# State of Special Education and Strategic Plan for Special Education

## June 6, 2024

**Dru McGovern-Robinett, Ph.D.**
Assistant Superintendent for Special Education

**Frances Stetson, Ph.D.**
President
Stetson and Associates

**Cherry Lee, Ed.D.**
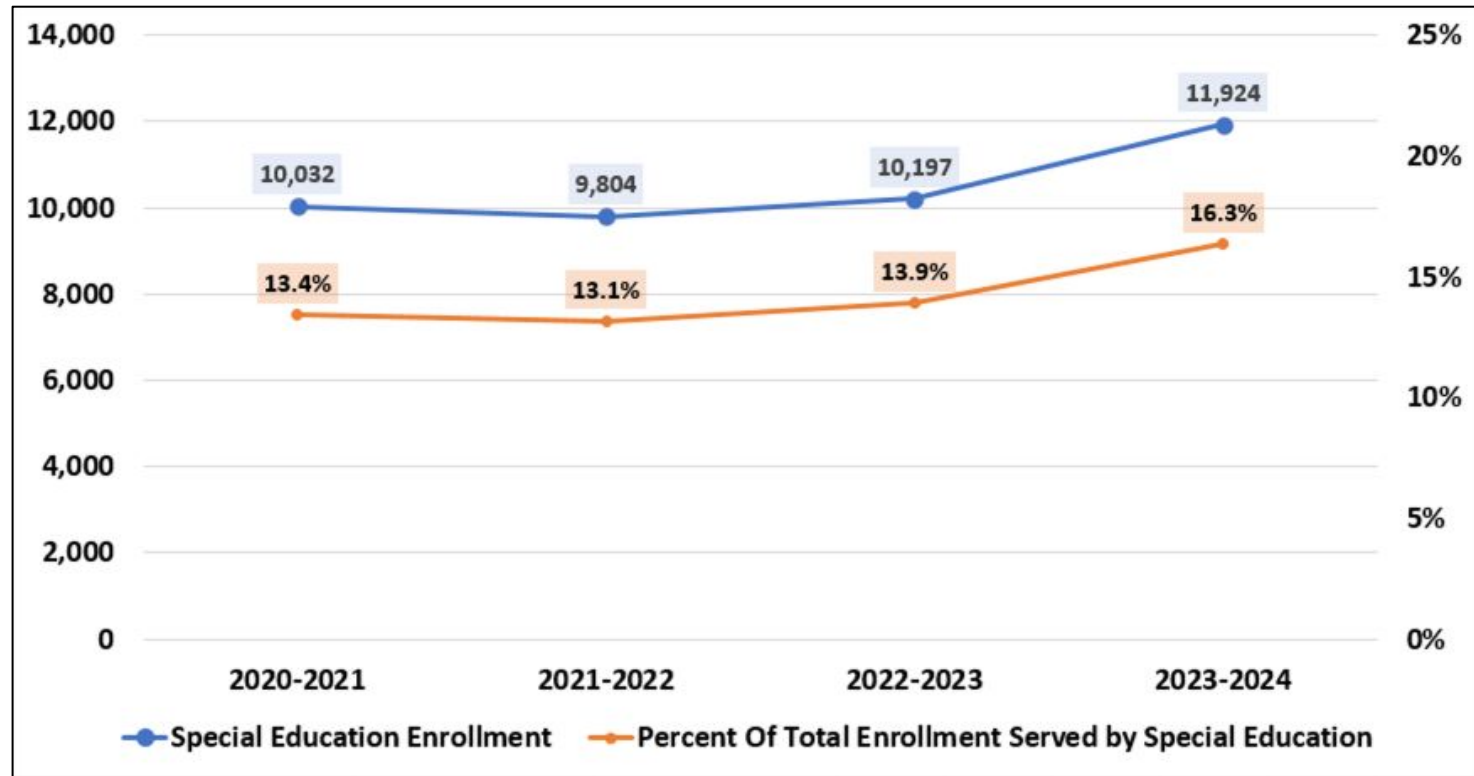Executive Director, Instructional Delivery and Inclusion

# Who We Serve

- **12,686 students served**
- **7,349 through Section 504**
- **7,367 students identified with dyslexia**

| 2024-2025 Special Education Staff | | |
|---|---|---|
| Teachers | Teaching Assistants | Dyslexia Interventionists |
| 907 | 952.5 | 123 |

# Growth Over Time at Snapshot

# Diverse and Unique Talents and Needs

| | |
|---|---|
| Specific Learning Disability | 45.44% |
| Autism | 14.19% |
| Speech Impairment | 13.53% |
| Other Health Impairment | 11.54% |
| Intellectual Disability | 8.03% |
| Emotional Disturbance | 5.03% |
| Non-Categorical Early Childhood | 1.11% |
| Orthopedic Impairment | .44% |
| Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) | .34% |
| Visual Impairment | .23% |
| Traumatic Brain Injury | .12% |
| Deaf-Blindness | .02% |

