

## Special Education Staffing Plan

SY 2014-2015

### St. Mary's County Public Schools Special Education Priority areas

#### Assurance and Compliance

The St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) Staffing Plan is consistent with procedures outlined in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for the purpose of ensuring a Free Appropriate Public education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities.

#### Evidence of Public Input

Public input to the plan is sought on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Input is obtained from caseload reviews with supervisory staff; site based administrative staff, School Improvement Teams feedback, the Citizen's Advisory Committee for Special Education (CACSE) members and Board of Education presentations.

#### Staffing Plan/Budget Timeline

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|----------------|--|
| March 2014     | IEP Chairpersons, Special Education Department Chairs, and Elementary School special education representatives, initiate transition planning for students transitioning from 5 <sup>th</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup> and from 8 <sup>th</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> grades. Sending schools meet with receiving schools to review individualized student needs. Planning begins to ensure appropriate resources are in place for the beginning of the next school year. Supervisors meet with school based teams/administrators to discuss transition needs. |
| April 2014     | Leadership teams continue plans for the SMCPS system wide articulation day in preparation for student transitions between levels and schools. Initial staffing decisions based on data obtained from the Maryland On-Line IEP census data, caseloads, projected enrollment data, preliminary budget allocations and feedback evaluation received during the 2013-2014 school year. The proposed Staffing Plan is posted on the Department of Special Education (DSE) website.  |
| May 2014       | The final plan is posted on the SMCPS website.   |
| July-August    | Individual school caseloads/updated SSIS data are reviewed for final staffing assignments to school sites for the 2014-2015 SY.  |
| Nov. 2014      | Budget preparations begin for the 2015 FY require the Executive Director to begin initial identification of special education staffing needs for the 2015-2016 SY.   |
| December 2014  | Board of Education begins public hearings and work sessions on the FY16 budget.  |
| Jan-March 2015 | Executive Director, Supervisors and SMCPS Finance Department review current SSIS data for schools and verify current staffing. Infants and Toddler program staff and Pre-school special education staff conduct transition planning for three, four and five year olds. Planning for program supports needed for the 15-16 SY begins.  |

The Executive Director meets on a regular basis with the SMCPS CACSE for current information from the community. The Executive Director also sits on the Division of Instruction Team. This team meets weekly throughout the calendar year to review and discuss issues as they relate to the departments of Human Resources; Budget and Fiscal Services; Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development.

**Evidence of Maintenance of Effort**

During the budgetary process, the Executive Director of Special Education/Student Services works directly with budget and fiscal services, supervisors, and site based teams to ensure a continuation of baseline needs in special education, and to identify additional supports that are necessary to support ongoing needs, The 2015 FY budget works with the state and local funding sources to meet the identified needs related to students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), staff compensation, and increasing student enrollment.

**Maintenance of Effort:**

Approved FY 2014 Expenditures	\$ 17,224,584
The Requested expenditures for the FY 2015	\$ 17,467,987

**Special Education Priority areas/Evaluation**

**Early Intervening Services**

The SMCPS continues to collaborate with the Maryland State Department of Education to implement a process to meet the staffing needs to provide continuous and ongoing services for Infants and Toddlers with seamless transitions to Part B services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Federal laws and the state of Maryland, requires that services for Infant and Toddler families, as well as the Extended Part C Option families, are provided on a continuous, year round basis. Unlike services for school aged children (3-21), summer services are not determined on an individual basis as in Extended School Year Services (ESY). In order to provide a coordinated system of early intervention and early childhood education that allows children with disabilities to receive all of the prescribed services necessary to develop their abilities to achieve school readiness as they enter kindergarten, the DSE has braided local, state, and federal funds and programs to provide these supports and services to children and families. Due to significant inequities in negotiated employee compensation requirements, direct services for related services are contracted with local providers and independent contractors to provide identified services during the summer months.

