

# **Special Education Task Force**

---

**2016-2017**

The IRSD Special Education Task Force developed a comprehensive collection of documents and data within a partnership of stakeholders focused on progress. This report is representative of the research outcomes and provides recommendations as well as focus areas for the future.

## Table of Contents

Special Education Task Force Members	2
IRSD Special Education Task Force Purpose	4
Indian River School District Portfolio Development Purpose	5
Letters of Commitment	6
Department of Special Services	10
Indian River School District Special Education Flow Chart	11
Special Education Strategic Directions and Goals 2016-2017	12
2016-2017 Work Groups	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Special Education Week and 2017 Special Education Ambassadors	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Media	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Parent Focus Groups	32
SWOT Data Summary	35
Special Education Survey Summary	40
Best Practice and Vision Statements	49
Summary of Trend Areas with Recommendations	56

## Special Education Task Force Members

### **Dr. Heather M. Statler, Chair**

Board of Education Member | Disability Support Services, Delaware Technical Community College

Ed.D. Educational Leadership, Administration, and Supervision, Delaware State University (2010)

M.A. Educational Leadership, Delaware State University

B.A. Psychology, Salisbury University

Doctoral Dissertation (2010): An Examination of Disability Support Services Training and the Integration of Universal Design for Learning for Faculty at Delaware Technical and Community College

---

### **Leigh Argo, Member**

Special Education Teacher | Millsboro Middle School

M.Ed. Special Education Wilmington University (2013)

B.S. Human Resource Management Wilmington University (1997)

---

### **Sally Benner**

Special Education Coordinator | Indian River High School

M.Ed. Special Education, Delaware State University (1985)

B.S. Special Education, Bloomsburg University (1977)

---

### **Kelley Collins-Vickers, Member**

Special Education Coordinator & Teacher | Lord Baltimore Elementary School

M. Ed. Special Education, Wilmington University (1998)

B.S. Education, Millersville University (1994)

---

### **Laura S. Hattier, Member**

Special Education Teacher | Selbyville Middle School

M.Ed. School Counseling, Lamar University (2016)

B.S. Secondary Education/Social Studies, Salisbury University (1988)

---

### **Jessica J. Hudson, Member**

Special Education Coordinator | Millsboro Middle School

B.S. Special Education, Delaware State University (1999)

B.S. Elementary Education, Delaware State University (1999)

### **Regena Izzo, Member**

Special Education Implementation Specialist | Indian River School District

M.Ed. Instruction, University of Delaware (1996)

B. S. Special Education, University of South Alabama (1984)

---

### **Page Lyons, Member**

Special Education Coordinator & Teacher | Howard T. Ennis

M.Ed. Curriculum and Instruction, American College of Education (2014)

B.S. Elementary Education, University of Delaware (2002)

## **IRSD Special Education Task Force Purpose**

**Dr. Heather M. Statler, Chair**

**April 2016**

The **purpose** of the Task Force is to examine current practices through system transparency in order to strengthen operations. This process will:

- o Identify current systemic challenges
- o Develop a priority framework based on students (and families)
- o Increase knowledge of and adherence to federal guidelines that impact services across all facets of operation for this division

### **Scope and Timeline:**

The Task Force will begin in May 2016. Meetings will be held on both a monthly basis throughout the school year and as needed during periods of increased activity. The group will look to encompass the following individuals:

Director of Special Services - Consultant to the group  
Supervisor of Special Education - Consultant to the group  
Special Education Implementation Specialist  
Secondary Special Education Coordinator  
Elementary Special Education Coordinator  
Elementary Special Education Teacher  
Secondary Special Education Teacher

Other members may need to be added to the group as deemed appropriate by the Chair.

**Findings and Recommendations** will culminate in an end-of-year report provided to the Administration and to the Board of Education in June for consideration of implementation during the 2017-18 school year.

## Indian River School District Portfolio Development Purpose

Dr. Heather M. Statler, Chair

May 2016

The IRSD Special Education Task Force will be developing a portfolio. We will develop this collection of documents in order to (1) present the information in a comprehensive and organized way to the Board of Education, (2) to document the progress and outcome of meetings, and (3) to formalize our commitment to the project in a tangible way.

The portfolio will:

- Highlight areas of strength and showcase our success
- Identify opportunities for improvement with relevant recommendations
- Outline trend areas for the future

In order to accomplish this task, SETF members and other identified individuals will need to work collaboratively and creatively. All three components of the portfolio are of equal importance. By listing our strengths and identifying our needs, we will create an inventory and showcase in a meaningful way our current practices. Members participating in this process should be applauded for their courage and commitment. Self-examination of a unit is not always an easy task. This information will provide the framework of special education practices in the future.

***This process will identify clear operational practices, provide guidance for leadership, outline strategies for success based on industry standards, ensure components of compliance, focus on students and families as a priority, and facilitate a culture of transparency and accountability.***

## **Letters of Commitment**

Mr. Mark Steele  
Superintendent Indian River School District

Dr. Heather Statler  
Indian River School District Board Member  
Special Education Task Force Chair

Dr. Jay Owens & Dr. Judith Brittingham  
Indian River School District Director Department of Special Services  
Indian River School District Supervisor of Special Education

# INDIAN RIVER SCHOOL DISTRICT

"A Model of Excellence"



Mark L. Steele  
Superintendent

June 2017

Dear Indian River School Board Members, Administration, Teachers, Staff, Parents, and Community Partners:

I am very proud of the work done this year by the Special Education Task Force (SETF) and the Department of Special Services. The policies and regulations governing special education are constantly changing at both the state and federal levels and have become a major concern to all school districts due to the increasing rate of litigation. The high level of collaboration between the SETF and our Department of Special Services in developing instructional strategies has enabled our students to demonstrate academic and social growth.

Dr. Heather Statler has done an outstanding job as the chairperson of the SETF making sure that all groups including parents, community members and educators have open dialog regarding both instruction and compliance. The members of the SETF have given countless hours analyzing and developing policies and procedures that not only improve the services that our students receive, but ensure that our schools are compliant with state and federal regulations. The Department of Special Services, under the leadership of Dr. Jay Owens, has done an outstanding job making sure that all procedural changes are implemented uniformly throughout the school district.

I have had the opportunity to work in the Indian River School District for thirty-six years. I can honestly say that the work done by the SETF has done more to support our special education students than any other committee in years past. I am greatly appreciative of all the work that the SETF has done to promote the success of the district's special education students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark L. Steele".

Mark L. Steele  
Superintendent

---

31 Hosier Street, Selbyville, Delaware 19975 • (302) 436-1000 • Fax (302) 436-1034

The Indian River School District is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate or deny services on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities.



**INDIAN RIVER SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
"A Model of Excellence"



**Mark L. Steele**  
Superintendent

June 2017

Dear Members of the Indian River School Board, Administration, Teachers, Staff, Parents, and Community Partners:

It is with great honor that I have had the opportunity to serve as the chair of the Special Education Task Force (SETF) this past academic year. It has been a wonderful experience to examine so many facets of special education in our district.

The concept was formulated as not only a response to ever-changing guidelines in the industry but also as a tangible mechanism to cultivate new ideas and expand current best practices for our students and families. This project has also provided a spotlight to celebrate the success of the district via models of excellence in our services and supports to students. The SETF has been a voice for our teachers, staff, parents, administrators, and community members.

The SETF members who have served on this committee with me have provided exceptional leadership and insight into their areas of expertise and I feel incredibly thankful for their energy and commitment to the project. The diversity of the group has provided healthy discussion on a wide range of topics pertaining to special education. The SETF members have conducted research efforts, data collection, and perhaps most importantly, countless conversations with stakeholders. I commend the committee members for having the courage to embrace the task of self-evaluation.

Administrative support and collaboration have been outstanding throughout the entire project as evidenced by the various accomplishments during the 2016-2017 School Year. It is with deep respect that I acknowledge the work of Dr. Jay Owens, Dr. Judith Brittingham, Mrs. Regena Izzo, and Mrs. Melissa Kansak. Each of these individuals embody a spirit of professionalism and dedication that has allowed this project to flourish. I am proud of their team spirit, commitment to success, and ability to work creatively to facilitate outcomes that benefit our students. It is their passion and determination that will allow this division to achieve new levels of excellence in the months and years ahead.

Respectfully,

*Dr. Heather Statler*

Dr. Heather M. Statler  
Board of Education Member

---

**31 Hosier Street, Selbyville, Delaware 19975 • (302) 436-1000 • Fax (302) 436-1034**

---

The Indian River School District is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate or deny services on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities.

# INDIAN RIVER SCHOOL DISTRICT

"A Model of Excellence"



Mark L. Steele  
Superintendent

June 2017

Dear Indian River School Board Members, Administration, Teachers, Staff, Parents, and Community Partners:

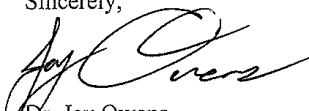
As the Indian River School District's lead administrators for the Department of Special Services, it has been a pleasure to collaborate with the members of the Special Education Task Force (SETF) during the 2016-2017 school year. The SETF has provided valuable feedback to our department which in turn has supported the positive growth in many of our strategic areas this year.

It is often difficult to gather true feedback from a group's stakeholders. The Department of Special Services includes a wide array of individuals including families, community members and educators. The SETF, through its initiatives, has provided the opportunity for all of these groups to have a voice. The collection and analysis of data and feedback from the IRSD staff members combined with a platform to explore a vision for the future are ways in which the SETF has provided the greatest levels of support.

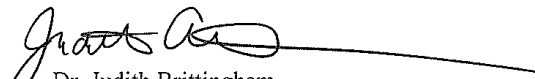
We want to thank Dr. Statler for providing exceptional leadership to this group while fostering a working relationship that is unlike any other within our district. She has maintained an open line of communication at all times. Dr. Statler provided honest feedback that supports current initiatives while also challenging the department to grow in ways that were previously not considered.

We also would like to thank the members of the task force who have spent a great deal of time and energy to analyze the special education practices and procedures within the district. The perspectives of this group have enabled the department to consider changes based on the viewpoints from a diverse stakeholder group. We look forward to this continued partnership as we strive to "specialize in the individual."

Sincerely,



Dr. Jay Owens  
Director of Special Services



Dr. Judith Brittingham  
Supervisor of Special Education

---

31 Hosier Street, Selbyville, Delaware 19975 • (302) 436-1000 • Fax (302) 436-1034

The Indian River School District is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate or deny services on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities.

## Department of Special Services

### Vision and Mission

#### Vision

The vision of the Indian River School District Department of Special Services is “to specialize in the individual”.

