, which will serve as the District’s first food service training site dedicated to preparing students with disabilities for employment in our local workforce.

GREENVILLE COUNTY SCHOOLS: MAJOR SPECIAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES

- Funding special education services.
 - Providing students with disabilities the support services that they need to become working, contributing, engaging members of society.
 - Recognition of innovation in demonstrating career readiness for students with disabilities.
-