On July 1, 2013, the SMCPS assumed “Lead Agency” in the partnership between the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and Department of Social Services (DSS). Through a *Memorandum of Understanding* with all three agencies roles and responsibilities have been outlined and agreed upon. The SMCPS also applied for and won the Federal Head Start grant. Both of these moves significantly increased the capacity of the SMCPS to maximize programming, to ensure our children are school ready.

In an effort to build strong relationships between general and special educators, the role of Supervisor of Birth to Five Programming in Special Education and the Early Childhood Supervisory position in General Education were combined to provide oversight of all general and special education programs that serve children and their families through the kindergarten year. The oversight of Infants and Toddlers, Pre-School Special Education, Head Start and General Education, Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten was assigned to one Coordinating Supervisor. This plan provided personnel savings to the system and allowed the blending of all programming to meet the individual needs of entering any early childhood program. For example, the collaborative efforts of general special education teachers led to the development of a new coaching model for Head Start teachers. Coaches provide onsite modeling of the implementation of strategies to support the outcomes and goals of children receiving services through an IFSP or IEP. This model has proved successful in meeting the Head Start regulation to include children with disabilities throughout the program and has provided exemplary services to children who have made tremendous gains in learning. The St. Mary’s County Public Schools continue to work to braid funds and blend programs in the early childhood arena to provide opportunities for children with disabilities to engage with their typically developing peers. The SMCPS also continues to strive to build strong partnerships with families and to engage parents in becoming strong partners in the educational programming for their children.

## **Professional Development**

The delivery of special education instruction is an integral part of the SMCPSS school improvement planning process. IEP Teams are knowledgeable in their responsibility to consider each student's needs and the supports and services necessary to provide the student access to, and participation in the grade level curriculum in the least restrictive environment.

A key element to the provision of a FAPE for students with disabilities is the availability of skilled personnel to implement each student's IEP. Through the collaborative efforts of the DSE and the Department of Teaching Learning and Professional Development (TLPD), special education staff participates in mandatory, voluntary and site specific professional development. Voluntary training module/resources provide professional development opportunities for all school personnel. Central Office staff members work with site based teams to provide site specific ongoing support, technical assistance, and consultation to special education service providers and programs. Restricted funds provided the resources to support technology upgrades for IEP planning and development; providing improved efficiencies for teachers and related service providers.

The SMCPSS currently serves a growing population of students that have been identified as having a disability of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The county maintains a full continuum of services to support administrators in designing appropriate environments and allocating resources, teachers in programming, school psychologists in administering assessments and observations, and guidance counselors in designing appropriate social interactions and families in developing home supports. The Autism Support Team consists of a Supervisor of Special Education, an Autism Lead Teacher and two Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA). This team provides support in the form of general supervision, professional development, and technical assistance targeting behavior support, functional analysis/behavior development and implementation of best practices. There are currently two elementary, two middle school, and three high school programs that serve students in intensive program classrooms. This framework of supports is provided to students birth through 21 years of age in the Community Promoting Academic and Social Success (COMPASS) classrooms. Students with ASD are also served in eighteen intensive SAIL classrooms that support students who are pursuing high school certificates of completion. High school students may be assigned to intensive case management classrooms. The SMCPSS has provided high quality professional development in Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), Treatment and Education of Autistic and other related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) methodologies, data analysis, Discreet Trial Teaching (DTT), and social skills and assessment/ evaluations. The SMCPSS continues to enhance existing programming and improve the skills of staff in the most recent areas of service level, service locations and curriculum/methodology. Staff and families routinely engage in team planning meetings that can take as many as 15 hours over multiple days. It is not uncommon for IEP meetings to last several hours due to back and forth negotiation of services and supports.

During the 2013-2014 School Year, in our efforts to be proactive with intensive student programming that continued to build upon the capacity of current program the SMCPSS completed training and implemented the Ziggurat model. This model for programmatic planning was developed by Ruth Aspy Ph.D. and Barry Grossman Ph.D. and is a comprehensive planning system for students with ASD. It is person-centered and based upon best practices/ interventions recommended in the National Autism Center's National Standards Project. By adopting the Ziggurat model, staff and families are included in a systematic approach to planning and services. This approach provides long term consistency in decision making, regardless of individual staff /advocate preferences and experiences. The SMCPSS purchased the training materials and were especially fortunate to have the training provided by Drs. Aspy and Grossman. All materials and training was funded with restricted grant funds.

