

Guide to Planning and Assessing School-Based Special Education Programs

This guide is designed to help school improvement teams better understand how to engage in the continuous improvement of the delivery of special education services in their schools. It is organized around the central issues guiding Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in improving special education. The guide provides specific questions to ask about special education in your school. Some of these questions may be answered by the data you will receive in *Special Education at a Glance*.

What are the features of special education programs and services in my building?

1. The following is a list of MCPS special education programs and services. Which are available in my school?

Autism, Elementary Home School Model, Language Disabilities, Asperger's Class, Learning and Academic Disabilities, School/Community-based, Learning for Independence, Emotional Disabilities, and Physical Disabilities.

2. The following is a list of related services provided to students with Individual Educational Programs (IEPs). Which are available in my school?

Audiology Services, Counseling Services, Medical Services for Diagnostic Purposes Only, Occupational Therapy, Orientation and Mobility, Parent Counseling Services, Physical Therapy, Psychological Services, Recreation, School Health Services, Specialized Transportation, Speech/Language Pathology, and Vision.

Which students receive special education services in my building?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. How many students with IEPs are there in my school?
 - a. What is the male:female ratio?
 - b. How many students are past or current Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) recipients?
 - c. Are any racial/ethnic, socioeconomic status, age, or other subgroups of students disproportionately represented in special education in my school?
 - d. What are some factors that may have contributed to this disproportionality?

- e. Are my school's special education students from my attendance area; or do they come from other schools in my cluster, quad cluster, or other clusters in the county?
 - f. Does my school have specific special education programs that may result in students coming from outside of my attendance area? Are these students more likely to be from specific racial/ethnic groups or other subgroups?
2. What are their disabilities?
 3. When were these students identified for special education? Did this occur while they were in my school?
 4. How many students were referred to special education in my school during last school year and this school year?
 - a. How many were subsequently found eligible?
 - b. What were the students' races/ethnicities?
 - c. Did they receive FARMS?
 - d. What interventions did general education teachers try **before** referral?
 - e. Were these interventions evaluated?
 - f. Do some teachers refer more students than other teachers?
 5. Does my school have the Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) team or an Educational Management Team (EMT)?
 - a. If we do have a CPS process, what data do we have on the effectiveness of this process in increasing achievement, reducing referrals to special education, and/or reducing problem behaviors?
 - b. How do we ensure that students with disabilities are receiving appropriate accommodations and support before we resort to behavior interventions?

How mobile are the students in my school who are receiving special education services?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. How many students with Individualized Education Programs enrolled in or withdrew from my school during the last school year?
2. How does this compare with my general education population?
3. Why are special education students enrolling in and withdrawing from my building during the school year?
 - a. Change in program? Who initiated the change—parent, staff, other?
 - b. Change in code?
 - c. Family issues such as moving?
4. Does my school have an orientation or transition program in place for new students who receive special education services and their families in order to facilitate their adjustment to a new school and make them feel welcome?

What is the attendance rate of students receiving special education services in my school?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. What is the attendance rate of students who receive special education in my school? Does it differ by disability, type of program, gender, race/ethnicity, or least restrictive environment (LRE) setting?
2. Why are my special education students absent? How many are absent due to suspensions or expulsions? Medical issues? Family issues? Mental health issues? Other issues?
3. Have any of my special education students been absent for 5 consecutive days? 10 days? More than 11 days?
4. Is there a pattern regarding the absences of my special education students? Start of the school day? End of the school day? Holiday breaks? During exams or standardized testing?
5. Does my school have supports and services in place to address excessive absences?

Which assessment accommodations are provided to students receiving special education services?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Which assessment accommodations were provided to students with IEPs in my school last year?
 - a. Were all of these accommodations approved by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)? Do my general and special education teachers know the MSDE accommodation policy?
 - b. Were the accommodations written into IEPs?
 - c. How many of my students who receive special education services have nonstandard accommodations? Do my teachers know which accommodations are considered “nonstandard?”
2. Did all students receive the same accommodations on classroom tests? Did they receive the accommodations during instruction? Why or why not?
3. How are parents and general and special education teachers informed of what accommodations a student may receive in classroom instruction and on assessments?
4. Who ensures that students with disabilities receive the accommodations specified in their IEPs? Have parents expressed concern about the lack of accommodations in classroom instruction and/or assessments?
5. Are there assessment accommodations that cannot be provided in my school? If so, which ones and why?
6. How have accommodations for students with disabilities impacted my Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?