# A Dynamic and Committed Team:
# Services to Students

**Special Education Teachers**
907

**Teaching Assistants**
956

**Dyslexia Interventionists**
123

**Speech Lang. Pathologists**
90

**Related/Instruct. Services**
89

**Evaluation (LSSP/Diag.)**
74

**Campus and Student Supports**
49
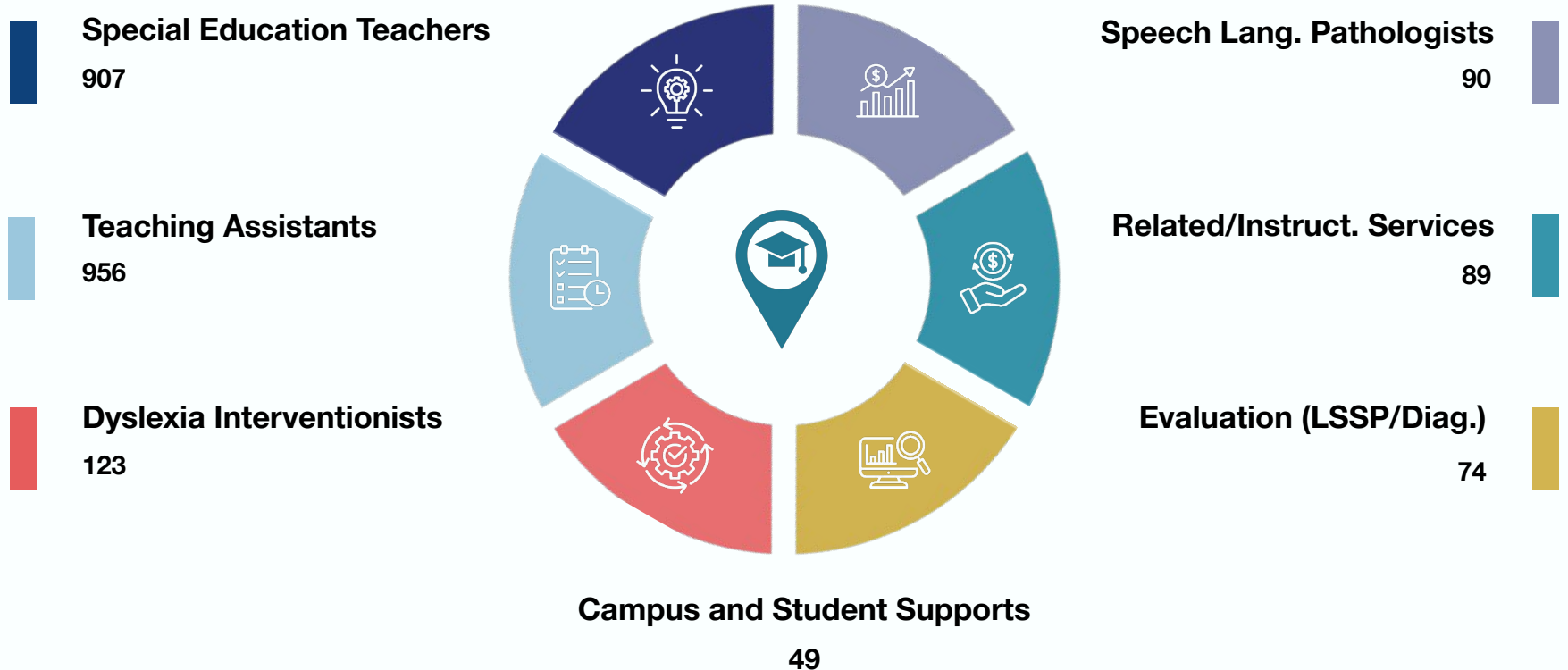
# Building On: Original Special Education Plan Priorities