Two Title I schools were identified for a MSDE Title I Focused School Grant. This grant was provided to help schools narrow the achievement gap. The Department of Special Education, in partnership with general education, plans to add two more identified schools and braid Title I funds with Local Flexible Funds in the Pass-through grant. The focus of this project is to expand intensive performance data analysis in order to provide diagnostic and prescriptive reading and math interventions. Professional development includes continued training in the Linda Mood Bell reading interventions and co-teaching, coaching, and mentoring with contracted consultants

### **Staffing Patterns of Service Providers**

The St. Mary's County Public Schools, *Bridge to Excellence Master Plan, Annual Update*, and the *MSDE Self-Assessment of Public Agency Performance on IDEA Part B Indicators*, provides a comprehensive, integrated, countywide plan, identifying the school system's goals and strategies for meeting them, and the methods of evaluating achievement of the goals and objectives.

The DSE continues to collaborate with the MSDE to implement a process to meet the service needs for children and families for Infants and Toddler and Extended Part C services. Federal laws and the state of Maryland require that service for Infants and Toddlers and Extended Part C families are provided on a continuous, year round basis. The DSE applies Federal pass-through funding, grants and Medical Assistance monies to meet the needs of children and families.

Each year the staffing plan for the current school year is reviewed and revised based on system census information, caseload information and input from school administrators, site based instructional staff, program coordinators, and appropriate stakeholders in the community. The SMCPs utilizes a staffing plan for providers based on student IEP needs, student census and instructional collaboration with general educators. Through this model, students in the SMCPs have their IEPs implemented in the Least Restrictive Environments (LRE). This plan is refined and expanded to also include related service providers. It also offers an appropriate and equitable basis for all schools, with individual additions of staff based on student and/or IEP needs.

The number of students served by an individual service provider may vary based on the needs of the students, the location of the service, and other duties required of service providers. Other duties that must be considered are assessments, IEP meetings, service coordination, medical assistance requirements, support to access community resources, job development, and travel time for itinerant staff between schools. Every effort must be made by the schools to provide services in the students' LRE. The school based team considers the needs of each student and the support and services necessary to provide access to the general education curriculum.

All personnel used to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities are included within this staffing plan. They include:

- Special Educators to include Vision, Audiology, and Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Behavior Interventionists
- Paraprofessionals
- Related Service Providers (OT/PT/SLP)

Based on the considerations stated above, guidelines have been developed to operationalize the assignment of special education staff to schools.

## Summary Guidelines

### Elementary School Special Education Teachers

General Education enrollment with an average of 1 special education teacher for every

- 200 general education students enrolled in grades k-5.
- *Per the negotiated agreement:* All elementary school teachers will have a minimum of 225 minutes per week, within the students' day, for planning. Planning periods should be in not less than 30 minute blocks.
- Each teacher will have a duty free lunch.
- When developing their individual schedules, teachers should be mindful of instructional interventions and compliance requirements (assessments, case management, etc.).
- *Average* caseloads of 18 students per special education teacher.
- Assignment of one full time paraeducator to support LRE or specific needs as identified on student IEPs.

### **Recommendations for Scheduling SWD in Elementary Schools**

- Concentrate resources for co-teaching in reading /language arts and mathematics.
- Class enrollment should be reflective of proportional representation, as closely as possible by limiting the number of SWD to approximately no more than 12% SWD in the general education classes.
- Limit classes that include SWD and supported instruction to no more than 25 students per class with proportional representation.
- Provide interventions beyond the core curriculum during guided practice or designated intervention times in order to maximize the time SWD are directly engaged with a professional.
- Minimize the assignment of "extra" duties such as bus, cafeteria and recess duties. Case management is the special educators' "extra duty".
- The DSE has worked with the Technology Department to allow access to TAC for special educators in order to facilitate a more efficient case management system for special education teachers to access student progress and achievement information.

