

Oconomowoc Special Education Analysis Abstract

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In the spring of 2011, the Oconomowoc Area School District contracted Elise Frattura to conduct a comprehensive review of programs and services offered to students with disabilities.

Themes Based on District Special Education Evaluation

<i>Infrastructure</i>	<i>Service Delivery</i>	<i>Teaching and Learning</i>
1. Unified Vision 2. Organization 3. Identification of Disability	1. Home School and Clustered Programs 2. Least Restrictive Environment 3. Staffing and Caseloads	1. Achievement 2. Response to Intervention 3. Pedagogy and Co-Teaching 4. Students with Severe Disabilities 5. Professional Development

Infrastructure

Positives:

1. District leadership is very interested in moving forward in a cohesive and pragmatic manner to proactively support each and every learner, with a specific eye on those students who struggle the most.
2. Both general and special educators are interested in understanding a more collaborative means to jointly support all learners.
3. There is a positive and intentional tone of good “will” throughout the district to proactively serve all learners in a comprehensive and cohesive manner.

Necessary Action:

There must be a united approach to moving forward based on unified mission and goals defined through best practice. Two primary concerns are:

- 1) the shared responsibility for children with disabilities by all personnel, and
- 2) the perception that children with disabilities may need to go some place else to have their needs met.

From the School Board to both general and special education teachers, a unified vision must be developed in support of a service delivery model that is proactive versus reactive. In this manner, all students will benefit from core content to minimize, if not eliminate the gap between students with and without disabilities and students of poverty. Often such common core beliefs in support of best practice for students with disabilities are integrated into a district belief statement.

Recommendations for Infrastructure:

1. All staff should use person-first language for students with disabilities
2. From the Board to general and special education teachers, a unified vision must be developed that takes into consideration how OASD will show how they hold high expectations for all learners through common core belief statements that support district policy and procedures.
3. Leadership for Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Technology, and Special Education must be merged to proactively support all learners under a Teaching and Learning structure for all students.
4. Teaching and Learning Facilitators for all learners should be created out of the current Program Support positions and supervised by the Administrator for Teaching and Learning with a focus on Pupil/Personnel Services and Special Education.
5. Reciprocal communication efforts from District Office must increase and be consistent to proactively support both general and special educators at the school level.
6. All leadership and teachers must own, hold high expectations, and share in the problem solving and success of all students, especially those with disabilities as part and parcel of their position descriptions and evaluation practices.
7. Action must be taken to determine why students in the area of Other Health Impaired are being over-identified, as a means to provide services to struggling learners through RtI, especially at the secondary levels.
8. OASD should work toward an eligibility rate of 10 to 11%.

Service Delivery

Positives:

1. General and special educators are working hard at co-teaching and serving a range of students with disabilities within the schools and classrooms they would attend if not disabled.

2. Many special education teachers are serving a broad range of students using a cross-categorical model.
3. Most teachers and administrators reported a push-in model across the district as a step toward integrated comprehensive services.

Challenges:

Home School and Clustered Programs Least Restrictive Environment Staffing and Roles

Recommendations for Service Delivery:

1. OASD should place all students with disabilities in the schools they would attend if not disabled, specifically:
 - a. The 43 students who are currently tuitioned-out of the district should be returned at a cost savings of \$600,000 (dollars to be reallocated to better provide support to the range of learners in the schools and classrooms they would attend if not disabled).
 - b. Special education teachers should be realigned in a cross-categorical manner where schools are staffed Early Childhood 1:8, elementary 1:10, middle school 1:12 and high school 1:14 and transition 1:8.
 - c. Paraprofessionals should be realigned at the same ratio (early childhood 1:8, Elementary 1:10, Intermediate School, 1:12 and High School 1:14). In addition to student specific paraprofessionals.
 - d. Students eligible for speech and language only should be returned or placed onto the speech and language caseloads
 - e. As the District makes significant strides to better serve all learners in a collaborative manner between special and general education, and students are returned to their home district, dollars should be reallocated to increase special education staff to be more aligned with a model that serves students cross-categorically using a 1:10 elementary, 1:12 middle, and 1:14 high school.
 - f. Develop service delivery teams to move from a deficit-based model to a proactive model (See Appendix E for more details):
 1. District-Wide Service Delivery Team
 2. School-Based Service Delivery Teams
 3. Grade-Based Teams for All Learners

Teaching and Learning

Positives:

1. Some teachers have attended co-teaching professional development and are looking forward to opportunities to co-teach and continued professional development.
2. A desire for all students to be academically successful prevails.

Challenges:

**Achievement
Response to Intervention
Pedagogy and Co-Teaching
Students with Severe Disabilities
Professional Development**

Recommendations for Teaching and Learning:

1. Embrace the importance that staff must assist in the development of each other's capacity to work with a range of students – that is, share expertise and knowledge.
2. Assurance that all supports are seamlessly tied to and grounded in core teaching and learning in support of the range of learners within every classroom and grade.
3. All staff must believe they have a role and that their perceptions of student learning matter. All staff must work to understand how perceptions of low expectations may marginalize the performance of students with disabilities, students of color, English language learners, and students of low socio economic status.
4. Commitment that is built on culturally relevant differentiated curriculum and instruction through universal access of content-driven curriculum
5. Given natural proportion of students with disabilities in every school and classroom they would attend if not disabled. Special educators must be aligned with general education teachers by grade levels or academies at a (1:10, 1:12, 1:14, elementary, middle, and high, respectively)
6. Universal access to curriculum through instruction and differentiation for all students is essential. That is, the instructional model needs to clearly articulate the importance of understanding "how" a child learns and developing lessons that allow for the first intervention to be the right intervention for as many students as possible through integrated heterogeneous learning groups.
7. Individualized proactive behavioral supports must be put into place that attends to teaching appropriate behavior.

8. Avoid the use of retention of any child with disabilities in the early years as a means to “catch-up.” As, it limits the opportunity for necessary transitional time between 18-21.
9. For students requiring functional skills (see Appendix E for more detail), balance instruction during natural transitions and in dyads versus large groups of students or enclaves.
10. Teaming arrangements should be based on the individual needs of the students who make up each special educators caseload and the general educators capacity to teach a broad range of learners - as an instructional mechanism to meet the goals of each student’s IEP
11. A comprehensive professional development process must be put into place, for both general and special education teachers, which is aligned to the District vision and non-negotiables regarding “how” students with disabilities will be served by grade level (elementary, intermediate, and high) co-developed with teachers and school principals.

Summary and Recommendations

All students should have the opportunity to attend their neighborhood school (or school of choice in school choice programs), and be placed in heterogeneous classrooms at their grade level alongside their peers. This placement is the least restrictive, least intrusive and least disruptive in their daily lives, encourages independence in learning and not being over helped (i.e. least enabling), and ultimately is least expensive. The curriculum and instruction they receive in these environments should address their learning needs and at the same time, open the window to a rich, creative, non-restrictive learning experience. Within an integrated service delivery model, though their individual learning needs are met, they are met in the least intrusive, most respectful and least disruptive way, and they are challenged to reach their maximum, learning potential (i.e. least enabling). A curriculum and instruction that bears these four non-negotiables is ultimately the least expensive option as well. Finally, with integrated services, educators themselves move out of segregated, restrictive teaching environments and provide high quality curriculum and instruction in ways that tap each learner’s gifts (i.e. least intrusive and least disruptive), that foster student self esteem and that encourage student’s positive sense of self as a learner (least enabling). Again, educators engaged in their teaching in this way save district resources that can be reallocated to the benefit of all in the school community.