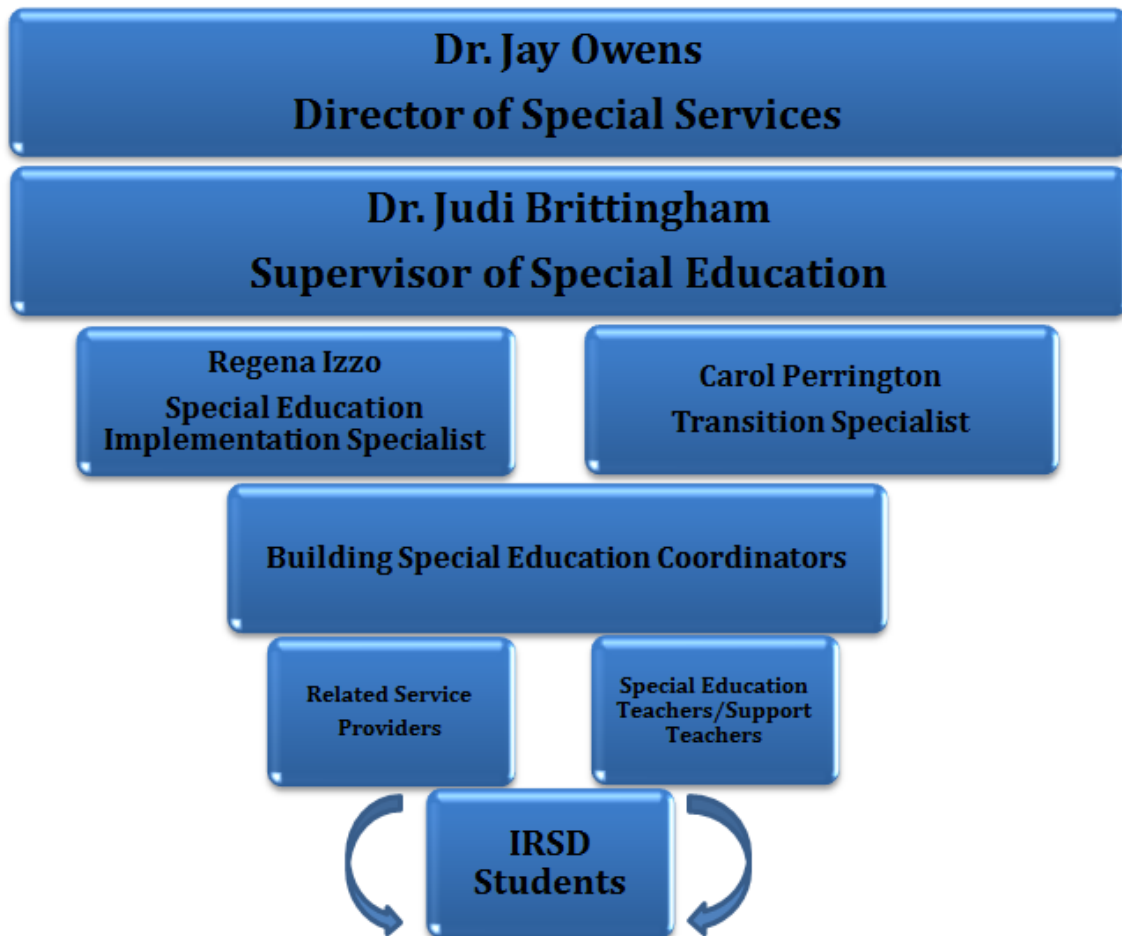
#### Mission

The mission of the Indian River School District Department of Special Services is to utilize a team approach with students, families, staff, administrators, the Board of Education, and the community to develop and deliver comprehensive and individualized special education and related services that allow students identified with disabilities to become emotionally, socially, and academically successful learners ready to fulfill their lifelong goals.

## Indian River School District Special Education Flow Chart

Indian River School District Department of Special Services

---



\*In Partnership with the Special Education Task Force

## Special Education Strategic Directions and Goals 2016-2017

- I. Provide oversight to the Special Education departments at each school.
  - a. Compliance monitoring
    - Preview IEPs for *Transition* compliance daily
      - ✓ Online and in-person audit of 100% of files
      - ✓ Individualized support provided to schools and teachers in need
    - Provide technical assistance as needed to case managers and Coordinators
      - ✓ Individualized visits based on the specific needs of the school and/or students has occurred at all schools
    - Preview IEP drafts (minimum of 1 per building per week)
      - ✓ This process has occurred throughout the school year
    - Monitor Special Education Out of School Suspensions monthly
      - ✓ Reports were run and feedback was provided to schools
      - ✓ Compensatory services have been offered as appropriate
  - b. Law/Regulation monitoring
    - Monitor potential regulations monthly
      - ✓ Subscription to and review of LRP. Relevant information is shared with appropriate parties
    - Review of *Special Education Connections* newsletter regularly
      - ✓ Subscription and review weekly
    - Monitor updates provided by Statewide Transition Cadre monthly
      - ✓ Attended monthly meetings
  - c. Maintain a Special Education handbook
    - Formation of a development committee-October
      - ✓ Handbook is in draft/revision with final document complete by September 1, 2017
  - d. Evaluate, monitor, and support related services staff
    - Develop an evaluation schedule that follows the IRES criteria
    - In PLC sessions, related services staff work through the DPAS II specialist rubric creating lists of potential evidence an evaluator may document to support “Effective” and “Highly Effective” ratings-
      - ✓ Completed November 2016
    - Develop an evaluation schedule that follows the IRES criteria
      - ✓ Completed 63 evaluations compliant with IRES (Jay)
      - ✓ Completed evaluations compliant with IRES (Judi)
      - ✓ Completed 32 evaluations compliant with IRES (Melissa)

- Provide content-specific professional development for designated professional development days
  - ✓ Provided special education teacher and paraprofessional training based on the needs identified through compliance monitoring. Paraprofessionals were provided a survey to determine the PD needs of the team.
- II. Provide staff development to the Special Education departments at each school
  - a. Offer regular workshops with a focus on the areas of greatest need
    - Provide Data Considerations Training for all schools-October
      - ✓ Completed in October
    - Provide Goal Writing Training via Schoology- November
      - ✓ Completed in November and added a face-to-face follow up training at each school
      - ✓ Provided an additional round of face-to-face professional development differentiated by school need
    - Provide targeted technical assistance for secondary school transition to IEP staff monthly
      - ✓ In progress. This has not occurred on a monthly basis. This is a focus area for the 2017-2018 SY
  - b. Deliver support and training to teachers that focuses on improved academic performance of students
    - Provide Read 180/Math 180 PD- October
      - ✓ Occurred in October
    - Provide Springboard training to Special Education staff- November
      - ✓ Occurred in December with an extra session in February
    - Provide individualized support for ILC teachers
      - ✓ 3 meetings with elementary ILC teachers and 4 meetings with secondary ILC teachers
    - Develop Coordinator Committees during the second half of the year that focus on academic advancement
      - ✓ Committees have been developed:
        - Extended school year instruction
        - Professional development (differentiated instruction)
        - Child Find procedures
        - Special Education Handbook

- c. Analyze data to drive decisions about curriculum and teaching strategies
    - Review, organize, and analyze SRI and SMI data by school
      - ✓ Mid-Year check occurred February 2017
      - ✓ End of Year analysis scheduled to occur June 2017
    - Review, organize, and analyze Smarter Balanced data by school
      - ✓ Scheduled June 2017
    - Review, organize, and analyze SAT data by high school
      - ✓ Scheduled June 2017
  - d. Provide individualized support to schools and staff with the greatest need
    - Provide training and technical assistance focused on patterns of non-compliance using compliance monitoring results
      - ✓ Monitored using the DOE compliance monitoring tool. Assistance was provided based on the greatest areas of need as identified by the compliance monitoring tool.
      - ✓ Specialized training during the special education coordinators meeting based on the needs identified by the compliance monitoring tool
    - Analyze the needs of the G.W. Carver Academy and provide support as identified
      - ✓ Created committees for behavior interventions, social and emotional wellness, and instructional strategies
      - ✓ Provided specialized staff training based on information identified within the compliance monitoring tool and through individualized conversations with staff
- III. Use fiscal resources to provide support to the district's Special Education needs.
- a. Analyze the current budget and allocate accordingly
    - Review expenditures from the previous school year and explore appropriate adjustments
      - ✓ Ongoing throughout the 2016-2017 SY
    - Amend the current IDEA and IDEA Pre budgets when needed to best meet the needs of the district students
      - ✓ Amendments have occurred during the 2016-2017 school year. Plans are in place to update the 2017=2018 grant to better reflect appropriate expenditures.
  - b. Review ILC funding and resource allocation
    - Provide secondary ILCs with transition-related best-practices prior to setting individual classroom budgets
      - ✓ ILC teachers have received training regarding transition services

- Consult with the Director of Finance to analyze the current budget and to allocate to ILCs accordingly
  - ✓ ILC budgets will be reviewed in June and July 2017
- c. Develop a Special Education funding committee to support the allocation of funds
  - Involve a variety of stakeholders including administrators, teachers, parents and board members- late winter/early fall
  - Analyze expenditures from the previous school year and thus far during the 2016-2017 school year
    - ✓ Committee was formed with a variety of stakeholders and a workshop was conducted in May 2017
- IV. Foster Positive Relationships with(in) the Special Education community
  - a. Communicate with the IRSD Parent Council and provide information accordingly
    - Assist with development of monthly topics/agenda
      - ✓ Occurred monthly
    - Provide resources and materials for monthly Parent Council meetings
      - ✓ Occurred monthly
    - Provide fiscal support to the Parent Council (\$300)
      - ✓ Funds available
    - Attend all Parent Council meetings
      - ✓ Occurred monthly
    - Provide important Transition updates about services, deadlines, and outside agencies to IRSD liaison
      - ✓ Occurred during the April meeting
  - b. Act as a liaison between schools and parents
    - Attend IEP meetings of students with the greatest needs to provide support for all parties
      - ✓ Occurs multiples times per week
    - Provide information to parents of students with disabilities in a timely manner with contacted
      - ✓ Communicate with all stakeholders within 24 hours, but typically by the close of the business day
    - Facilitate communication with parents through the Alert Now system
      - ✓ Occurred for any special education events