**01**

**Clear & Inclusive Vision with Shared Ownership**

**02**

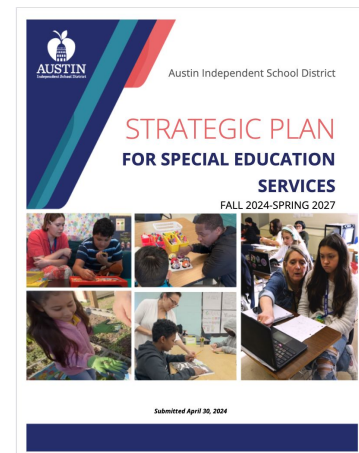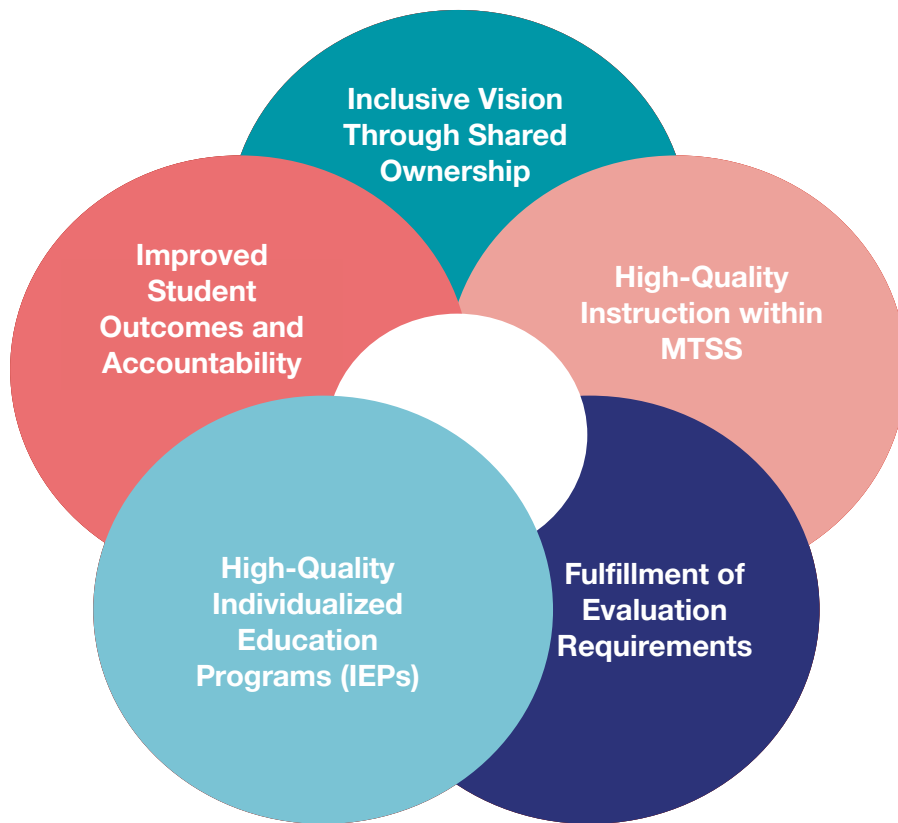**Strong Tier 1 Instruction within a Multi-Tiered System of Support**

**03**

**Evaluations & Compliance**

# Special Education Strategic Plan: 5 Broad Tenets



Inclusive Vision Through Shared Ownership

Improved Student Outcomes and Accountability

High-Quality Instruction within MTSS

High-Quality Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

Fulfillment of Evaluation Requirements

Austin Independent School District

STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES
FALL 2024-SPRING 2027

Submitted April 30, 2024

# Informing the Strategic Plan

**Austin ISD Special Education**

The goals and strategies listed in this plan are based on key findings from the Program Evaluation of Austin ISD Special Education Services, the TEA Order and the recent Stetson Audit.

**2022** ▶ **2023** ▶ **2024** ▶

| Austin ISD Program Evaluation Categories (Stetson) | TEA Order | Austin ISD Audit Categories (Stetson) |
|---|---|---|
| • Leadership<br>• Instruction<br>• Staffing<br>• Capacity Building<br>• Parent Engagement | • Satisfy Open Corrective Action Plans<br><br>• Implement Practices to Address Systemic Special Education Compliance (including Multi-Tiered Systems of Support)<br><br>• Improve Data Management and Reporting Systems<br><br>• Establish a Parent Outreach Campaign | • Multi-Tiered Systems of Support<br>• Child Find<br>• Referral and Evaluation Systems<br>• ARD Committee Meeting Process<br>• Monitoring for Compliance<br>• Accountability Systems<br>• Parent Communication and Engagement |

# Root Causes/Systems Challenges from Audit

| | |
|---|---|
| **Personnel Shortages** | **Data System Accuracy** |
| **Shared Ownership for Compliance Status** | **Professional Development and Engagement** |
| **Program/Label vs. Individual Student Orientation** | **Variability in Parent Engagement/Relationships** |

# 5 Strategic Plan Tenets

| Inclusive Vision Through Shared Ownership | High-Quality Instruction within MTSS | Fulfillment of Evaluation Requirements | High-Quality Individualized Education Programs(IEPs) | Improved Student Outcomes and Accountability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Communicating and Engaging in Shared Inclusive Practices | Aligned Clarity of Processes | Aligned Clarity of AISD's Child Find, Referral, & Eval. Processes | ARD Committee Structures to Promote Family Engagement | Focused and Compliant Systems and Structures |
| Tools and Resources/ Continuum of Supports | Implementation of a Robust Program with Fidelity | Compliant Referral and Evaluation Process Implementation | Differentiated Professional Learning for Staff | Quality Outcomes and Standards |
| Professional Development and Community Engagement | Support and Capacity Building | Quality Staffing and Professional Development for Evaluation | Monitoring of IEP Development/ Implementation | Alignment of Resources for Staff Recruitment, Hiring, and Support |