### Middle School Special Education Teachers

- General Education enrollment with an average of 1 special education teacher for every
- 150 general education students enrolled in grades 6-8.
- *Per the negotiated agreement:* All secondary school teachers will normally have a minimum of five planning periods per week. Each teacher will have a duty free lunch.
- When developing their individual schedules, teachers should be mindful of instructional interventions and compliance requirements (assessments, case management).
- *Average* caseloads of 15 students per special education teacher.
- Assignment of one full time paraeducator to support LRE or specific needs as identified on student IEPs.

## **Recommendations for Scheduling SWD in Middle Schools**

- Concentrate resources for co-teaching in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- Class enrollment should be reflective of proportional representation, as closely as possible by limiting the number of SWD to approximately no more than 12% SWD in the general education classes.
- Limit classes that include SWD and supported instruction to no more than 25 students per class with proportional representation.
- Provide interventions beyond the core curriculum during guided practice or designated intervention times in order to maximize the time SWD are directly engaged with a professional.
- Minimize the assignment of "extra" duties such as bus, cafeteria and recess duties. Case management is the special educators' "extra duty".
- The DSE has worked with the Technology Department to allow access to TAC for special educators in order to facilitate a more efficient case management system for special education teachers to access student progress and achievement information.

## **High School Special Education Teachers**

- General Education enrollment with an average of 1 special education teacher for every 200 general education students enrolled in high school.
- *Per the negotiated agreement:* All secondary school teachers will normally have a minimum of five planning periods per week. Each teacher will have a duty free lunch.
- When developing their individual schedules, teachers should be mindful of instructional interventions and compliance requirements (assessments, case management).
- *Average* caseloads of 15 students per special education teacher. Assignment of one full time paraeducator to support LRE or specific needs as identified on student IEPs.

## **Recommendations for Scheduling SWD in High Schools**

- Priority should be given for supported instruction classes and scheduling for freshmen
- 9/90 classes, English, Algebra, and High School Assessment (HSA) courses.
- Refine the use of credit bearing study skills classes for SWD to differentiate the types of support provided to students who require organization and study skills from those who require instructional remediation and intervention.
- Class enrollment should be reflective of proportional representation, as closely as possible by limiting the number of SWD to approximately no more than 12% SWD in the general education classes.
- Limit classes that include SWD and supported instruction to no more than 25 students per class with proportional representation.
- Minimize the assignment of "extra" duties such as bus, cafeteria and recess duties.
- Case management is the special educators' "extra duty".
- The DSE has worked with the Technology Department to allow access to TAC for special educators in order to facilitate a more efficient case management system for special education teachers to access student progress and achievement information.

## **Infant and Toddler Programs**

To the maximum degree possible, all infant and toddlers receive services in their natural environments. In addition to natural environments, children have the opportunity to receive services at regionalized programs located in three elementary schools; one in the northern area, one in the central area and one in the southern area of the county.

- One teacher for an average of 25 infant/ toddlers
- Two full time equivalent para educators to the I/T program

## **Preschool Special Education**

Three year old students recommended to receive classroom instructional services receive their instruction in half-day programs clustered in one of three elementary schools, community pre-school programs, Judy Center classes and Head Start classrooms. Students receiving single services may receive them in their home schools, Judy Centers or Head Start classes. Services may include a combination of classroom service and services in natural environments. Four and five year old children who require less than a half day pre-school program are provided services in the home school. Four and five year olds, with intensive needs are served within programs that are clustered in three elementary school locations.