- Assist schools with disseminating important information required for families to understand Transition planning; and the supports and services related to Transition
  - ✓ Hosted the Transition Fair in October
  - ✓ Attends TAPP transition meetings
  - ✓ Attends meetings for students in transition who are privately placed
  - ✓ Identified as an area of focus for the 2017-2018 (restructuring the Transition Specialist position)
- c. Empower and entrust teachers and staff to meet the diverse needs of the district's students
  - Provide a bi-weekly email updates/tips to all Special Education staff
    - ✓ An area of focus to increase consistency of communication for the 2017-2018 SY
  - Organize Coordinator committees to address the greatest needs of the students with disabilities and special education teachers
    - ✓ Monthly focused coordinator meetings occurred
  - Allow for leadership positions within the respective coordinator committees
    - ✓ All coordinators had an opportunity to chair a committee during the 2016-2017 SY
  - Seek opportunities for special education teachers to provide training to their peers during PLC and PD opportunities
    - ✓ A lead teacher will attend the final special education coordinators meeting and will work with their respective coordinator to train school staff during the 2017-2018 SY
- V. Promote equity for students with special needs in the district
  - a. Review programming options
    - Define levels of service in all district schools- October
      - ✓ Review of services within each school has occurred
    - Evaluate limitations of programs for students with disabilities through the evaluation of master schedules and course offerings
      - ✓ A comprehensive review of programming has occurred with each school and individualized meetings with feedback were provided
  - b. Develop strategies to decrease the number of suspensions of Special Education students
    - Initiate plans for documenting the current number of suspensions
      - ✓ Schools have been trained to monitor the number of days of suspension and have been advised to consult DOSS when students exceed 5 days of OSS

- Provide monthly updates to schools regarding the number of days of suspension for students with disabilities
  - ✓ Regular updates have been provided to schools, especially when cases of concern arise
- Provide professional development to schools regarding the appropriate initiation of a Functional Behavioral Assessment and the development of Behavior Improvement Plans
  - ✓ Training provided to school psychologists, administrators, special education coordinators and special education teachers
- Train staff on the laws associated with the discipline of students with disabilities
  - ✓ Provided updates to principals, special education teachers, school psychologists and teachers
- c. Foster an environment of success in college, career or military after graduation
  - Assist schools and families with student transition to post-secondary education, training, and work during IEP meetings and through other means including:
    - I. Selecting goals:
      - a. Case Managers, students, families, and other IEP team members exhibit an improved understanding (through training and the transition IEP process) of how a student's assessment data, including transition assessments, connects with selecting appropriate goals. Students and families who are connected and working with outside agencies such as DVR, DDDS, Adult Service Providers, Pathways to Employment, and others have received greater guidance on selecting goals that meet the previous description
    - II. Accessing critical information:
      - a. More families than the previous 3 years have been involved with receiving services from outside agencies. Students have received information earlier related to college, technical schools & training, work experiences, pre-employment training, and options for additional life skills training.
    - III. Meeting deadlines:
      - a. More students are meeting important deadlines required for access to postsecondary opportunities (college, trade school, jobs, training, financial support, housing, medical insurance, SSI, and more)

#### IV. Completing required applications:

- a. 99% of Sussex Central and 100% of Indian River High schools, along with all the attending seniors at G.W. Carver completed their DVR applications if they were eligible or opted out of services.
- b. The number of families completing DDDS applications for more intensive services has increased to almost ½ of the eligible population.
- c. The number of students applying for Pathways to Employment services more than doubled this year.
- d. A high percentage of students completed college applications and many of those students with disabilities took the required steps to enroll and start in August of 2017.
- e. We have completed intakes with DDDS and DVR with adult employment service providers for nearly all the students in the 18-21 year old program (TAPP), all the seniors and some of the juniors who are eligible in our high schools.

## **2016-2017 Work Groups**

### **Best Practice IEP Samples**

This committee created comprehensive “best practice” IEP samples across elementary, middle, and high school and across all disability categories. Case managers will utilize the samples to draft IEPs that meet students’ needs with fidelity to compliance regulations.

### **Prior Written Notice Stems**

Prior Written Notice is the most important document a special education coordinator creates at an IEP meeting. This is an area of focus for our department. This committee worked to create stems for each type of IEP meeting a team may encounter in the school year. These will be used as anchor standards throughout all special education services initiatives.

### **IEP Goal Stems**

Goal Writing was an identified major area of concern based on compliance monitoring during the summer of 2016. This committee worked to create an interactive guide for special education teachers as they work to draft goals for each need area on the IEP.

### **Special Education Handbook**

All stakeholders involved expressed that this task is a priority to streamline procedures and processes in the IRSD Department of Special Services. This committee worked to organize pertinent information into a user-friendly document that will be a valuable resource to staff working with students with IEPs.

### **Specialized Intervention Notebook**

This committee focused on providing creative solutions to guide decisions regarding needed supports for individualized intervention. They started with a collection of ideas already implemented in the district and expanded to include service suggestions for students in need of the most behavioral/emotional support in the Indian River School District.

### **Child Find Procedures**

This committee revised and streamlined current child find procedures to ensure best practice implementation of screening and evaluating processes. The committee's' work will insure that procedures are consistent across the Indian River School District.

### **Extended School Year**

The scope of Extended School Year services needed to be increased in the Indian River School District to ensure that proper programming is in place for all students that qualify for these services as documented in their IEPs. This committee worked on aligning services and providing curriculum input to insure that the individual needs of all eligible students are met.

### **Turn Key Professional Development for Delivering Specialized Instruction**

This committee created a professional development bundle that will be presented to coordinators and lead teachers for use during the 2017-2018 and beyond. Each building will turn key this information to their entire faculty so that individuals are equipped with the necessary knowledge to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

### **Turn Key Professional Development for Differentiation in Classrooms/Center Based Instruction**

This committee created a professional development bundle that will be presented to coordinators and lead teachers for use during the 2017-2018 school year and beyond. Each building will turn key this information to their entire faculty so that teachers can address the varied needs of students within their classroom.

## Special Education Week and 2017 Special Education Ambassadors



The Indian River School District selected the week of February 27th - March 3rd as Special Education Week. Special Education Week was designed as an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of our students, to promote respect and awareness, and to recognize special education leaders in the district. Many activities occurred during this week, including:

- Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign on March 1st
- Selection and Recognition of Special Education Ambassadors
- Informational displays in buildings on Parent-Teacher Conference nights
- Daily bulletins/announcements related to the success of people with disabilities
- A podcast (Episode 15) regarding special education initiatives  
([www.soundcloud.com/irsdspotlight](http://www.soundcloud.com/irsdspotlight))

It is anticipated that Special Education Week will continue to be recognized in the district at the end of February each year.

# 2016-2017 Special Education Ambassadors



The Indian River School District honored staff members in each building who embrace and promote a culture of support and success for students with disabilities. These individuals received recognition for being Special Education Ambassadors. We believe Ambassadors are those who carry a positive message of inclusiveness for students with disabilities and serve as a role model to their colleagues and the community. Ambassadors clearly support a mission to allow students identified with disabilities to become emotionally, socially, and academically successful learners ready to fulfill their lifelong goals.

There were 271 staff members who nominated 133 of their colleagues and the following 16 were selected by the members of the Task Force:

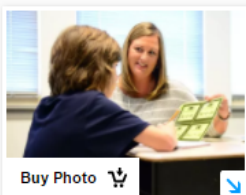
Kasey Abbott Long Neck Elementary	Sara Heinicke Georgetown Elementary	Mary O'Neill Millsboro Middle
Marjorie Adkins Southern DE School of the Arts	Christina Holmes John M. Clayton Elementary	George Schwendtner Georgetown Middle
Colleen Barrett Georgetown Kindergarten Center	Joanna Hudson North Georgetown Elementary	Phil Shultie Honorary Ambassador
Sally Benner Indian River High	Sharon Lawrence East Millsboro Elementary	Sue Shultie G.W. Carver Academy
Linda Brown Lord Baltimore Elementary	Christine Morrison Phillip C. Showell Elementary	Jesse Steele Selbyville Middle
Melissa Glaeser Sussex Central High	Helen Morrow Howard T. Ennis	

## Media

[Online Article Delmarvanow.com and the Wave](#)

### Indian River looks to lead in special education

Gray Hughes , [rghughes@dmg.gannett.com](mailto:rghughes@dmg.gannett.com) 12:38 p.m. ET Sept. 19, 2016



(Photo: Staff photo by Megan Raymond)

[f 171](#) [TWEET](#) [LINKEDIN](#) [COMMENT](#) [EMAIL](#) [MORE](#)

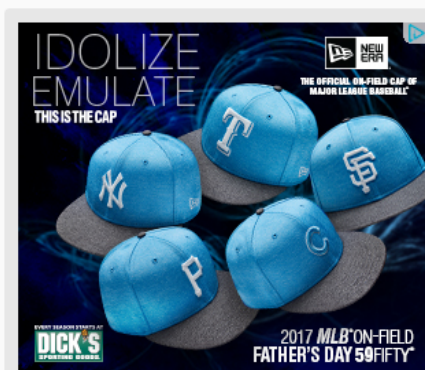
The Indian River School District has created a task force in order to help improve special education programs in the district.

The process is an evaluative task, taking that information and turning it into a recommendation, according to Heather Statler, a member of the Indian River Board of Education and the person in charge of the task force.

"We are hoping we will have this very robust summary report that will help guide us and steer us as far as the future of special education in the district," Statler said.

The district hopes the framework established by task force will benefit both current and future students, Statler said, and should be finished by the end of the 2016-2017 school year.

**READ MORE:** [IR starts council for parents of special needs students](#)



#### TOP VIDEOS

[\(continued on next page\)](#)





Lee Argo, teacher at Millsboro Middle School helps one of her students during math class on Friday, Sept. 16, 2016. (Photo: Staff photo by Megan Raymond)

To ensure voices are heard from across the community, the task force is holding parent focus group meetings throughout the school year — Oct. 12 at 6 p.m. at Millsboro Middle School, Nov. 30 at 6 p.m. at Selbyville Middle School, Feb. 8 at 6 p.m. at Georgetown Middle School and March 22 at 6 p.m. at Millsboro Middle School.

During these parent focus group meetings, Statler said the members of the task force are hoping to hear from stakeholders in the process: the parents and the students.

"It's not about us necessarily about what we think the strengths or weaknesses are but we want feedback and input from our stakeholders to find out what do they think are our strengths are and what we can improve upon," she said. "We want to talk about their experiences with us. Some of them have great stories to tell, others have things where they feel as if we can do a better job and we're open to hearing that."

[Continued on next page](#)



Dr. Heather Statler is heading an Indian River School District Task Force to evaluate special education in the district. (Photo: Staff photo by Gray Hughes)

The task force has three goals, Statler said, which are to identify the current, systemic challenges facing students in the special education classroom, develop a priority framework which is based on students and families first and to increase the district's knowledge and adherence to federal guidelines and the components which impact service across all aspects of operation within the school district.

Statler also points out the current attitudes about special education as a reason why she wanted to assemble the task force.

