



Seattle Public Schools
Special Education Parent Communicator
February 12th, 2009

Carla Santorno, Chief Academic Officer
Fred Row, Interim Executive Director

Update

As your Interim Executive Director, since October of 2008, I have had the opportunity to meet a number of you and have been impressed with the professionalism, quality of services and commitment to meeting student needs. I want to take this opportunity to thank each of you for all of the work you do to address the special needs of your students.

It is my belief that the Special Education Department must embrace the principle that effective student growth and development is fostered through parents and staff working together as an “educational team.” While the District is pursuing candidates to fill the Executive Director’s position I want to assure you that the department continues to have effective leadership as we work toward implementation of recommendations from the review.

This is my 42nd year working in public education. My experience includes classroom teacher, principal, 27 years as a Director/Executive Director of Special Education and most recently as the Assistant Superintendent of Learning and Teaching for the Renton School District. I worked with Dr. Goodloe-Johnson, Superintendent and Carla Santorno, Chief Academic Officer, to review and revise the job description and the position of Executive Director of Special Education will be re-posted soon.

One of my goals is to make sure this office communicates with you throughout the year. This document was put together to help provide information about the anticipated changes for the 2009-10 school year.

External Review

In 2007, an external review of the special education program was completed by the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Education Development Center, Inc., out of Newton, Massachusetts. The goal of the review was to recommend ways to increase academic achievement, graduation rates, and other outcomes for students who receive special education services.

The review team stressed that the recommendations relate to structures, systems, and procedures. They noted that special education teachers and other staff interviewed were very dedicated to doing the right thing for students, and noted a willingness to consider new ways of operating that have the potential for positive outcomes for kids.

Our work in the Special Education Department is being guided by the recommendations in this review and by our District's strategic plan, *Excellence for All*. I am working closely with our team as we begin implementation of review recommendations in our effort to move from serving students based on specific programs to services needed in cluster/geographic area schools that have close proximity to student's homes.

Vision

At recent Board meetings and school closure workshops the Seattle School District Special Education Vision was shared with the public. The vision states:

- We will use an Integrated Comprehensive Service Delivery model in every building and provide self contained programs in each cluster.
- We will educate our students in the least restrictive environment according to their Individualized Education Program.

General education and special education students and staff will be experiencing many changes due to relocation of students due to the school closures approved by the Board at their January 29th meeting. Change isn't easy and I want to address a couple of the changes that will occur in special education due to initial implementation of recommendations from the review as well as closures. Over the next weeks we will be scheduling special education staff meetings where Department Supervisors will share more detailed information.

Areas of Change

Two key change areas for the 2009-10 school year include kindergarten program services as well as beginning transition activities for implementing the Integrated Service Delivery Model.

Questions and Answers

The following Question and Answer Section may help clarify changes that are being implemented for the 2009-10 school year. If you have additional questions please feel free to contact me:

Fred Row - Interim Executive Director/Special Education Consultant
Special Education Office: 206-252-0058



Special Education Question and Answers Regarding Service Delivery Changes February 12th, 2009

Vision for Change

1. What is the Seattle School District Special Education Vision:

- We will use an Integrated Comprehensive Service Delivery model in every building and provide self contained programs in each cluster.
- We will educate our students in the least restrictive environment according to their Individualized Education Program.

2. Why is the District making changes in how we serve special education students?

In April 2007, the Seattle School District contracted with the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Education Development Center, Inc. to conduct a comprehensive review of the special education programs in the District. The review was completed and final report received in October 2007. A change from a program label model to a Comprehensive Integrated Service Model is beginning based on the findings of the review.

The Review found that current Special education services in the Seattle Public Schools are predominantly arranged programmatically by disability category, and students are placed based upon their labels. Programs are so specialized that some students ‘fit’ the program and others are denied unless there are enough students to develop another specialized program.

The program model assumes that students cannot attend the school they would attend if they were without disability or by parent choice. More than thirty percent of special education students do not attend their school of choice.

