

Best Practices in Special Education
Approved by ProCom November 29, 2010

ProCom Members for 2009-2010:

LPS Members

Susan Gourley- Superintendent of Lincoln Public Schools
Nancy Biggs - Associate Superintendent of Lincoln Public Schools
Bill Bucher - Principal at Lux Middle School
Susan Cassata - Principal at Lincoln East High School
Marilyn Moore - Associate Superintendent of Lincoln Public Schools
Mark Shepard - Associate Superintendent of Lincoln Public Schools
Ruth Ann Wylie - Principal at Prescott Elementary School

LEA Members

Jenni Absalon- President of Lincoln Education Association
Doreen Ainslie- Social Studies Teacher at Mickle Middle School
Marcia Benner - Counselor at Lincoln High School
Michael Geist - Science Teacher at Lincoln Southwest High School
Jim Rea - Executive Director of Lincoln Education Association
Daniel Ross - Fifth Grade Teacher at Calvert
Dan Studer – LEA UniServ Director
Resa Wiltse - Second Grade Teacher at Meadow Lane

Special Education ProCom Subcommittee Members:

Marcia Benner, Co Chair - Lincoln High School Counselor
Kris Reckewey, Co Chair - Director of Special Education
Courtney Blum - Special Education Teacher at Hill
Cindy Brunken - Supervisor of Special Education
Mary Eills - Assistant Director of Special Education
Barb Jacobson - Director of Curriculum
Karen Krull - Special Education Teacher at Irving,
Kim Legg-McCarty - Special Education Teacher at LHS
Kelly Muthersbaugh - Special Education Teacher at Meadow Lane
Jan Olmstead - Special Education Teacher at Lefler
Mary Phillips - Supervisor of Special Education
Mindy Roberts - Special Education Coordinator at Schoo
Erin Reed - Special Education Teacher at Elliott
Susan Safarik - Supervisor of Special Education

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of best practices addressing recently identified needs in the area of Special Education.

History

Developed in early 1990's, ProCom Membership is five to eight administrators and five to eight Lincoln Education Association (LEA) members along with the district Superintendent and President of the LEA. ProCom has been a part of the LEA negotiated agreement since 1992-93. The purpose of ProCom is to discuss overall relations between the parties, exchange information, receive suggestions, consider problems, and discuss improvements. ProCom meets regularly and establishes an annual agenda on which items may be placed during negotiations.

The Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) and the LEA bargaining teams, which negotiated the Professional Agreement for 2006-07 and 2007-08, referred the task of addressing the issue of how to ease the workload of teachers to ProCom. Beginning in December 2006, ProCom met to identify events and issues that were adding to the workload of teachers, explore ideas for reducing that workload and the stress related to the increased workload, and create strategies to develop an action plan and recommendations for easing teacher workload. One of the areas identified for review was the area of Special Education.

In the spring of 2009, district-wide forums were held and teachers and administrators were given two opportunities to provide feedback about Special Education workload issues. Using that input, the Special Education ProCom Subcommittee was formed and began meeting in January 2010. Initial areas of concerns identified by LEA Subcommittee members were time, staffing issues, and caseload. Special Education Subcommittee members identified concerns that included the need for more information about service delivery models, more collaboration with General Education, mixed concerns about progress monitoring, and the need for more communication among teams, in buildings and from the district level to the building level.

As a beginning step, the Subcommittee looked at all areas of concern as well as considering what was working well in some buildings and how to increase what was working well across the district. Items from the forum discussion that were working well included Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teaming, good communication, visiting successful programs, integrating services, Response to Intervention (RtI), district supports, resources, early childhood, service delivery, progress monitoring, and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Items from the forum that needed improvement included more staff development; behavior supports, paraeducator training, common plan time, communication, data collection, support staff, technology support, paperwork/time concerns, collaboration with General Education, and sharing curriculum/instruction ideas. From these two descriptions, it was evident that processes were in place in some schools that promoted a smoother work system than in others. The Subcommittee worked toward putting together some best practices to make workloads more manageable across the district.

The Subcommittee met again in February and April 2010. The Subcommittee ultimately formed more specific recommendations to address areas of concern and on March 10, 2010, the LEA/LPS Special Education ProCom Subcommittee co-chairs, Marcia Benner and Kris Reckewey presented a report to the ProCom Subcommittee. During the March 2010 meeting, the ProCom Subcommittee members reviewed the processes used to gather information, reviewed the summary of the district discussions held in the Spring of 2009, reviewed the timeline of the Subcommittee, and provided suggestions for the best practices document. A final report was planned for May 2010; however, that deadline was extended because of time constraints related to negotiations. The Special Education Subcommittee co-chairs reviewed information for a final report on October 7 and submitted that report on November 12, 2010.

Best Practices

The items listed below were identified by the Subcommittee as providing the best practices for addressing workload concerns across the district in the area of Special Education. These best practices are presented in the categories of:

1. Communication at the district level and at the building level
2. Progress monitoring
3. Service delivery
4. Resource inventory
5. Collaboration between Special Education and General Education.