[Continued on next page](#)

"I think it's a travesty we only talk about it when things go wrong," she said. "We need to have conversations about the things we are doing right and we are doing great things. There are teachers and coordinators in our buildings that are doing what I consider best practice and we don't always get to highlight those types of things."

With special education being her specialty, after working with students with disabilities in colleges, Statler feels as if this is a good fit for her and what she wants to do for individuals with disabilities.

**READ MORE:** [Indian River School District? There's an app for that](#)

"At the end of the year we hope to develop a portfolio," Statler said. "The portfolio will be a tangible way for us to collect information and documents in a comprehensive, organized way to present it to my colleagues on the board of education. I also think it's a tangible way to look at the progress we are making and the initiatives we are implementing."

In addition to the physical document, Statler said the district is producing a documentary that people can watch to gain the information presented in the packet without having to read it all.

"We have never done anything like this in the district before," she said. "We have never taken on a big, self evaluation type of process for special education. Not saying we haven't done outstanding work in the field before, I think we already have a lot of great things in place with best practice type of things. ... We hope this will make us a leader in the state and it's exciting."

*rg Hughes@dmg.gannett.com*

## Spotlight Podcast

In February, we produced a 16-minute episode of the IRSD Spotlight podcast that highlighted Special Education Week in the Indian River School District. The episode featured an interview with Board of Education member Dr. Heather Statler and Dr. Jay Owens, Director of Special Services. Dr. Statler and Dr. Owens discussed the purpose of Special Education Week and talked about the special activities being held in district schools the week of February 27 through March 3.



## Article from the Coastal Point

### Special-education staff gets the spotlight

Front Page Indian River School District Learning Points Local News

Date Published:  
March 10, 2017  
By Laura Walter  
Staff Reporter

**Coastal Point • Laura Walter:** For their devotion to Indian River School District's most vulnerable populations, these staff members were voted leaders in IRSD special education. "Above and beyond" were the words most frequently used to describe 17 individuals who were named Special Education Ambassadors this week.



The Indian River School District honored educators who serve as role models for their colleagues while promoting a positive message of inclusiveness for students with disabilities.

"Ambassadors will be those who clearly support a mission to allow students identified with disabilities to become emotionally, socially and academically successful learners ready to fulfill their lifelong goals," according to IRSD officials.

"[These are] folks in our schools who really make it possible for our students to achieve their goals," said IRSD Board Member Heather Statler.

Nearly 300 IRSD staff members nominated 133 colleagues, from whom one individual was selected from each of 16 buildings.

School ambassadors were recognized at the Feb. 27 Board of Education meeting:

- Sharon Lawrence (East Millsboro Elementary), "a passionate educator who inspires students and staff and ignites their passion for learning."

- Sue Shultie (G.W. Carver Academy), “leading the TAP program to ensure older students leave with the responsibilities needed to lead successful, productive lives.”
- Sara Heinicke (Georgetown Elementary), “a student advocate, who is dedicated to finding resources and opportunities, including a new playground equipment.”
- Colleen Barrett (Georgetown Kindergarten Center), “leaving no stone unturned in advocating for students and supporting teachers in the IEP process.”
- George Schwendtner (Georgetown Middle), “who goes the extra mile for families, and gives students learning opportunities for their academic and life goals.”
- Helen Morrow (Howard T. Ennis), “admired by the staff and ensures students get every opportunities to learn, while diminishing undesirable behaviors.”
- Sally Benner (Indian River High), “having dedicated decades this this job and builds relationships with each student and family.”
- Christina Holmes (John M. Clayton Elementary), “who creates a culture of acceptance and understanding in the classroom, so students thrive and are ready learners.”
- Kasey Abbott (Long Neck Elementary), “whose bubbly personality ensures students feel loved, welcomed and encouraged in all their classrooms and activities.”
- Linda Brown (Lord Baltimore Elementary), “who is passionate about respecting differences and supporting equal access for students, besides helping with various special needs programs.”
- Mary O’Neill (Millsboro Middle), “who goes above and beyond to ensure students needed supports, including inviting kids to enjoy quiet lunches with her in the library.”
- Joanna Hudson (North Georgetown), “an advocate for students, constantly seeking ways to ensure success and help students reach their potential.”
- Christine Morrison (Phillip C. Showell), “whose excitement is inspiring, and who supports staff with new ideas and believes all students can learn.”
- Jesse Steele (Selbyville Middle), “whose calm demeanor helps him teach, build positive relationships with families and promote success for his students and all SMS students.”
- Marjorie Adkins (Southern Delaware School of the Arts), “an advocate for students, who ensures appropriate accommodations to meet their needs.”
- Melissa Glaeser (Sussex Central High), “so invested in the student’s’ social and academic well-being that students seek her out for help.”

Phil Shultie of Sussex Central High School also received a special recognition, as he’ll retire this spring after 42 years of teaching students with disabilities, including starting the SCHS Intensive Learning Center.

The awards kicked off IRSD’s first-ever Special Education Week, in which schools gave parents information about special services and Individualized Education Programs. Students also participated in the national “Spread the Word to End the Word” campaign that asks participants to pledge to stop saying the “R-word,” in order create more accepting attitudes and communities for all people.

“Our goal as a district is to ensure that every child has the opportunity to be successful in school and life, regardless of his or her disability,” Statler stated. “Support is crucial in the realm of child special-education services. Every special-needs student needs the support of parents, teachers and family members if he or she is to be successful. We hope to foster and strengthen this support network through our Special Education Week activities.”

Led by Statler, the IRSD Special Education Task Force will host the final parent focus group meeting of the school year on March 22 at 6 p.m. at Millsboro Middle School.

Any parent or community member can attend to give feedback or learn more about special-education services offered in the IRSD.



The public is also being encouraged to complete the survey online at [www.IRSD.net](http://www.IRSD.net) (click "Parents and Students" tab, and then select "Special Education Task Force Survey).

"Questions on the survey focus on knowledge of special-education services of the district, knowledge of the IEP process, training of the staff, diversity and sources where people in the community can [learn more] about special education," Statler said. "We're very excited to get this feedback [to improve programs]."

In January, IRSD parent and alumnus Dana Lathbury shared her own experiences with special education, while encouraging the public to attend. "You have parents that are speaking up. It takes a special teacher to deal with someone with special needs, and they don't get recognized enough."

The public can also hear the IRSD Special Education Week podcast (Episode 15) at [www.soundcloud.com/irsdspotlight](http://www.soundcloud.com/irsdspotlight).

## Respecting others: IRSD students spreading the 'word'

Mar 6th, 2017 · by Glenn Rolfe · Comments:

MILLSBORO — Word about respecting others — particularly those with disabilities — is spreading fast throughout the Indian River School District.

Wednesday, March 1 was national Spread the Word to End the Word day. It was a banner day at Millsboro Middle School and other schools.

At the midpoint of IRSD's Special Education Week celebration, scores of students and staff took the pledge to refrain from using the R-word (retard/retarded) in a derogatory, demeaning or hurtful manner.

"When you are talking about somebody else and you are putting them down, you never know what that person could be going through," said Millsboro Middle School student Josh Johnson. "Talking about that person and saying words that degrade them, especially mentally, that is a big deal. And it needs to stop. We want everybody to have the same equal opportunity and be the best they can be."



[Continued on next page](#)

Millsboro Middle School's student council members were the first sign the banner and take the pledge.

"It's very important to me because the people who are getting teased or bullied about who they are, it's all about labeling and understanding," said Zy'kyeria Nathan. "If we all take part in this today then it won't happen in the future, and the people will feel comfortable. Every one of us is different. No one is made the same."

Mary O'Neill, a librarian paraprofessional who has the WIN (What I Need) program at Millsboro Middle School, was among the 16 individuals honored as Special Education Ambassadors for the IRSD. She applauded the unified efforts to show respect to everyone.

"Bullying shouldn't happen, no matter who are, but especially for kids who have challenges," said Ms. O'Neill. "We all have stories and everyone should just take a step back and realize that before they open their mouths."

"I have a rule in my room: Kids are not allowed to talk bad about anyone," said Ms. O'Neill. "If that child is not present they are not allowed to bring their name up in negativity."

Seventh grader Katerine Gutierrez signed the banner and planned to take spread the word at home. "I'm going to tell them not to be mean to anyone with a disorder and to respect everybody," she said.

Kaelyn Long, who has a family member with disabilities, says being disrespectful can cause hurt and pain. That's why she took the pledge.

"It means to not put people in discomfort and not bully them or to be disrespectful. You don't know what's going on in their life," she said.

"I believe that everyone should have an equal chance, even if you do have a mental disability," added Josh Johnson. "I feel that when you say certain words, like for instance the R-word, if you say that word to somebody else you are degrading yourself, which is not positive. Adding to the negativity is not really necessary."

*News Editor Glenn Rolfe can be reached at [grolfe@newszap.com](mailto:grolfe@newszap.com)*



Indian River School District board of education member Dr. Heather Statler looks on as Millsboro Middle School students sign the banner in taking the pledge to Spread the Word to End the Word during the school's district Special Education Week observance and celebration.



## Parent Focus Groups

2016-2017 School Year

Parent Focus Groups were established for the 2016-2017 school year as an initiative for parents, guardians, and family members to have an open dialogue about special education services within the district. The primary purpose was to gain a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses as it relates to special education as well as to establish an open line of communication with stakeholders.

### Parent Focus Group Information Post Card



## Special Education Task Force

**The Indian River School District welcomes your input!**

The IRSD Special Education Task Force will host a series of Parent Focus Group meetings in 2016-2017. The dates are as follows:

**Wednesday, October 12, 2016** - Millsboro Middle School, 6:00 p.m.

**Wednesday, November 30, 2016** - Selbyville Middle School, 6:00 p.m.

**Wednesday, February 8, 2017** - Georgetown Middle School, 6:00 p.m.

**Wednesday, March 22, 2017** - Millsboro Middle School, 6:00 p.m.

These sessions will give parents a chance to provide their thoughts, input and feedback about the future of special education in the Indian River School District. All parents of district students are welcome to attend any session.



### For more information, contact:

**Dr. Heather Statler, Board of Education, [heather.statler@irsd.k12.de.us](mailto:heather.statler@irsd.k12.de.us)**  
**Jay Owens, Director of Special Services, (302) 436-1000, [jack.owens@irsd.k12.de.us](mailto:jack.owens@irsd.k12.de.us)**

### **Parent Focus Group Guiding Questions**

1. When you first began your child's IEP process, how did you feel? Were there any changes in your initial feelings after the first initial meeting was held? Why or why not?
2. Reflecting on the IEP meetings that you have attended as a parent/guardian, was there one part that stands out for you as the most helpful? Was there any point where you felt confused or an area that you needed more information or clarity?
3. Do you feel supported by the School District and/or do you feel your child's school has the best interest of your student in mind?
4. Do you feel knowledgeable about your child's strengths and weaknesses? Do you know how to support your child at home with their homework, projects, and any other assignments?
5. Are you knowledgeable about community resources and/or supports that may be helpful in enhancing your child's success? Do you look for information online, as well?
6. In your experiences so far, have you had any disappointments regarding special education services in our district? And if so, are there ways you would like us to consider on how to improve those areas? We also want to know the ways we are "getting it right". With that thought, would anyone like to share a success story?
7. Is there one area that you believe we should focus on for the future of special education in our district?