**Inclusive Vision Through Shared Ownership**

Communicating and Engaging in Shared Inclusive Practices

Tools and Resources/ Continuum of Supports

Professional Development and Community Engagement

**Here's What We Know:**

- ❏ Inclusive environments with high expectations improve student outcomes
- ❏ Parent feedback shows varying experiences with inclusive practices
- ❏ System transformation requires shared responsibility, expectations, and communication at all organizational levels
- ❏ Disability awareness and acceptance must be centered for equitable outcomes

**What that Means in Terms of Needs and Opportunities for Impact:**

- Consistent communication reinforcing inclusive practices and quality standards with expectations from all levels of leadership and throughout the district
- Onboarding, training, development and messaging that intentionally centers disability and inclusive practices system-wide
- Common expectations and processes for parent engagement in ARDs and IEPs
- Awareness and acceptance of disability and inclusive mindset activities district-wide and in addition to department-specific actions

# Now What?
## What we are doing

| | Timeline | Deliverable or Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| Intentional and prioritized district Communication Plan around inclusive practices, with expectations for the guiding principles for inclusion, and services for students | August 26, 2024 and recurring | Communication plan and messages<br>Matias' Week Ahead<br>District documents/website, Leadership Weekly |
| Intentional disability awareness and acceptance programming that celebrates neurodiversity, contributions and opportunities for inclusive improvements across the district and campuses | August 16, 2024 for calendar September 30 and ongoing | District Calendar with events outlined, communication plan, Scheduled activities for awareness and acceptance identified and implemented |
| Consistent and effective Communication and Parent Engagement Processes in ARDs and the IEP Process | April 2024 August 2024 and recurring | PL Training materials and process document; Checks for understanding and campus action plans; agendas illustrating emphasis in P3 and AP3 curriculum for aspiring administrators, surveys |
| Cyclical and Required Learning Opportunities on Inclusive Practices for District and Campus Staff with coaching around implementation with embedded resources and quality examples of accommodations and modifications within the district curriculum and appraisal tools | August 16, 2024 and ongoing through May 2025<br><br>Exploratory Fall 2024 | Embedded examples of accommodations/ modifications om the PPfT resource documents for all teachers. Greater definition of what inclusive practice and differentiated instruction look like in practice.<br>3-6 hours of equity learning experiences with a focus on consciousness for supporting people with disabilities and disrupting able-ism |

**High-Quality Instruction within MTSS**

Aligned Clarity of Processes

Implementation of a Robust Program with Fidelity

Support and Capacity Building

**Here's What We Know:**
- ❏ Inconsistent practices, protocols, and management of MTSS process
- ❏ Training and learning expectations around MTSS largely elective fostering decreased alignment across campuses
- ❏ Strong and robust MTSS is essential for ensuring the success of all students
- ❏ High-quality, evidenced based-and differentiated instructional practices with targeted interventions enhance learning outcomes for all learners
- ❏ Shared ownership with monitoring for compliance and implementation of MTSS needed across district leadership and campuses

**What that Means in Terms of Needs and Opportunities for Impact:**
- ● MTSS Manual and frameworks needed to clarify expected practices/expectations
- ● Substantial foundational training and development on the MTSS process and expectations needed/provided; however, that professional learning does not yet equate to consistent implementation and expected outcomes
- ● Ongoing and development of training that improves Differentiation, UDL, Cultural and Linguistic Supports
- ● Aligned instructional curriculum and tiered resources, and implementation of evidence-based practices with intervention supports needed across levels

# Now What?

| What we are doing | Timeline | Deliverable or Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| Implementation of MTSS Process and Protocol and redesigned curriculum | August 14th-15th 2024 and ongoing | MTSS Manual, PL for Trainer of Trainers Review and Implementation; Updated Curriculum Documents; Professional learning plan, presentations and agendas |
| Checkpoints and implementation of classroom walkthroughs with differentiated supports and coaching/follow-up | Beginning September 13, 2024 through Dec. 20, 2024 then Feb. 2025 on for follow-up | Walkthrough Documents/logs, Summary of identified staff for coaching/follow-up PL, etc; communication plan and assignment completion of follow-up |
| Ongoing training for all administrative and teaching staff with intervention resources | October 14, 2024 and ongoing Deeper dive after August overview | PL Trainer of Trainers for Campus Staff; Intervention Resources aligned with MTSS Manual, PL/Training schedule |
| Establishment of district-wide committee for progress monitoring/refinement | June 2024 and ongoing | Committee Listing, Meeting Schedules, Quarterly Agendas |