The following guidelines are considered when assigning staff:

- One FTE special education teacher and one FTE para educator for an average of 9 students per session for intense needs students.
- One FTE special education teacher and one FTE para professional for co-taught preschool classes.
- Additional paras/ABA providers may be assigned to classrooms based on student needs and IEP Team recommendations

## **SAIL (Supporting Academics and Independent Living) Programs**

The SAIL Program is designed to provide special education services to students who have documented significant cognitive disabilities and have been identified as being in need of an alternative, adapted, and functional curriculum. SAIL classes are located in each high school, and middle schools, and in two regionalized programs at the elementary level. In all settings, students have opportunities to interact with their typical peers. The following guidelines are considered when assigning staff:

- One FTE special education teacher and one FTE para for an average of 9 students
- Additional paras/ABA providers may be assigned to classrooms based on student needs and IEP Team recommendations

## **LAP (Learning Adjustment) Program**

The majority of students with emotional/behavioral factors that interfere with their learning receive their services within a continuum of services provided at their home school. For those students who require a highly structured behavioral program with a small student to teacher ratio, the SMCPS maintains LAP classes at two elementary cluster sites, two middle schools and each high school. At all sites, SWD are provided opportunities to interact in the general education setting with typical peers. The following guidelines are considered when assigning staff:

- One FTE special education teacher and one FTE para for an average of 9 students

- Additional paras may be assigned to classrooms based on student needs and IEP Team recommendations

### **Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders COMPASS (Community Promoting Academic and Social Success)**

The majority of students (6-21) with autism spectrum disabilities (ASD) receive their special education services within a continuum of services provide at their home schools. For those students who require a highly structured behavioral, academic, and socially engineered program the SMCPS maintains a continuum that includes cluster classes at each level. These classes provide services for behavior, communication, and social needs. Currently there are specialized classroom programs at pre-school, elementary, middle and high schools levels. Specialized support is available across the system. Additionally, central office based staff in the form of a Supervisor of Special Education, an Autism Instructional Resource Teacher and two Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA provides system wide services and embedded staff development for school based teams. They are also responsible for training the team of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) providers. The ABAs providers are assigned for program, student and family services.

- One FTE special education teacher and one FTE para for an average of 9 students
- Additional paras/ABA providers may be assigned to classrooms based on student needs and IEP Team recommendations.

### **Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

Students with hearing impairments are served primarily in their home schools. Students needing specific intensive supports unique to hearing impairment will be served in a regionalized program elementary program. This program will provide a school community who is aware of the specific cultural aspects of the Deaf Culture and have some basic communication skills in American Sign Language. The site will also include enhanced amplification systems in general education classrooms to support opportunities for inclusion in the least restrictive environments with hearing students. The following guidelines are considered when assigning staff:

- One FTE teacher of the hearing impaired
- Three educational interpreters
- One FTE para for inclusion support as needed

### **Gateway to Independence Program**

Students who are working toward a Maryland Certificate of Completion have program entitlements through the age of 21. As part of their transition planning, they may be considered for the Gateway to Independence program. These students meet at the College of Southern Maryland for the classroom component and spend the second half of their day on job sites with the support of a job coach as appropriate. Students who have transitioned from this program have all been employed, with or without job coaches, in community job sites, and have received travel training. The following guidelines are considered when assigning staff:

- One FTE special education teacher and two job coaches for an average of 18 students
- Additional job coaches assigned based on student needs.

## **Staffing for Related Service Providers**

Staffing for speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists physical therapists, teachers of the visually impaired, educational interpreters, LAP counselors, and itinerate teachers of the hearing impaired is based on the following considerations: number of students, number of sites served, frequency of services, and professional duties and responsibilities. The Executive Director of Special Education /Student Services recommends to the Superintendent of Schools the amount of central office support required to monitor the provisions of special education service to schools, to implement programs designed to enhance student performance and to supervise and support school based and itinerant staff. In determining the number of special education support staff required, the Executive Director considers:

- The number of schools and programs to be supported,
- The number of special education staff to be supported; giving special consideration to new staff needs.
- Support to students transitioning to post-secondary work, training, and/or schooling.
- The number of students requiring assistive technology, and
- School system initiatives related to *Race to the Top* initiatives and the SMCPs Master Plan.
- DSE needs as determined through the Self-Assessment of Public Agency Performance, The Master Plan and Annual Updates and
- Internal/state monitoring of the implementation of services and the staff that provide the service.