### **Summary of Data – Themes of Discussion**

- IRSD should consider developing online resources for parents. This might contain an introduction to the IEP process, detailed explanations of the forms a parent would see during the meeting, an explanation of a psychoeducational assessment, definitions of various tests utilized during assessment, and any other relevant resources. Short, engaging video clips that explain the process would be very helpful.
- Parents would like guidance on how to advocate appropriately for their children. A good deal of confusion can exist, particularly when newly diagnosed and learning about the continuum of services.
- Parents would like “steps to prepare” for the first IEP meeting. Many parents feel overwhelmed/anxious/nervous during the first meeting.
- IRSD should consider allotting additional time for IEP meetings when interpreters are present for developing English learner families to enhance and strengthen communication efforts.
- Parents would like IRSD to consider providing more opportunities for their direct feedback into the IEP process. Parents know their child best. This could possibly be accomplished by an inventory or summary sheet provided to parents in advance of IEP meetings and would hence create a platform for conversation(s). Parents are a partner with the school to facilitate their child’s success.

- Opportunities exist to strengthen communication after IEP meetings. Parents noted that there are often general questions or ideas that are formulated after the meeting and it would be beneficial to have a mechanism with which to easily communicate with district personnel about broader special education topics and/or direct services for their child.
- Special education teachers are commended for their work and commitment to children with IEPs but may need additional support structures provided by the district. Teachers want their students to succeed but are not always equipped with an abundance of resources or time.
- Student feedback into the IEP at the high school level is vital. As we prepare students for transition beyond high school, it is important that they each have a working knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses.
- Although internet resources are greatly appreciated, there should be a 'Guide' or brochure available in main offices that outlines services, resources, contacts, Board members (area of expertise) for special education.
- Parents would like information available on Teacher Conference nights regarding special education services and supports.
- IRSD should consider strengthened areas of mentoring for special education teachers. A seasoned teacher can provide of wealth of knowledge to our incoming teachers.
- Informational materials should be considered for distribution to parents to further explain the many tests and assessments utilized to determine a child's diagnosis.
- IRSD should consider all transitions important (elementary to middle school, middle to high school, high school to graduation).

**Quotes Captured During the Focus Group Sessions:**

**“I am extremely pleased with the teacher’s display of interest in my child’s future.”**

**“I appreciate this meeting because it indicates that the need to change and improve processes has been recognized.”**

**“I hope that you all will continue to seek 360 degrees of feedback from all parties to improve the process, especially the children.”**

**“I love the idea of videos explaining the IEP process!”**

**“I like the idea of a Resource page on the district website for parents of children with special needs.”**

**“Please help educate and empower parents to advocate for their children.”**

**“My child was not just made to feel like something is wrong. Nothing is wrong; we all have quirks and learn differently and at our own pace. Our uniqueness is what makes us each special.”**

**“To the Board: Please be encouraged in your endeavors. We need you and so do our children!”**

## SWOT Data Summary

A SWOT analysis was conducted during the months of October and November in A SWOT analysis was conducted during the months of October and November in an effort to create a voice for anyone in the district who wanted to provide feedback about special education. Information obtained from the completed inventories was compiled into common themes.

### **IRSD Special Education SWOT Analysis**

The Special Education Task Force (SETF) is gathering information in the Fall of 2016 to help create a framework of services for students. Please take a moment to help us identify our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as it relates to special education in our district. Each category below has 'Guiding Questions' to help prompt your thinking. However, you do not need to answer each question. Please provide as much feedback as you would like. We value your input!

#### **STRENGTHS**

1. What aspects of special education are you most proud of?
2. What do you think others see as our strengths?
3. Are there ways we "get it right"?
4. What are our best practices?
5. In what ways are our services a "model of excellence"?

---

---

---

---

---

#### **WEAKNESSES**

1. What gaps exist in our services?
2. Are there systemic patterns or isolated areas of weakness?
3. Are there certain factors that limit our progress?
4. What factors cause frustration?
5. What needs improving most?

---

---

---

---

---

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

1. What new ideas can we explore?
2. Are there current or planned changes on the horizon?
3. Could an identified strength lead to an opportunity?
4. Are there inherent opportunities within our stakeholder groups?
5. Do ideas for collaboration or partnerships exist?

---

---

---

---

---

#### **THREATS**

1. Are there barriers to growth that exist in our industry?
2. Are there identified weaknesses that threaten our future?
3. Are there potential challenges ahead?

---

---

---

---

---

## **STRENGTHS**

Themes were developed from a qualitative analysis of 282 written comments submitted for consideration.

- ★ Our students are our priority. Students are at the core of decisions.
- ★ Teamwork exists, is noticed, and is celebrated.
- ★ Flexibility is a cornerstone to how we operate as a district.
- ★ Teachers and other staff are invested in their students in ways that far exceed any requirements on paper.
- ★ Individualized supports are at the core of our conversations.
- ★ A culture of acceptance exists.
- ★ Collaboration is embraced when opportunities are presented.
- ★ We care about our students and their families and want them to succeed.
- ★ We promote an environment where students can feel comfortable to think independently.
- ★ There is a clear vision regarding the outcomes we would like our students to achieve.
- ★ All students can learn and our teachers embody a “we can” attitude.
- ★ We recognize when it’s time to change for the better.

## **WEAKNESSES**

Themes were developed from a qualitative analysis of 278 written comments submitted for consideration.

- ☐ There is a lack of consistency with IEP goal writing across the district.
- ☐ Teachers, at times, feel overwhelmed with the number of IEP students in their class.
- ☐ Language barriers with families exist.
- ☐ Howard T. Ennis facilities are inadequate.
- ☐ Curriculum constraints exist.
- ☐ Lack of communication can sometimes disrupt services.
- ☐ There is a lack of strategies and resources for students with behavioral challenges.
- ☐ Technology gaps prevent students from being able to access information.
- ☐ Documentation and other paperwork can be overwhelming, especially with the frequent changes in the requirements.
- ☐ Staff professional development opportunities are inadequate.
- ☐ There is a lack of coordination with community and service agencies.
- ☐ There are limited opportunities for vocational training in our communities.
- ☐ Time constraints exist which make it difficult to properly address each child’s unique needs.
- ☐ Gaps exist in the consistency of transition services.

- ❑ Social skills weaknesses exist.
- ❑ Stressful family structures exist for some students.
- ❑ Related service staff is stretched thin.
- ❑ There is lack of behavioral accountability for students.
- ❑ There is a lack of proper structure and support in team classrooms.
- ❑ Delays in identifying children for services exist.

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

Themes were developed from a qualitative analysis of 169 written comments submitted for consideration.

- ★ Special Education trainings could be expanded to all teachers.
- ★ Utilization of technology platforms such as schoology are great tools for teachers across school settings and buildings to have conversations about special education topics.
- ★ Teachers could benefit from technology trainings.
- ★ Universal Design for Learning Strategies are promising for both disabled and non-disabled peers alike.
- ★ Expansion of topics for more relevant professional development days.
- ★ Exploration of individual curriculum options.
- ★ Partner with businesses and other community members for support of our students.
- ★ Possibilities exist for students to flourish in new ways through increased student-directed activities and self-motivated learning.
- ★ Collaboration with other special education teachers within our district, state, and nation.
- ★ We should consider more integration of “real life” experiences into our classrooms.
- ★ Expansion of social skills through programming.
- ★ Higher education pathways that are tiered with both certificate and diploma options.
- ★ Sibling workshops would be beneficial for families.
- ★ Celebration of vocational skills in addition to traditional academic paths.
- ★ Continued partnerships with the Parent Council.
- ★ Team teaching is a best practice that could be expanded.
- ★ Consideration of a mentoring program for seasoned special education teachers to support new special education teachers.
- ★ Consideration for more creative scheduling options.

## **THREATS**

Themes were developed from a qualitative analysis of 146 written comments submitted for consideration.

- ☐ Teachers feel overwhelmed at times with responsibilities related to IEPs.
- ☐ Financial considerations are concerning.
- ☐ Potential litigation.
- ☐ Outdated equipment and small rooms with too many students.
- ☐ Lack of updated information.
- ☐ Inconsistency and lack of accountability at times.
- ☐ Decreased levels of related service providers.
- ☐ Lack of training.
- ☐ Standardized testing may be inappropriate for some special education students.
- ☐ Limited opportunities and supports in Sussex County.
- ☐ Ever-changing technology.
- ☐ Increasingly complex diagnoses and needs of children, including behavioral impacts.



## Special Education Survey Summary

### Indian River School District "A Model of Excellence"

The Indian River School District is committed to strengthening special education services for our students. As such, your feedback is valuable. Please consider taking a few moments to answer the following questions. Your responses will help us to understand the needs of our students, families, and community members. The Special Education Task Force appreciates your ideas and input!

1. I am directly involved in the life of a student with special needs as one of the following: **(Please check all that apply)**

Parent/Guardian _____	Special Education Teacher _____
Family Member _____	Paraprofessional _____
Friend _____	Other Educator/School Staff _____
Administrator _____	Community Member _____
General Education Teacher _____	

2. I am familiar with the following:

_____ Special Education	Least Restrictive Environment _____
_____ IEP (Individualized Education Program)	Procedural Safeguards _____
_____ Eligibility	Transition Services _____

3. The Indian River School District has helped me understand special education and the purpose of an IEP.

5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

4. I understand what IEP goals are and how they impact instruction in the classroom.

5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

5. I believe educators in the Indian River School District are knowledgeable and well trained with regards to the individual needs and instruction of children with disabilities.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree

6. I feel that the overall special education services provided by the Indian River School District address student identified needs.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree

7. When seeking information about special education services, the first resource I would consult would be:

_____ Indian River School District Website	School/Guidance Office _____
_____ Individual School Websites	Teacher _____
_____ DE Dept. Of Education Website	Online Search _____

8. I know who to contact at the school and district level if I have questions or concerns about special education services in the Indian River School District.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

9. We value your input and suggestions. Please share with us anything you would like us to know with regards to Special Education in the Indian River School District.