How are students who receive special education services performing on Montgomery County Public Schools Assessment Program (MCPSAP), TerraNova Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills Second Edition (TN/2), Maryland School Assessment (MSA), High School Assessment (HSA), report cards, or other state and local assessments?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. How did my students who receive special education services perform on the Maryland School Assessment/Modified-Maryland School Assessment, High School Assessment/Modified High School Assessment, and/or the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt-MSA)?
2. How many of my students took the Alt-MSA? Did all of these students meet the criterion of having a significant cognitive disability?
3. Did the performance of students who receive special education services differ by disability, program, race/ethnicity, FARMS, or percentage of time they received instruction in general education classrooms?
4. How did students who receive special education services perform on other assessments such as the following?
 - Pre-K MCPSAP (prekindergarten reading and math)
 - MCPSAP-PR (Primary Reading Assessment K–2)
 - Kindergarten Math Performance Assessments
 - DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills for Reading First Schools)
 - MAP-R (Measures of Academic Progress in Grades 3–5)
 - Math Unit Assessment, Grades 1–5
5. Did their performance differ from general education students on the state assessment, classroom exams, or grades?
6. What services does my school provide to increase the performance of students with disabilities on assessments? Who delivers these services? Are related service providers involved?

What are the graduation rates for students receiving special education in my school (high schools only)?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Of students who receive special education services, how many have been designated to graduate with a diploma? With a certificate?
 - a. What are the disability classifications of these students?
 - b. Were these disability classification decisions made by IEP teams in my school, or did students enter my school with this designation?
2. At what age are students who receive certificates leaving my school?
3. How many students who receive special education services dropped out of my school last year?
 - a. What are the reasons?
 - b. What age/grade were they?
 - c. What were their disabilities?
 - d. Where are these students now?
4. Could I predict who was going to drop out? What interventions does my school have for students who receive special education and have excessive absences, failing grades, and other risk factors for dropping out?

What special education services and supports do students receive in my school, and are they effective?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Are students receiving the services as indicated on their IEPs? How do I know?
2. How many hours of special education and related services do individual students with an IEP receive in my school?
3. Has the average number of hours of special education and related services decreased or increased over the past year?
4. Do the IEPs of students in my school reflect general curriculum goals and grade-level benchmarks?
5. How many students with IEPs receive instruction from qualified teachers in reading/language arts, mathematics, and/or science in general education classrooms?
6. How many students with IEPs receive their academic instruction solely from special education teachers? Are these teachers considered “highly qualified” to teach this subject matter?

7. What academic interventions do we have available to support the achievement of students who receive special education in the general education curriculum?
 - a. When and how are regular education teachers informed about and receiving students' IEPs?
 - b. How are these evaluated? Are all teachers using research-based practices?
8. How and where are the IEPs for students with special needs maintained? How do general education teachers become aware of a child's IEP?
9. How is progress toward IEP goals measured and documented, and how is this information transmitted to parents?
10. How do you ensure that IEP services are provided as specified?
11. Do students who receive special education services participate in extracurricular activities? How does their participation compare with the participation of students in the general population? How many receive transportation services? Do parents know the process for requesting after-school activity bus transportation?

- c. Have the numbers of students in LRE A and LRE C changed over the past year? For what reasons?
- d. Are certain students (e.g., disability, race/ethnicity, FARMS) who receive special education disproportionately represented in LRE A or LRE C?
2. How are decisions regarding LRE made?
 - a. Do general education teachers get to choose whether or not to accept students with IEPs in their classes?
 - b. How are students who receive special education assigned to general education classes, and are they distributed throughout classrooms or are they grouped in certain classes? Are there performance and/or behavior differences depending on how/where students with IEPs are assigned?
3. How many students with disabilities are receiving their subject-matter instruction solely in regular classes?
4. How many of my special education students are included in general education only for electives, lunch, recess, other?
5. What models/approaches are both general and special education teachers using to support students who receive special education services in general education classrooms and environments (e.g., co-teaching models, consultation, other)? Have all of my teachers received professional development related to models for supporting inclusive instruction?
 - a. Have the models been evaluated? How do we know if they are working?
 - b. What types of supports and accommodations do we provide to students with IEPs to help them succeed in the general education classroom? Who provides these? What assistive technologies do we use?
6. Do performance, attendance, or other key indicators differ among students with the same disabilities by the percentage of time a student with an IEP is educated in a general education classroom?