## Fulfillment of Evaluation Requirements

Aligned Clarity of AISD's Child Find, Referral, & Eval. Processes

Compliant Referral and Evaluation Process Implementation

Quality Staffing and Professional Development for Evaluation

**Here's What We Know:**
- ❏ Staffing shortages persist across systems and tremendously impacted AISD
- ❏ Follow-up to determine effectiveness of Child Find activities inconsistent and may be reinforced by staffing combinations in the evaluation role
- ❏ Referral and evaluation processes requires alignment and reduction of unnecessary/burdensome aspects
- ❏ Shared ownership for evaluation and referral processes is required system-wide
- ❏ Valid, reliable and timely data systems and reporting must be maintained and integrated, where possible

**What that Means in Terms of Needs and Opportunities for Impact:**
- Development of Evaluation Manual with expectations for follow-up
- Simplified and consolidated referral process information needed for alignment and to decrease variability
- Staffing and compensation review to reduce reliance on contractors to create more consistent through lines within the referral process, when possible
- Data driven decisions with timely response or strategy required for compliance

# Now What?

| What we are doing | Timeline | Deliverable or Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| Completion of staffing study and examination of ongoing recruitment needs | By March 30, 2025 | Staffing Analysis with Talent Strategy, Resource Mapping Documents, Job Description Review Revisions, Allocation Listings |
| Implementation of Evaluation Manual with aligned (streamlined) processes (with PL) for evaluation and related service providers | May 31, 2024 for Manual; PL by August 30, 2024 | Evaluation Manual; Professional learning plan, presentations and agendas; Leadership Weekly Communication; Streamlined Referral Checklist |
| Exploration of opportunities for longer-term transitions in the evaluator role and number required to expand the current role of evaluators to one more aligned with best practices in support of both campus staff and families in understanding the evaluation process | In alignment with staffing study<br><br>June 2025 | Inflow and completion analysis; review of staffing study; Job Description Review Revisions, Allocation Listings |
| Deeper engagement of principal supervisors in monitoring campus compliance for evaluations, referrals, etc. for shared ownership and responsibility | September 2024 and recurring at least quarterly | Calendar of Checkpoints Developed; Agendas, Data Review Document |
| Enhanced/aligned reporting and data visualization to ensure timely evaluations | August 1, 2024 with ongoing enhancement | Data visualization dashboard with necessary and accurate elements for monitoring targets |

## High-Quality Individualized Education Programs(IEPs)

ARD Committee Structures to Promote Family Engagement

Differentiated Professional Learning for Staff

Monitoring of IEP Development/ Implementation

**Here's What We Know:**

- ❏ Quality student IEPs are the bedrock of IDEA
- ❏ Parent engagement is essential to the IEP development process and surveys/focus groups indicated variability in experiences
- ❏ Inconsistent and variable IEP development or implementation
- ❏ Progress monitoring and reporting variable across students

**What that Means in Terms of Needs and Opportunities for Impact:**

- Differentiated training and professional learning must be ongoing, expected, and cyclical
- Spiraled support for Adaptations, Accommodations, and strategies to support a full continuum of services and High-Quality IEP Development and implementation
- Training in ARD Committee Manager Training for Administrators and Family Engagement Processes for Staff
- Implementation with feedback for refinement
- Deepened expectations, guidance and coaching on progress monitoring and reporting
- Shared responsibility and alignment across campuses

# Now What?

| What we are doing | Timeline | Deliverable or Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| Implementation of ARD Process to Build Family Engagement | August 2024 | PL Training Materials and Process Fidelity of Implementation Checks for campuses |
| Professional Learning Series for Special Educators for Improved IEP Development/Implementation and related topics for educators | August 13-15, 2024 and ongoing | PL modules and resources, Checks for understanding and completion summaries |
| IEP development and implementation rubrics and classroom walkthroughs with quality checks | October 31, 2024 | Rubrics, walkthrough documents with quarterly review checkpoints |
| Common expectations for the start of each year and semester for case managers to communicate with families and provide related contact information for parent outreach and support | September 2024 and recurring monthly | Common Expectations, Dissemination and Review Schedule Communication Plans; Implementation Checks |
| Regular cadence of principal training and support to highlight expectations and increase implementation of positive strategies for engaging parents in the ARD process | July 27, 2024 and recurring monthly | Agendas, Slide Decks and Materials, Checks for Understanding and Data Review |

**Improved Student Outcomes and Accountability**

Focused and Compliant Systems and Structures

Quality Outcomes and Standards

Alignment of Resources for Staff Recruitment, Hiring, and Support

**Here's What We Know:**

- ❏ Alignment and accountability across district and campus teams needed for compliance and improvement (Mindsets, Habits, Actions)
- ❏ Root causes for system improvements are multi-layered and cross-departmental
- ❏ Viable staffing models with limited vacancies impact quality delivery and services
- ❏ Digital management system challenges impact timely data-driven decision making
- ❏ Compliance and outcomes for students receiving special education services is not consistently viewed or practiced as a shared responsibility at this time