---



---



---

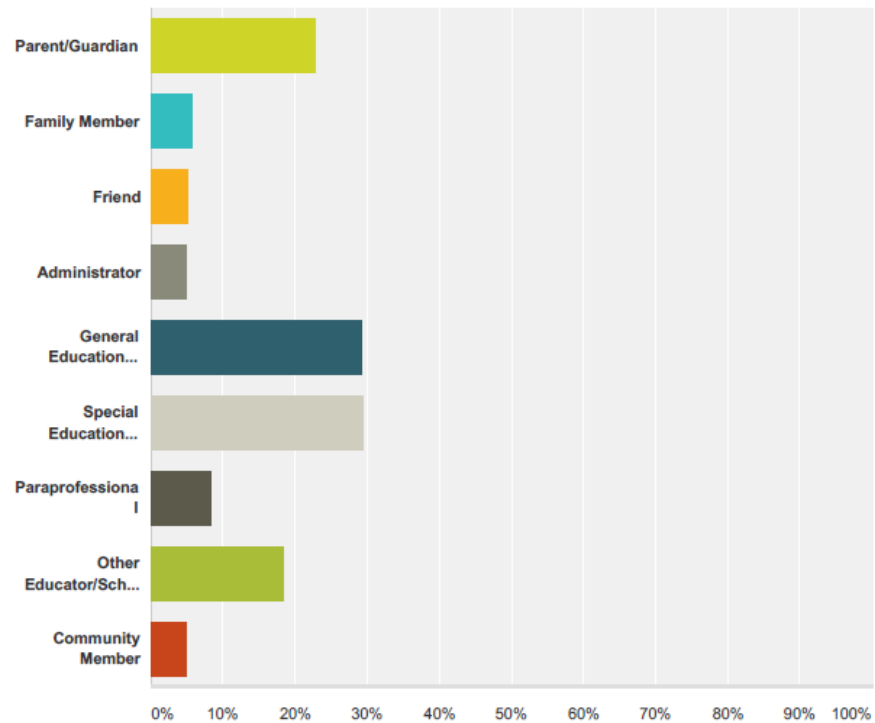


---

*Thank you again for spending your time to complete this survey.*

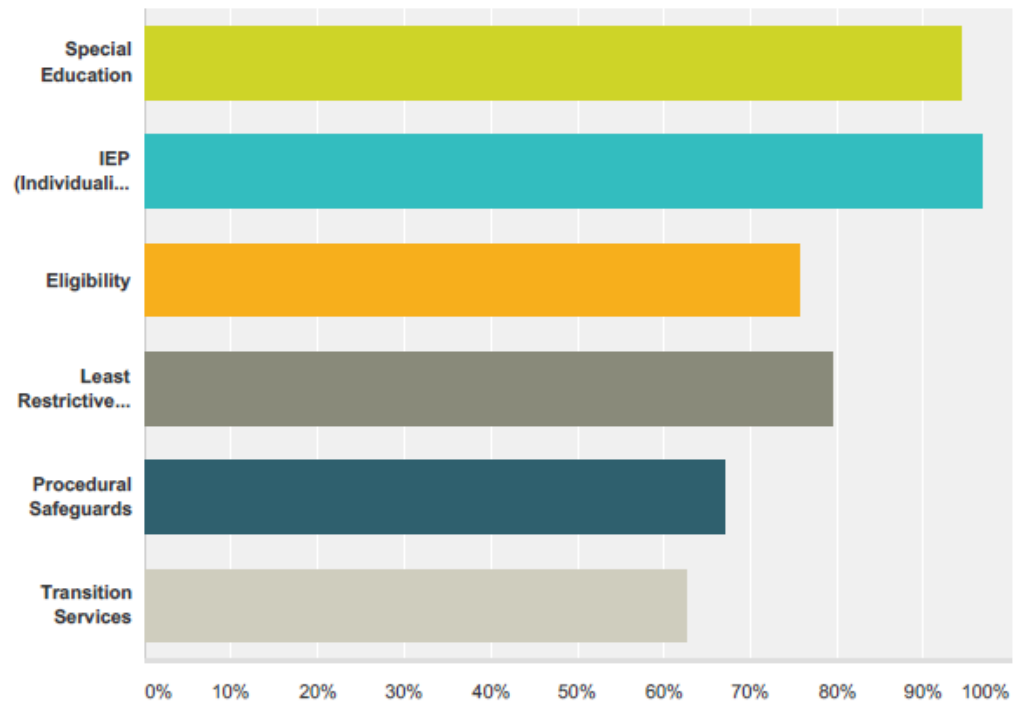
## Survey Data By Question

1. I am directly involved in the life of a student with special needs as one of the following:  
(Please check all that apply)



Parent/Guardian	22.90%
Family Member	5.84%
Friend	5.14%
Administrator	4.91%
General Education Teacher	29.21%
Special Education Teacher	29.44%
Paraprofessional	8.41%
Other Educator/School Staff	18.46%
Community Member	4.91%

2. I am familiar with the following: (Please check all that apply)



3. The Indian River School District has helped me understand special education and the purpose of an IEP.

1 (strongly disagree)	2	3 (neutral)	4	5 (strongly agree)	N/A	Total
7.48% 32	4.21% 18	18.22% 78	22.90% 98	43.69% 187	3.50% 15	428

4. I understand what IEP goals are and how they impact instruction in the classroom.

1 (strongly disagree)	2	3 (neutral)	4	5 (strongly agree)	N/A	Total
6.07% 26	3.27% 14	6.54% 28	21.73% 93	61.21% 262	1.17% 5	428

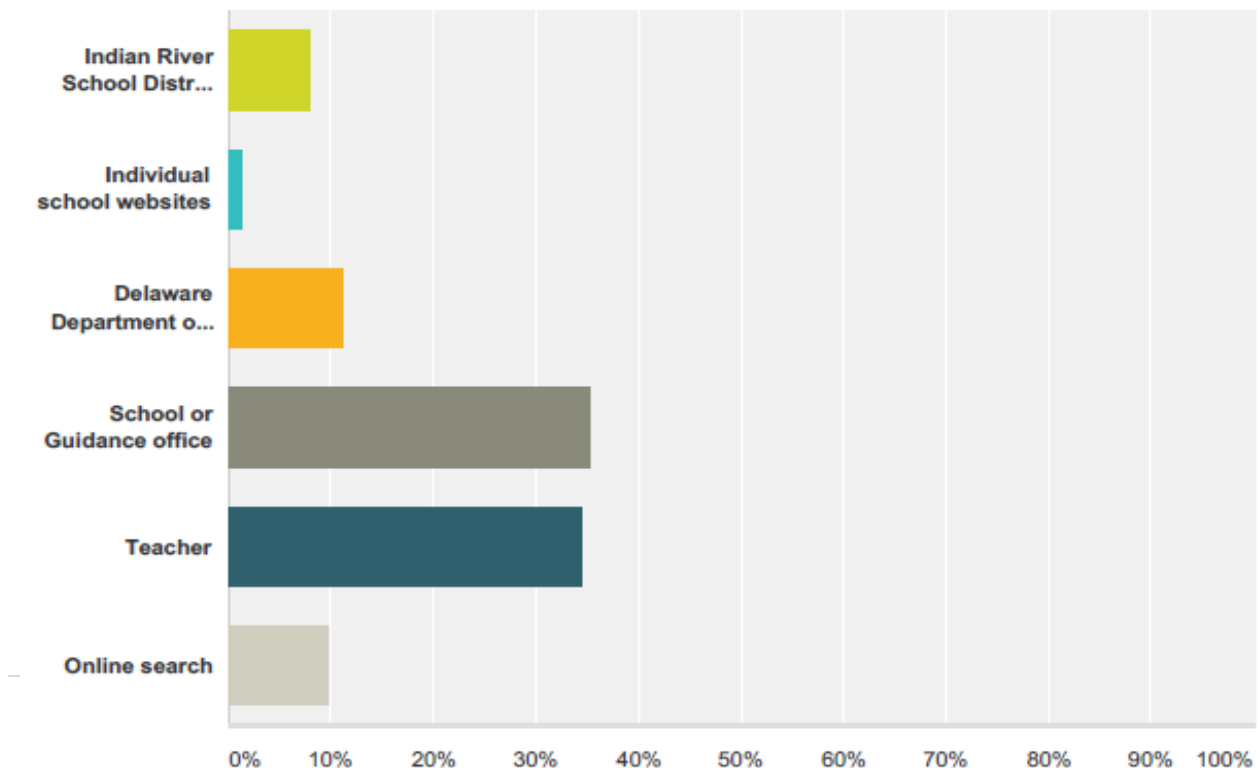
5. I believe educators in the Indian River School District are knowledgeable and well trained in regard to the individual needs and instruction of children with disabilities.

1 (strongly disagree)	2	3 (neutral)	4	5 (strongly agree)	Total
6.54% 28	10.98% 47	22.90% 98	33.41% 143	26.17% 112	428

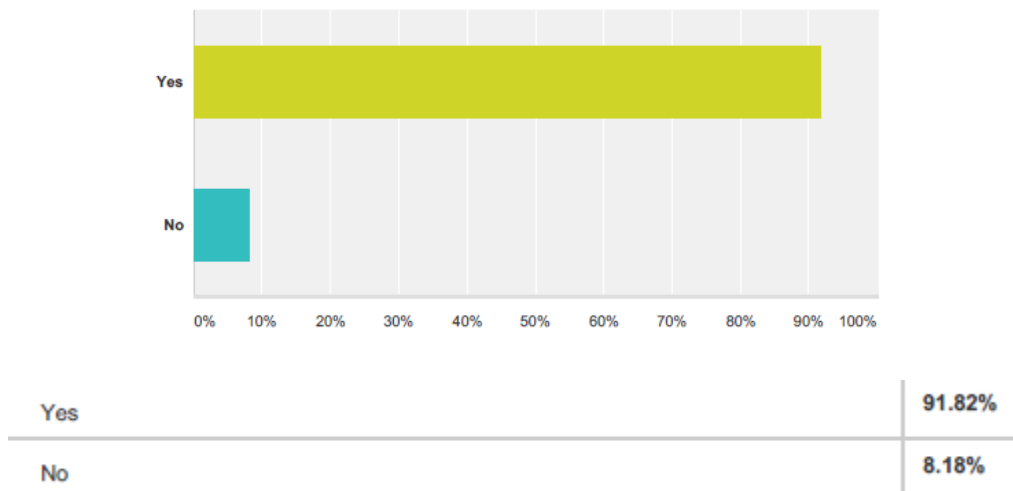
6. I feel that the overall special education services provided by the Indian River School District address student identified needs.