Seattle’s current program-driven model requires siblings within families to attend different schools—not by family choice—thus fragmenting not only the students’ day, but also family life. Program-driven models, by segregating their students, give them the least amount of cohesive instructional time often requiring transfers to another school building due to a lack of continuum program services.

Integrated Service Delivery Model

3. What is an Integrated Service Delivery Model?

In an Integrated Service delivery model, both special and general educators at a specific grade level work together to support students with a range of differing needs. Such supports are based on the significance of a specific learning; they range from team-taught large group instruction, to co-planned, small, flexible learning groups, to one-to-one instruction in integrated school and community environments.

In an integrated and comprehensive services model, students are placed in classes according to their natural proportions in the school. Assigning students in natural proportions sets the expectation that all school staff be able to teach to a range of students. The role of the special education teacher is initially to support students in these settings, but ultimately to build the general educator's capacity to teach to a range of students.

The following core principles have been adopted by the Special Education Department and Seattle School District:

- Unified belief that students with disabilities can and will learn with the appropriate support;
- Students receive services in the schools they would attend if not disabled or in the schools of choice (they do not have to go a school somewhere else to get their needs met);
- Supports built on culturally relevant differentiated curriculum and instruction through universal access of content-driven curriculum;
- Staffs develop and support each other's capacity to work with a range of student.

4. For the 2009-10 school-year will all students be served in an Integrated Service Delivery Model?

While that would be the ideal goal, the answer is no. It will take the District 5-6 years to fully implement a Comprehensive Integrated Service Delivery Model. The District will start initially by moving students who would normally attend a "Blended Kindergarten Program" to general education kindergarten classrooms with support from special education resource services. This will require additional services being allocated to buildings in order to provide appropriate services to meet the needs of students.

5. Given the current fiscal shortfalls facing the District, are special education changes being made as an effort to save money?

No. Implementation of an Integrated Service Delivery Model will actually increase direct programming costs due to the need to allocate additional staffing and resources to school in order to meet the needs of individual students traditionally serviced in a contained classroom setting. The one area that may be considered a cost savings is that of transportation by eliminating the need to transport large numbers of students out of their cluster/geographic areas and across the District. These savings may help reduce

additional costs connected with implementation of an Integrated Service Delivery Model but would not cover all additional costs.

Kindergarten Changes for 2009-10

6. Does this mean that there will be no self-contained services for kindergarten students beginning in 2009-10?

No. There will always be a small number of students who require such intense services that they will require a self-contained special education setting with inclusion opportunities throughout the day as appropriate.

7. Why was it decided to dissolve the Blended K classrooms for 2009-10?

By concept the "Blended K" classroom was a general education classroom with a smaller number of general education students and special education students. The intent of such a program was to prepare students to enter first grade with resource support. Because of the District's current program driven model, the majority of students did not enter first grade with resource rooms support but often had to transition to another building for first grade to receive services in a self-contained classroom. In beginning to implement a comprehensive integrated service delivery model the Department is going to start slowly with preschool students rising to kindergarten and kindergarten students rising to first grade. In making this service change the District and Department recognize the need to:

- Provide additional staffing support to schools so that student program services can be provided within a school that is within close proximity to their homes.
- Provide staff development for special education, kindergarten and first grade teachers that focus on serving students in an Integrated Service Delivery Model.

8. Will all schools get additional resources to serve special education kindergarten and risers to first grade students from Blended K classrooms?

It is hoped that services can be put in place in the majority of district elementary schools so that families can have their child served in a school with closest proximity to their home. However, this may not be possible at all schools next year. During the first year we may have to identify one or two schools in each cluster that will be provided additional resources to serve students in a comprehensive integrated service delivery model. In implementing integrated services across all clusters, it is imperative that resources for students and staff be provided that will assure students receive an appropriate program.

9. Will all students currently serviced in a "Blended K" classroom be able to enroll in a school of choice and receive services through resources services?

The majority of students will be able to do so. However, there may be a few students that because of the intense level of services needed may need to be served through a more self-contained program. In these instances department Supervisors will meet

with individual families to identify the school location for the needed services. Unfortunately it may not be in one of the schools the parents identified through the enrollment process.