**What that Means in Terms of Needs and Opportunities for Impact:**

- ● Cross-departmental focus group to emphasize monitoring of special education timelines and requirements
- ● Systems and structures for compliance monitoring and progress checkpoints built in as part of a shared responsibility for principals, principal supervisors and the department in support
- ● Conducting routine staffing comparisons and making adjustments in compensation as needed

# Now What?

| What we are doing | Timeline | Deliverable or Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| Report quarterly progress updates on the goals and activities of the strategic plan to Austin ISD Board of Trustees | October 1, 2024 and recurring | Board Presentations; Board Updates; Website Additions for Tracking |
| Examine and refine organizational structures in special education and the OTLL for alignment and accountability with quarterly meeting/accountability structures | October 1, 2024 and recurring | Meeting Agendas, Data for Compliance and Effective Implementation by Schools and ED, Review and expectations protocols |
| Refine structures to increase recruitment, hiring, and certification for special education teachers and teacher assistants | August 2024 and recurring | Decreased vacancies for special education positions; recruitment event information; detailed pathways |
| Increase federal and state compliance indicators through improved training on the special education digital management system and resolution of compliance concerns with vendor | August 1, 2024 phase 1 October 1, 2024 and recurring | Accessible visualization tools; Analytics reports, Meeting Agendas and deliverables, increase in reporting accuracy |

# To Date and Upcoming

| Plan | Refine | Monitor |
|------|--------|---------|

**Plan**

- Draft provided to SEFAC for feedback
- Reviewed/discussed in SEFAC Groups and via Survey
- Revised with team and TEA Monitors for Submission
- Submitted Plan April 30th at Higher Level with Plan for Tighter Milestones and Cyclical Monitoring Built In

**Refine**

- Review of plan with All Chiefs and Deputy
- Cross-functional Team Drafted Milestone Schedule and Role Responsibility
- More detailed Operational Plans to be Developed for 23-24 this Summer

**Monitor**

- Cyclical Monitoring built in at Regular Intervals
- Transparency in Reporting
- Implementation Checkpoints and Accountability
- Revision and Improvement as Needed

# In Strategic Planning & Systems Change . . .

**From Constructs**

**Identified in Program Evaluation & Audit**

**To Knowledge and Skill Development**

**To Application in Schools & Classrooms**

From Labels & Places to Services:
*A Major Mindshift*

To PD/Coaching/Technical Assistance

To the Practical Application
*Actual Decision Making*

**Cracking the program mindset**

**Shifting interpretation of message from losing ” programs” to achieving individualized services**

**Individual Student Support Decisions**

**IEPs that result in Targeted Student Services**



**Ensuring Appropriate Supports for All Students with Disabilities**

Programs

**Program-Centered Services**

- Decisions do not begin with the required presumption that the general education classroom & curriculum are the 'starting points' (violates original promises of IDEA)
- Lower expectations
- Lower achievement and post-school success
- Fewer age-appropriate role models
- IEP goal attainment is 'out of sync' with student strengths and capabilities
- Perpetuates stereotypes
- Originates from a deficit perspective rather than a strengths based perspective
- A program label may not be descriptive of specific interventions needed by a student
- Segregate students and limits access to general education

**Individualized Student-Centered Decisions**

- Decisions begin with the required presumption that the general education classroom & curriculum are the starting points'
- All decisions rest on the strengths and capabilities of the student
- Good use of academic learning time (ALT)
- Higher achievement and post-school success
- Describes specific individualized supports and services
- Can be provided in any academic setting
- Is not tied to a specific disability label, but focuses on the individual student

**Continuum of Supports**

**Tier 1** Research-Based Available to All

Advance Support

In-Class Support

Specialized Support

GENERAL EDUCATION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION

# Technical Assistance Visits for Implementation and Support

**SAMPLE --- Summary of Austin ISD 2024 Technical Assistance Reports:**

| School | Principal Attended | | Purpose of Visit | | | Staffing Implications | | | Impact | | | School Following New AISD Protocol* | | Issues related to Audit Findings | Value Added: Quality Practices | Improvement Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | √ | No | Sched | Prof Dev | Problem-Based Consult | + | 0 | - | T | P | Other | √ | X | | | |
| | √ | | | | √ TL | √ | | | 1 | 1 | 0 | √ | | 10 students waiting for testing | Created a checklist to communicate daily at parent's request. This maximized instructional time while meeting parent's request. | |
| | √ | | √ | | | √ | | | | | | | | Need to improve LRE data | 1.Spec ed tchrs now join gr level PLCs 2. counselor dev lessons re: Soc/Emot – dramatic decrease in inappropriate behaviors; 3. Parapros rcvd training empowered to assist with behavioral concerns | Heavy reliance on spec support; Staff continue to use pace names for services & staff; Too many LIFE SKILLS students grouped together (0+) from K-age 12.; Rethink Forms 1 and 2 for students receiving pull-out services for dyslexia to include them in co-taught ELA classes |
| | | | √ | | | | √ | | | | | √ | | | | Need to provide training in use of Gen Ed curriculum and co-teach models, include gen ed teachers in planning and scheduling, |

Technical Assistance (TA) visits to AISD campuses have been completed throughout the spring and early summer.
TA reports are being analyzed and a final summary report will be available to the Department after school visits have been completed.