1 (strongly disagree)	2	3 (neutral)	4	5 (strongly agree)	Total
6.78% 29	10.51% 45	19.63% 84	36.92% 158	26.17% 112	428

7. When seeking information about special education services, the first resource I would consult would be:



8. I know who to contact at the school and district level if I have questions or concerns.



### **Summary of Data Charts**

The survey data provided valuable insight in combination with written comments from participants. There were 428 surveys completed.

- Although a majority of participants identified themselves as either a General Education teacher or Special Education teacher (58.5%), the data clearly indicated that a high number of participants identified with multiple roles. For example, a participant may have indicated that they were both a parent and General Education teacher. As such, the survey is limited in this regard but still provides some level of research value.
- Survey participants were least familiar with the district's transitional services (62%).
- Responses indicated that 66.6% either strongly agreed or agreed that the district has helped them to understand special education and the purpose of an IEP.
- Responses indicated that 82.9% either strongly agreed or agreed that they understand what IEP goals are and how they impact instruction.
- Responses indicated that 59.6% either strongly agreed or agreed that educators in the Indian River School District are knowledgeable and well trained in regards to the individual needs and instruction of children with disabilities.
- Responses indicated that 63.0% either agreed or strongly agreed that the overall special education services provided by the Indian River School District address student identified needs.

- When seeking information about special education services, 69% of participants indicated that they would consult a teacher or the school/guidance office first.
- 91.82% of respondents indicated that they know who to contact at the school and district level if they have concerns.

### **Survey Comment Trends**

Each area was identified by a qualitative analysis of written comments that were submitted. Several areas contain suggestions and/or recommendations for the district to consider.

#### **Autism Services -**

There is a great deal of support for the recently established autism program in the district. It is important that we continue to expand upon this foundation moving forward as evidenced by the following:

“I would like to see continued education on Autism/Aspergers/ADHD and how to work with those students and their academic, emotional, and social needs.”

“Students need to be connected to outside services in a timely manner. The district needs to focus more on students that are on the autism spectrum.”

“More autism support and services. Teachers need training and services for mildly autistic children in the general education classrooms.”

“I am concerned about secondary supports for autism.”

#### **Special Education Teachers who are Dually Certified -**

The current practice of utilizing dually certified teachers in classrooms needs to be explored for continued feasibility.

“My only concern is the dual certification that is currently popular in many of our state schools. This may meet the requirements needed to instruct special education students but teachers that have only taken a test to become qualified really do not have enough knowledge to adequately meet the needs of special education students. This is really a state issue - not a district one.”

“I have real concerns about the ability of dually certified teachers adequately servicing their special education students. The demands are too great on the general education teachers to add the extra and important duties of a special education teacher.”

“Dual certified teachers have double the work and no extra planning or compensation. Providing a substitute for teacher so they can write IEPs is a nice idea but then you’ve tripled the workload. The teacher now has to write sub plans so they can go write an IEP. Writing an IEP can take several hours. I have no idea what the solution should be but teachers are burning out.”

### **General Education Teacher Training -**

While we do feel that general education teachers are supportive and embrace students with disabilities in their classrooms, it is noted that more resources and training opportunities would be beneficial as it relates to student outcomes.

“While most teachers accommodate students with special needs, it is under the direction of a certified special education teacher. More in-service and training for core content and CTE teachers regarding struggle and challenge points that should be attended to each day is a need.”

“Offer special education training to general education teachers. I believe that some do not understand how to deliver and the importance of accommodations.”

“Training and strategies should be provided to general education teachers to help support them. More planning time is needed for the Special Education teacher to plan with the general education teacher and make modifications to the lessons.”

### **Mental Health Concerns -**

Our students face many challenges on a daily basis and for some, this includes mental health issues (both diagnosed and undiagnosed). It would be beneficial for all staff to have an increased understanding of mental health issues in general and a “toolkit” of resources or strategies to assist these students.

“I feel that teachers need additional training on dealing with children with mental health issues. There seems to be an increasing amount of students who have significant mental health needs and accompanying behaviors.”

“Overall it seems that all of us could use some training about the mental health issues we are faced with in our students.”

## **Discipline -**

Our students need support via appropriate outcomes. Since variations in discipline do exist, there are opportunities to close this gap. The Department for Special Services should consider ways to partner with our Discipline teams to ensure student's needs are being addressed in a timely and reasonable manner.

"I am worried about discipline outcomes in my school. We need things addressed swiftly so as not to disrupt the learning process."

## **Alternative Settings -**

Howard T. Ennis and G.W. Carver are unique settings within our district. The Ennis facility is aging and outdated. Efforts should remain focused on the process of obtaining a new building so that students can continue to flourish. At G.W. Carver, there are opportunities to improve student outcomes with strengthened supports. IRSD should consider establishing a working group that researches best practices and trends in alternative placement settings.

"As an employee of IRSD, I have plenty of experience working with our special needs population. However, I know from experience that some of the students that are being served are not receiving the best possible care, especially when considering the age and status of the building that they are spending their day in. The staff make the best with what they are given, but I believe that something has to be done sooner rather than later so that we are providing our very best for the students who need the most from us. We are better than we are currently able to provide, but are limited due to the resource that we have at hand." (Howard T. Ennis)

"It says much about the quality of staff at Howard T. Ennis when a special needs child looks forward to attending school daily."

"I would like to see a more hands on approach to teaching being used at Carver Academy. Teachers at Carver would benefit from professional development on differentiating instruction, project based learning and the importance of using student IEPs to help guide in lesson planning."

"We can and should do more for students at Carver. More behavioral components are needed to support the learning process."



### **Related Service Personnel -**

Related Services are valuable for our students. IRSD should consider additional opportunities that maximize these critical areas of development through creative and/or flexible scheduling and increased staffing.

“It would be nice to allow for more occupational therapy in school.”

“We need to look at ways to increase our OT, PT, speech, and other related staff services. They are so important in the development of our students!”

### **Other Points of Interest -**

“I’d like to see a support group for parents about IEPs and special education.”

“I feel that ASL should be offered as a World Language course.”

“I believe there is still a lot of progress to be made in the identification process of students who have English as a second language. There is a lot of confusion as to what is the natural progress of learning English and what may be an indication of a learning disability.”

“There is a need for transition specialists in each of the high schools.”

## Best Practice and Vision Statements

Our greatest resource is our people. As such, the Ambassadors and many other professionals in the district that work with special education students were asked to provide their personal statements regarding the value and importance of the work they do daily to support the growth of our children and communities. The following is a sample of those statements:

“When I work with my students, the thing that I do best is to promote a work environment based on acceptance. In my classroom ALL students support each other through their learning no matter what their differences may be. Students are willing to take risks, and extend themselves in new ways because they know that no matter what happens, they have a team of supportive peers and a teacher who will do whatever it takes to help them achieve great things.”

Gwen Kangas, Teacher Lord Baltimore Elementary

“When I work with my students, the things that I do best are to provide differentiated instruction that meets the needs of all my diverse learners and to create a learning community where all students can take risks, learn from their mistakes, and achieve success. In my classroom, lessons are carefully designed and implemented to reach each student’s needs using multimodal strategies and tools.”

Jennah Truitt, Kindergarten Teacher Lord Baltimore Elementary

“Working with special education students as well as special education educators for over 30 years has been tremendously rewarding. I am very passionate about working hard to inspire our students to strive for the best they are capable of every day and to reach their goals and dreams. I feel such a sense of honor and pride to watch former students receive their diplomas at graduation each year. Each June, I promise our fifth grade class that I will be at their graduation, and that is a promise I fulfill each year.

Christine Morrison, Special Education Coordinator Phillip C. Showell Elementary

“For us, best practice with exceptional students includes doing lots of informal observation and assessment of our students so we can get to know their strengths and areas of need thoroughly. Understanding their beginning levels helps us to target and differentiate instruction for each of our unique learners.”

1<sup>st</sup> Grade Special Education Teachers, John M. Clayton Elementary

“What I believe to be my most meaningful practice with my students is building a positive rapport with my students. Celebrating successes during reading and math really uplift the students to make them feel like they CAN because we know they CAN.”

Kelly Namorato, ILC Teacher Phillip C. Showell Elementary

“As a special education teacher, I implement many best practices in my classroom to help all students. I provide differentiated instruction to meet the varying levels and needs of my students, both whole group and small group. I also give students the opportunity to engage with information orally, visually,

kinesthetically. I am constantly formatively assessing students and using that information to drive educational decisions for individual students. I keep my groups flexible so that students consistently work on improving weaknesses. I communicate constantly with professionals in my building regarding mutual students, to share insight, ideas, solutions, educational gains, and persistent problems. I celebrate all victories with students no matter how small, and I try my very hardest to establish an environment and student relationships that produce kids who are excited to come to school to have learn and have fun. The very best part of teaching is my students and I keep their well-being at the center of all the decisions I make.”

Molly Abbott, Kindergarten Teacher John M. Clayton Elementary

“What I believe is my most meaningful practice with students is helping them with self-discovery. By taking the time and interest to help students complete a variety of personality, interest, and ability inventories, they are provided with thought provoking insight about their unique attributes. I especially enjoy completing career development activities that help students to envision themselves thriving in a productive, relevant and attainable career.”

Laura Hattier, Special Education Teacher, Selbyville Middle School

“One of the most meaningful practices I use with my students is “morning meeting” and the responsive classroom approach. I believe that getting to individually know my students through this process is invaluable. In addition, as a class, we problem solve, celebrate each other, and empathize. We become a community of learners with a climate of trust. Students become invested in their learning and a spirit of cooperation and inclusion is fostered.”

Heather McCabe, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher Phillip C. Showell Elementary

“Students with disabilities inspire me each day to be better than the day before. Their perseverance and tenacity to succeed is contagious. Seeing what they endure daily makes me work even harder to show them I am invested in their future!”

Christina Holmes, ILC Teacher John M. Clayton Elementary

“Working with special needs populations inspires me to be a better person. I have met amazing families who never give up and children who work so hard. I hope to help others see who I see and the potential for what great adventures lie ahead!”

Amanda Wroten, Special Education Coordinator Long Neck Elementary

“I love working in special education because I get to truly make a difference in the lives of children and their families. Our kids face so many challenges; academically, behaviorally, and socially. I am able to design and implement specialized plans to help all of my students succeed in all areas of their lives. My students know that I care about them and they have a positive and safe place to learn and grow. “

Linda Brown, Special Education Teacher Lord Baltimore Elementary

“Abilities outweigh disabilities! It’s a wonderful thing to be a part of a team of special educators to guide children toward recognition and development of their unique abilities as if they are our own children. Watching a child embrace his or her abilities, gain independence, and find success along the way is truly amazing.”