10. Will students currently in a Blended K classroom that is outside their home cluster have to transition to a school within their cluster?

No. Parents will be given an option to have their child enroll in first grade in a school within their cluster or to stay at the building they received "Blended K" services **during the open enrollment process.** If a parent elects to stay at a school outside of their cluster it is with the understanding that they will provide transportation for their child to and from school for as long as they elect to remain at the school. The District will provide transportation to schools within their cluster. If parents elect to transition their child to a school within their home cluster the Special Education Department will work with families to make this a smooth transition for students and families.

Enrollment Options for 2009-10

11. Parents are currently making school visits. If they are not looking at a "specific classroom program" what should they be looking for during their school visits?

Just as parents of students who do not have a disability they should look at the school community to determine if it is where they would like their child to attend. In making their school visits they should then identify their top three schools of choice just as all parents do under the current open enrollment procedures.

12. Does this mean that students in other "special programs" at different grade levels will not be able to go to a school of their choice and be provided services through an Integrated Service Delivery Model?

No. While the majority of students currently served in a "specific program" will continue to be served in more contained settings, changes in services will be determined individually through the IEP process. However, throughout the next few years there will be a concerted move to implementing Comprehensive Service Delivery Models in all clusters and buildings.

As indicated, some students may be able to move to a school of their choice through the IEP review process if it is determined that needed services can be provided through resource supports with some additional resources.

There is a concerted effort to provide a continuum of services at each middle and high school so that parents of students rising from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school can identify schools of choice through the enrollment process just as parents of students not receiving special education services do. Requests for students that have been serviced in a self contained program will be reviewed by department Supervisors to assure that services are available within schools requested.

13. How has school closure impacted special education services?

School closure has allowed the District to begin implementing Comprehensive Integrated Service Delivery in a number of buildings due to relocations required because of closure. It has also provided a vehicle to create continuum of Integrated Services in each cluster for students currently placed in more self contained settings, thus eliminating the need for students having to transition to another school each time there is a natural transition between levels.

14. What if parents want to select a school that can provide services their child needs outside of their cluster?

Parents may request a school outside their cluster during the Open Enrollment Process that can provide special education services their child needs. Applications for students served in a contained program will be reviewed and approved by the special education department. All other students will be processed according to the Open Enrollment procedures. Parents would have to agree to provide transportation for as long as their child is served outside of their cluster/geographic area. Students placed outside of their cluster/geographic area by the District in order to receive special education services will be provided transportation.

15. Do all special education parents enroll their child through the enrollment process beginning with the 2009-10 school year?

Yes, all parents may go through the regular open enrollment process. The enrollment office will identify students currently served in a self contained program and forward enrollment requests to the special education office, which will review the application and determine if services can be provided in buildings requested. All other students will be considered under the normal open enrollment process and criteria.

16. What if services can not be provided in a school requested through the enrollment process?

If services can not be provided in a requested building it is the special education office that identifies the location where services can best be provided in a school that has closest proximity to the family's home.

Additional Questions

17. Who should questions regarding special education be directed to?

The first individuals to talk with are your child's special education teacher and if you still have questions your building principal or vice principal. If you still have issues that you don't feel have been resolve you should contact a special education supervisor. The special education administrative team includes:

- Julie Mack – Supervisor, Early Childhood (Birth to Three & Preschool)
jmack@seattleschools.org

- Joanie Bell – Supervisor, Elementary Programs
jobell@seattleschools.org
- Becky Clifford – Supervisor, Elementary Programs
rlclifford@seattleschools.org
- Michael Sanford – Supervisor, Middle School & K-8 Programs
msanford@seattleschools.org
- Martha Lawson – Supervisor, High School & Specialized Programs
mlawson@seattleschools.org

Fred Row - Interim Executive Director/Special Education Consultant
Special Education Office: 206-252-0058
Pamela Klopfer – Office Specialist III
(206) 252-0054

In implementing a Comprehensive Integrated Service Delivery Model the Department will be addressing a fundamental goal consistent with the Seattle School District Mission Statement, that is, to prepare ALL students for life after high school.