# Summary of Results from Technical Assistance Visits

At least 85% of AISD campuses visited are following the new district protocol for determining staffing and scheduling on the basis of individual student needs.

This represents successful implementation of a process that is directly aligned to individualized, targeted decisions based on student needs and compliance requirements.

Goal: By 2025, all Austin ISD schools will implement a consistent process for determining service and staffing needs, thus ensuring equitable supports for every student with disabilities in every school.

# A Quick Look Inside: Collaboration Around Learning and Support

# Family Engagement
## Spring 2024

**Planning for Increased Engagement**

Based on your review of parent survey data, **brainstorm two strategies** to improve parent relationships and engagement.



AUSTIN
Independent School District

**Designing ARD Meetings that Build Family Engagement**

Participant Notebook
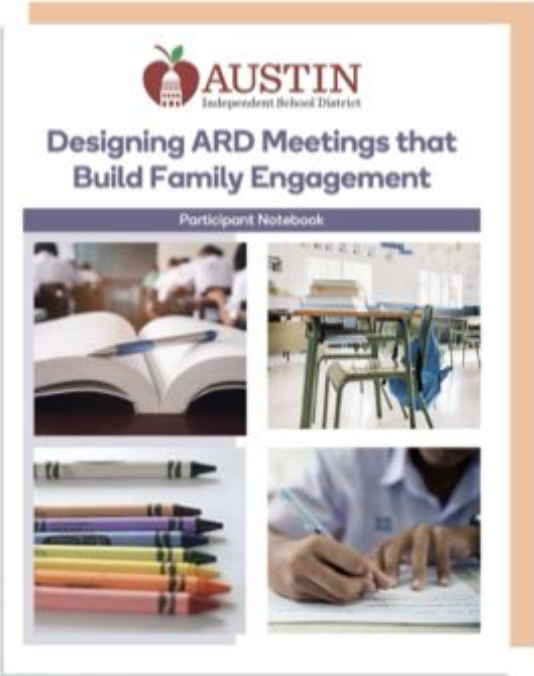
# Another Deeper Dive

Course Introduction

**Creating a welcoming environment builds trust between families of students with disabilities and the campus.**

## Course Objectives

1. Consider ways that families may react to having a disability in their family

2. Understand ways that educators can collaborate with families to build stronger relationships

3. Review the district process for engaging families of students with disabilities

Main Menu

1. The Needs of Families of Students with Disabilities

2. IDEA and the ARD Meeting

3. Identifying Services and Supports

4. Resolving Conflicts

5. Progress Monitoring

6. Reflecting on the ARD Meeting

From Constructs → To Knowledge and Skill Development → To Application in Schools & Classrooms

**Higher levels of Student Success and Compliance**

# Additional Highlights

Evaluation Progress
Reported in Constraint 3

# Professional Learning Milestones 23-24

**Spring 2023**
**Step By Step for**
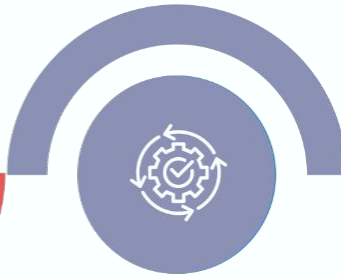**Inclusive Schools:**
**All Campuses**

**Fall 2024**
**Accommodations, Supports &**
**Modifications; Referral within**
**MTSS;  Family Engagement,**
**IDEA Legal Framework**

**Spring 2024**
**Parent Engagement**
**in the ARD Process**

**Summer 2024**
**Leadership Institute**
**Universal Design for**
**Learning and Support**

**Fall-Spring 24-25**
**TIER Modules for MTSS for**
**all Instructional and Admin**
**Staff**

# SEFAC

## At-A-Glance:
- Broad District Parent Representation in Membership
- Spring Convening to Start
- Priorities and Perspectives
- Building a Continual and Enriching Partnership Informing Our Work and Opportunities

# Engagement, Services and Support



- ➤ ABCs of IEPs, Child Find
- ➤ Transition Services
- ➤ Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health Supports
- ➤ Organizational Strategies & Executive Functioning
- ➤ IEP Virtual Learning Series and Autism Series
- ➤ Student Accessibility Resources



## Overview of Special Education for Parents

**WHAT IS SPECIAL EDUCATION?**

When a child receives special education, it means that a public school provides custom services and instruction specific to the needs of that student. Special education is available because of a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which provides students with disabilities and their parents special legal rights to receive these individualized learning opportunities.