Communication

District Level Communication

- Notify staff directly about the posting of Coordinator Meeting minutes and Improving Learning for Children with Disabilities (ILCD) “Notes and News” will be provided. District level program or project meetings will be summarized in the monthly ILCD Notes and News. Special Education staff will receive an email notice that Coordinator Meeting minutes and ILCD Notes and News are available; a direct link is provided on the Special Education Home Page.
- Increase use of DocuShare; training is available from Computing Services. Encourage staff to participate in professional development related to technology.
- Increase use of LPS Special Education website: post initiatives, schedules, DocuShare information, etc. A reminder will be sent to staff in the fall about what is included on the LPS Special Education website.
- Discuss staffing needs, caseloads, schedules, and service delivery; help staff know it is appropriate to ask questions. After communicating staffing questions with the building administrators, staff may also contact the district office if extra help is needed.
- Share district information; school representatives should attend district meetings and share information with other staff in the building.
- Arrange for district office staff to help problem solve for students.
- See other district staff recommendations below.

School Level Communication

- Communicate information at the school level. Special Education team meetings should be regularly scheduled and attended; building level meetings held monthly at a minimum (high school department meetings are often on the 2nd Tuesday, building meetings are also held on Tuesdays). Meetings should be scheduled with teacher plan time in mind.
- Discuss items from district coordinator meetings with Special Education staff and as appropriate, with General Education staff.
- Share information to support staff members in attending workshops/meetings.
- Review staffing needs on a regular basis, as needed, or when requested: caseloads, service delivery, schedules, and especially changes that occur when students with disabilities transfer in or out of a school building. Staffing review discussions can be requested by any staff member.
- Plan, implement, and revise special programming plans for individual students as a team. Ongoing teaming and problem solving are key to student and staff success. Utilize Tier 1, 2, and 3 supports when addressing student needs.
- Facilitate communication among teaching and administrative staff.
- The promotion of safe and comfortable meetings, problem-solving, and troubleshooting with all team members including administration would be an expectation.
- Hold open, honest discussions about successes, needs, struggles, etc. Support staff in accessing the use of district services. An outline of Special Education supports and contacts is available on the Special Education Home Page.
- Discuss and support development of a plan for times when a paraeducator substitute is not available. Consider developing a substitute paraeducator pool unique to a school.
- Rotate paraeducator and teacher assignments so that no one person is the only one serving a student with high needs.

Progress Monitoring

- Discuss progress monitoring during building Special Education team meetings.
- Provide district supports when setting up progress monitoring such as behavior specialists, cadre, coaches, or other district staff.
- Continue IEP progress monitoring partnership meetings; continue to share progress monitoring models during the meetings.
- Support inservice opportunities; district staff can provide professional development to help building staff with progress monitoring.
- Consider using PLC days as progress monitoring days; look at using co-teaching time flexibly on PLC days. There are buildings in LPS that are doing this successfully. If you want more information, contact the Special Education Department.
- Incorporate progress monitoring as a part of instructional services.

- Work with parents to prioritize a manageable number of goals. Work as a building team to determine who is responsible for scheduling, completing, and sharing progress monitoring data to streamline the progress monitoring processes.
- Continue to encourage the use of the high use goals and district monitoring tools found on the IEP disk and in DocuShare linked at the Special Education Website.
- Consider making minor IEP revisions to change the monitoring tool when students move from building to building. It is acceptable to update the IEP.

Service Delivery

- Provide a summary of service delivery options for schools to use. Provide district inservice for schools to discuss service delivery.
- Review professional development opportunities regarding service delivery and programming; additional opportunities may be suggested by contacting the district office.
- Consider various service delivery options and be willing to change as needed.
- Promote monthly minutes for IEP services to provide flexibility in serving students.
- Protect lunch and plan times; teachers may volunteer to serve students during plan, but caution doing so on a frequent basis.
- Develop a backup plan to help cover atypical situations.
- Schedule IEP meetings well in advance whenever possible.
- Train the district representative role; when needed, a staff member who is familiar with district resources and guidelines may serve as the district representative when the coordinator is not available; the decision to use this method must be discussed and supported by the school.
- Post required professional development for teachers before the end of the school year. Teachers can find these on the LPS Staff Development site. If you have a question about required 7.0 hours of Staff Development District flex time, contact the Special Education Department.

Resource Inventory

- Provide a district inventory of materials provided by the district in the past few years. This action step has been started, but will need to continue to be updated.
- Combine district inventory information with building inventory information for a complete inventory and check out system at each school. Communicate available resources and where they are located.

General Education – Special Education Collaborative Connections

- Attend joint professional development meetings, such as English Language Arts (ELA) - Special Education progress monitoring partnership meetings, staff meetings, writing inservice, Getting Started, etc.

- Develop master schedules with both General and Special Education in mind.
- Assist and support principals in fostering collaboration across General and Special Education staff.
- Use PLC time to share, analyze, and use progress data to guide instruction.
- Provide district in-service for staff groups across departments; help building staff understand our shared responsibility.
- Help determine the teacher(s) and/or grade level teams of teachers who will attend the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)/IEP meeting in accordance with state guidelines.
- General Education and Special Education teachers work together on data collection (for example, one writing assignment could provide information for both Special Education and the General Education teachers).