## **Caseload Review Process**

Despite efforts to ensure that all positions are filled, a vacancy may occur due to emergency or medical leave, childcare issues, or the lack of available qualified personnel. Vacancies most often occur in the areas of related service providers (OT, PT, and SLP). In the case of a related service provider, typically a contract provider is hired until the positions are filled. When vacancies for a site based teacher or paraprofessional occur, either a long term substitute is hired or a redistribution of existing staff occurs while the SMCPs tries to fill the position. If the vacancy causes a temporary lapse in the delivery of special education services and the services cannot be made up, compensatory services are provided.

Principals and/or parents may make requests in writing for additional staff due to special program needs or unusual circumstances. An IEP program review for the individual child will be scheduled. The Department of Special Education will:

- Confirm the request,
- Verify the specific need or unusual circumstance through an IEP program review and consultation with the Special Education Supervisor,
- Review the existing data,
- Review the staffing patterns for the school resources are utilized to the maximum extent appropriate, and
- Agree or disagree with the request.

If the IEP Team determines the need, the Executive Director of Special Education/Student Services follows up by securing the funding, and assigning the additional staff. If a need is not verified, the Executive Director of Special Education/Student Services confers with the principal to resolve the issue.

## **Parentally Placed Students in Private Parochial Schools**

The SMCPSS provides Child Find activities for all students residing in St. Mary's County. Private and Parochial schools representatives from each school located in St. Mary's County are invited to attend two meetings annually. The SMCPSS shares information from the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the Maryland State Department of Education. Comments and concerns are invited. After consultation with the private/parochial schools representatives, the SMCPSS has determined that it will provide direct speech services for habilitation or prevention of speech impairments adversely affecting a student's educational performance. Consultation for academic intervention is provided for IDEA eligible students in need of specialized instruction. These services are agreed upon and reviewed annually through a Memorandum of Understanding with all participants. Students on Home Instruction were included in the Memorandum of Understanding during the 2010-2011 school year.

## **Monitoring for Continuous Improvement**

Monthly IEP Chairperson Training is held as a proactive measure to ensure IEP Chairpersons receive training in the most current compliance and procedural information. Special Education Department Chairs and Elementary Team representatives were added to this monthly professional development in 2010. The expectation is that these school based leaders provide the information and training to their teams at the site based level.

The SMCPSS uses the Maryland State On-Line IEP program for program evaluation, detailed compliance monitoring and state and federal reporting. Technology training with the software is combined with the IEP Chairperson trainings. The DSE conducts ongoing compliance audits as part of self-assessment activities and provides detailed monthly reports to each school. Additional professional development is provided to individual sites and/or individual staff if non-compliance persists. These audits also help the DSE identify systemic areas of concern to correct non-compliance as quickly as possible.

If a complaint or Due Process is filed, the SMCPSS investigates immediately and works with the MSDE investigators to correct the complaint.

## **Evaluation of Plan Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of the staffing plan is reflected, in part, in the progress toward meeting the standards and goals identified in the *MSDE Self-Assessment of Public Agency Performance on IDEA Report*. Improvement planning includes not only the staffing planning but also identified outcomes and strategies that are most likely to result in systemic changes and improved results.

The DSE uses Federal Pass-through funding to provide supplemental staffing needed to implement special education services. Special Education Supervisors work closely with building principals and site based classroom teachers to ensure special education programs are providing appropriate services and opportunities for inclusion with typically developing peers.

The SMCPSS Department of Special Education collaborates with the St. Mary's County Health Department, and the St. Mary's County Department of Social Services, in providing comprehensive services for early intervention to children, birth to five, and their families in natural environments. Local funding, Pass-through funding and Part C monies fund special education teachers, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists and physical therapists. Additional hourly positions required to support children and families are funded through Medical Assistance resources.







Specialized support is available across the system. Additionally, central office based staff, in the

**Special Education Staffing**