Special education is a service, not a place.

**How can special education services help your child?**

- ▸ If your child is eligible for special education services, your child will have access to services and supports that are specially designed to meet your child's unique needs.
- ▸ Special education services provide individualized programming at NO cost to you and may include special education teachers and service providers such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, and providers of dyslexia instruction.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS:**

Parents have a right to request a special education evaluation at any time. Schools are required to refer a student for an evaluation when a disability is suspected that might require special education services. It's important to understand the steps of the special education process.

**Steps to Begin Special Education:**

1. Referral
2. Consent to Evaluate
3. Evaluation
4. Determine Eligibility (ARD)
5. Develop the IEP

**Receiving Special Education Services:**
→ Implement the IEP

More information about your rights as a parent can be found below:

SPEDTEX
Special Education Information Center
**Special Education Help for Parents**
spedtex.org
1-855-773-3839

**Parents Guide to the ARD Process**
bit.ly/ParentsARD

**Notice of Procedural Safeguards**
bit.ly/ParentsNPS

While there are other federal laws that also offer certain protections for students with disabilities - such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - IDEA has specific rights only available under that law. This document summarizes those rights.

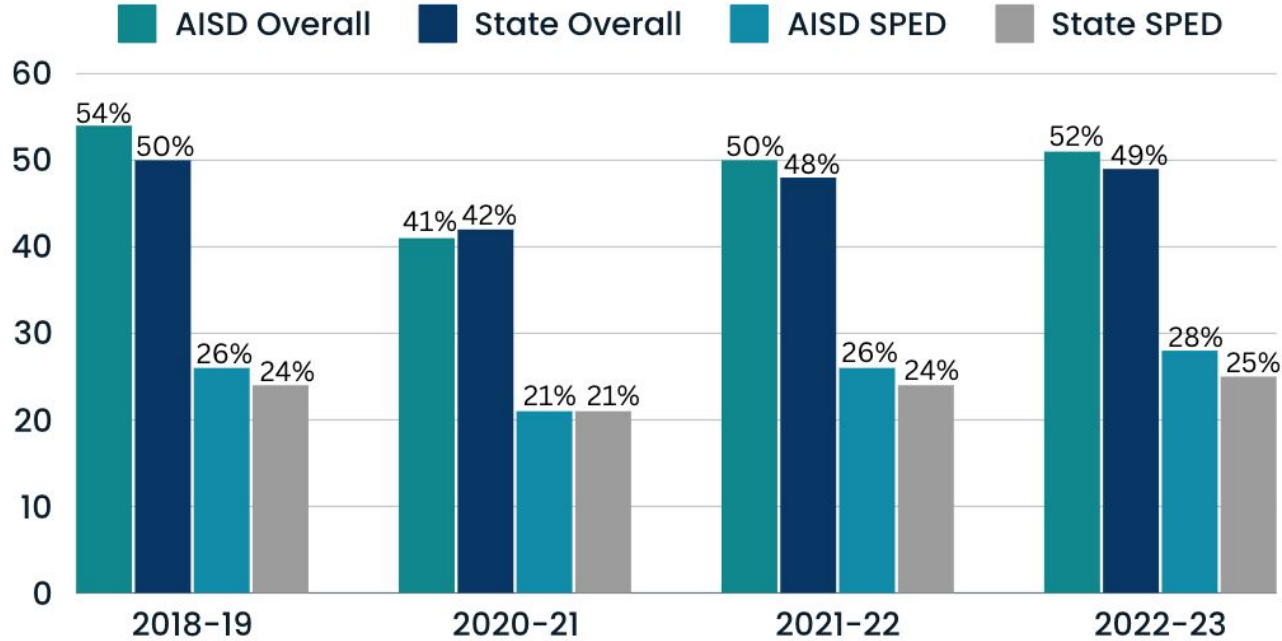Page | 1          TEA.TEXAS.GOV/TEXASSPED          August 2023

**Online Resources and Website Enhancements**

# Student Performance

At Meets Grade Level or Above All Tested Grades/All Subjects

Source: Texas Academic Performance Review (TAPR)



Legend: AISD Overall | State Overall | AISD SPED | State SPED

| Year | AISD Overall | State Overall | AISD SPED | State SPED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2018-19 | 54% | 50% | 26% | 24% |
| 2020-21 | 41% | 42% | 21% | 21% |
| 2021-22 | 50% | 48% | 26% | 24% |
| 2022-23 | 52% | 49% | 28% | 25% |

## Graduation Rates

| | |
|---|---|
| AISD | 95.6% |
| State | 89.7% |
| AISD Special Education | 90.5% |
| State Special Education | 79.1% |