Where are students who receive special education services being educated?

LRE A and LRE C reflect the setting where a student receives special education services. MCPS is required to meet the annual LRE targets set by MSDE and report LRE settings based on the percentage of time a student is educated outside of the general education setting.

Inclusion Indicator	MSDE Targets		
	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011
LRE A (removed from regular class less than 21% of the day)	61.11%	61.61%	62.11%
LRE C (removed from regular class greater than 60% of the day)	16.11%	15.86%	15.61%

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Where are my students receiving their special education services?
 - a. How many are in LRE A and LRE C? Do all my staff members and I understand the meaning of LRE and the definitions of LRE A and LRE C?
 - b. How many students from my attendance area are receiving special education at another school? Why (e.g., parental choice, lack of program or service at my school, etc.)?

How do parents and teachers of students who receive special education services perceive the MCPS school environment?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. How do parents of students with special needs and special education teachers rate the climate in my school?
2. Do parents of special needs students participate in my school's activities?
3. Are there any parents of students with special needs on my School Improvement Team?
4. Is there a process for parents of students with special needs to communicate with classroom teachers? Is the process the same as for general education teachers? Is the process working? What evidence do I have that it is working?
5. How many complaints, etc., have I had from parents of students who receive special education services in my school? Is there a recurring issue?
6. Does my school have a special needs chairperson? How are parents informed about who the chairperson is, and is the special needs committee active within my school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)?
7. Have parents of students with special needs responded to the parent satisfaction survey for my school differently from general education parents?

If so, in what ways and why?

8. Is there a schoolwide homework policy in my school? Is it different for students who receive special education? Are students with disabilities assigned class work that they miss due to pull-out services as homework? What supports are available to help students with disabilities and their families complete homework assignments?
9. Are the modifications and accommodations for homework for students who receive special education known to the general education teachers? To the parents?
10. Are specialized homework supports available for students who receive special education in my school?
11. In my school, do all teachers share responsibility for the performance of students who receive special education?
12. What training or supports are given to my teachers who provide services to students with special needs? What follow-up has been put in place to monitor the implementation and/or effectiveness for students?

What mental health and behavioral interventions are used in my school?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. What are the suspension and expulsion rates for students with disabilities in my school?
 - a. What are the reasons for suspensions?
 - b. Has the number increased/decreased over the past school year? Why?
 - c. When considering a behavior infraction of a student with a disability, do we investigate whether the student has had appropriate supports and accommodations?
2. Does my school have a schoolwide plan for dealing with disruptive students? Does my school have a plan based on positive behavior supports?
3. Does my school have a crisis intervention plan for students who are in behavioral/emotional crisis? Is this plan based on positive behavior supports?
4. Are physical restraints used in my school? If so, under what circumstances? How is their use documented?
5. Have my staff members been trained in physical restraint techniques?
6. Do we use in-school suspension?
 - a. How often has it been used?
 - b. Are records maintained?
7. Do any of our students have functional behavioral assessments?
8. Do any of our students have Behavioral Intervention Plans (Behavioral Management Plans)? Do I know whether these plans are being implemented properly?
9. Do we have or use a “time out” room in our building? How often do we utilize exclusion as an alternative to suspension?
10. Do we have procedures for using the “time out” room?
11. Do we keep logs documenting who uses the “time out” room?
12. Do some teachers use the “time out” room more than others?
13. Who reviews the “serious incident reports” for our school?
 - a. What actions are taken?
 - b. Do we keep records on the students who have been moved in “serious incidents”?
14. Have our staff members been trained in positive behavior intervention strategies?