Laura Lee, Special Education Coordinator North Georgetown Elementary

“Servicing students with special needs is a honor and a challenge day in and day out. Within the classroom we strive to encourage each student to grow to their potential. This is often accomplished through the help of paraprofessionals, support staff, and general education teachers. Through collaboration, innovation, and dedications, ALL students CAN and WILL learn if given the opportunity and support.”

George Schwendtner, ILC Teacher Georgetown Middle School

“I am passionate about providing services to students with disabilities. It is ultimately rewarding to coordinate services for a student who is struggling and then to see them make progress and succeed. I especially enjoy the most challenging students because of this. I love watching our students grow both academically and behaviorally. I couldn’t imagine doing anything else and I can’t wait to see what our students can do next!”

Lisa Stetler, Special Education Coordinator Selbyville Middle School

“What I love about special education is the ability to create opportunities for students to succeed in ways they didn’t think were possible! We as special educators have the ability to change not only students’ perceptions of learning, but students’ perception of themselves. I believe that ALL children can make incredible progress when we enhance their individual strengths, and provide individualized support for their weaknesses.”

Joanna Hudson, Special Education Teacher North Georgetown Elementary

“I always knew that I wanted to work in the field of education. By having great coworkers that always want the best for each student, it helps to ensure that we always put the child’s needs first. When working with students, you should always think about what you would want if this was your child. By having this attitude, each child will always receive the best possible education.”

Kim LeKites, Special Education Coordinator Georgetown Middle School

“Being a Special Educator has become a very personal experience, as my daughter was born with disabilities. This has shifted my philosophy from one of “helping those who need it” to teacher students about their disability and abilities. Helping to empower students has become a mission of mine; through teaching them to become self-aware and developing self-advocacy strategies to overcome the obstacles they live with every day. Seeing them begin to realize that a disability isn’t something they have to be ashamed of but can learn to compensate for is such an amazing experience.”

Jessica Hudson, Special Education Coordinator Millsboro Middle School

“Each student I work with is unique and talented in a different way. They inspire me every day and are the reason why I am in special education. To watch them overcome adversity (in and out of the classroom) and still have the fight to keep working hard, to eventually walk across the state at

graduation makes me hopeful for their future.”

Julene Williamson, Special Education Coordinator Indian River High School

“Many policies, guidelines, and laws have changed throughout the years I have been in education. It is important to treat each student as an individual. Fair doesn’t always mean everyone gets the same thing. It means everyone gets what they need. I take a lot of pride in providing students with disabilities opportunities to learn and celebrate the progress as they proceed through nine years at the same school. I have come to appreciate the perspective of the parent’s point of view and the pride they experience when their child is successful.”

Marjorie Adkins, Special Education Coordinator/Teacher Southern DE School of the Arts

“Genuinely get to know your students...their likes and dislikes...their individual strengths and weaknesses...their journey that led them to you. Get to know what motivates them to succeed. Teach them how to manage their day. Motivate them to try new things. Provide purpose when introducing new challenges. And above all, be the vessel of academic and emotional support needed for the challenges that lie ahead.”

Jesse Steele, Special Education Teacher Selbyville Middle School

“Building strong parent relationships is key. Parent participation in the special education process is vitally important. Parents and guardians know their children better than anyone else, and have the most complete understanding of their child’s physical, social development, and family history. Parents need to know they are a partner with the school. Parents need to know that their concerns matter. I have had the wonderful opportunity to work in our district for almost 40 years. Through the years, I have realized that completion of the massive amount of paperwork is paramount but parents want educational personnel to see that their child is not just a bunch of papers in an organized file.”

Sally Benner, Special Education Coordinator Indian River High School

“I consider it an honor to be the “voice” for students who receive services. The trust that they have invested in me is precious, considering that so many of their backgrounds include traumas that no child should have to live through or overcome. These children continue to challenge me as a professional, a human being, and a parent. Empowering them with the tools to take the lead role in their own lives, in their services, and in their understanding of their disabilities are the most valuable skills that we, as educators, can offer.”

Melissa Glaeser, Special Education Teacher Sussex Central High School

“I feel privileged to have started TAPP, the 18-21 year old program within IRSD. I truly enjoy and know this is my dream job after 30 years of teaching. Each student that I’ve taught and have had the opportunity to know, has touched my heart. My student’s unique needs make teaching challenging as well as fulfilling. I love my students and what I do!”

Sue Shultie, Special Education Teacher G.W. Carver TAPP

“The longer I teacher and work with children the more I realize that they teach me far more than I could ever teach them. Students with disabilities are not disabled, they are differently abled. We need to embrace them and their differences and help them to become their all. I value the time I have gotten to spend with each of my students every day.”

Page Lyons, Special Education Coordinator Howard T. Ennis

“The students that I work with at Howard T. Ennis inspire me not only professionally but also on a personal level. Most of the students in my classroom have both physical and intellectual limitations. Not a day goes by that I am not motivated by my student’s courage and strength. I have no doubt that I have learned far more from my students than I will ever be able to teach them.”

Helen Morrow, Special Education Teacher Howard T. Ennis

“In the 25+ years that I’ve worked in the field of special education as a teacher and coordinator, we’ve seen so many changes. But the one constant is the commitment and passion we have to do our best for special needs children and to be their advocate and cheerleader. It is so rewarding to witness the changes and growth in a child who has benefited from special education services and the dedication of wonderful teachers and therapists.”

Loretta Ewell, Special Education Coordinator TOTS

“Students with disabilities inspire me as a teacher because I know that I have a positive impact on a child’s life. I have found it to be rewarding and very much a learning experience. I recognize individuals with disabilities as individuals with differences. I enjoy working with the student's everyday.”

Larry Patterson, Special Education Coordinator/Teacher Howard T. Ennis

“Special education is my passion because I learn more and more every day. The students and parents that I work with day in and day out are so grateful for the work that we are putting in to make their child’s education more successful. Special education is something that is forever changing and I like to think that is because we have realized that it is never okay to settle. It is my passion to work with students with special needs as it provides a sense of accomplishment to my everyday life. Students with special needs more often teach me to be driven, passionate and thankful for what others do for you. They have also taught me to not to take anything for granted and that when you think you are having a bad day, there is always someone else that needs you even more. Most importantly, I have learned to never just be okay with what you are doing today, always strive for more and never be afraid to ask for help if you are unsure of how to get to that place, after all, two passionate minds are always better than one!”

Erika Murphy, Special Education Coordinator John M. Clayton

“When I arrived in Delaware 25+ years ago from Western Pennsylvania, I was very excited when my principal Gary Brittingham asked me to be part of a TEAM classroom. I knew this was an amazing way to support exceptional children. Not only did it make a difference in many children’s progress, it was also a great way for teachers to learn from each other in a very natural way. When our school split into East Millsboro and Long Neck Elementary, sadly the TEAM classrooms faded away. This past school year Kelly, Sarah and Jenn took proactive steps to make this option available again. How exciting it has been to see the students thrive in this supportive atmosphere! I have truly learned and grown by working alongside teachers, students, and their families to embrace the many changes and challenges throughout the years.”

Sharon Lawrence, Special Education Coordinator East Millsboro Elementary

“Specializing in the individual is what I love about special education in the Indian River School District. Every day that I work with students and parents, I try to visualize the adult and community member that each student will become after they leave our classrooms. I dream of the success they will have and the hurdles we are here to help them overcome. Each day can bring challenges and triumphs as our students work to become emotionally, socially, and academically successful. But these challenges and triumphs are what motivate me to learn more about special education and advocate for those who need the most help.”

Kelley Collins-Vickers, Special Education Coordinator Lord Baltimore Elementary

“There is nothing more precious than seeing the joy in the eyes of a student who struggles so hard and then that moment happens when they realize they go it! That moment is indescribable to people who have not had the honor and privilege of seeing it. Those moments are the reason I get up in the morning. Our special education students inspire me to work tirelessly to make those moments happen as often as I can.”

Tara Thoroughgood, Special Education Coordinator East Millsboro Elementary

“During this school year I built strong relationships with my ILC students in and out of the classroom. I was asked by one of my 6th grade ILC girls if I would go to the school dance with her. She really wanted to go but couldn’t do it alone. At the dance, a song that she loved played and immediately she ran out on the dance floor-twirling and laughing-so full of joy and without a care in the world. She was by herself and all eyes were on her but she didn’t care and she danced as though no one was watching! I had a huge smile on my face as I watched her and I wished everyone could be that free. Everyone has something to give to this world. We just need to open our heart and our mind to even the smallest of lessons. A reminder of why I do what I do and why I love my job so much.”

Mary O’Neill, ILC Paraprofessional Millsboro Middle School

“I love special education because I am inspired on a daily basis by these students. Witnessing their successes and the joy on their faces motivates me to work harder to meet their individualized needs.”

Kayla Bollinger, Special Education Coordinator/Teacher Lord Baltimore Elementary

“Moving from the position of, first, Special Educator then Special Educator Coordinator to the area of transition planning was a natural and exciting progression for me. I was inspired to assist students in planning their life after high school; and working with the devoted coordinators and case managers to

help them in their work with the students. It was amazing to see how students began connecting their education to their futures; and develop greater self-determination to get ready! There has been nothing more satisfying than to watch students graduate to their next step toward adulthood, whether it be college, work trade school, or the 18-21 program to learn more skills. Connecting almost all of our families to adult employment and support agencies helped complete the cycle of what educators started in preparing our special needs students to become independent adults. As my career winds down, this just makes me happy to have helped so many students and families!"

Carol Perrington, IRSD Transition Specialist

"The goal of education is not to increase the amount of knowledge but to create the possibilities for a child to invent and discover, to create men who are capable of doing new things." ~Jean Piaget

Dawn Anderson, Special Education Coordinator Sussex Central High School

"I love being a special education teacher. My students are amazing and inspire me every day. They overcome so many obstacles on a daily basis and have a positive outlook on life. They may not learn things the same way as everyone else, but they have the willpower to succeed and will do anything to meet their goals. The dedication and determination that I see my students put forth on a daily basis is the reason why I am a special education teacher. They mean the world to me."

Kasey Abbott, Special Education Teacher Long Neck Elementary

"I love working with special education students because they, like all children, are the most amazing little people and deserve every opportunity we can provide. As a teacher, I was always drawn to working with special education students because I loved being part of their growth and being able to witness time and time again that incredible moment when they overcome a challenge. As a Special Education Coordinator, I love being part of a team that works to understand a child's learning differences and strives to provide specialized programs and services to enable that child to be successful."

Allison Bennett, Special Education Coordinator John M. Clayton Elementary



## Summary of Trend Areas with Recommendations

Trend areas are defined as common themes that are consistent across multiple data sources. It is believed by the Task Force members that triangulation of data was achieved by (1) written comments submitted both anonymously via the SWOT analysis and survey response section in addition to anonymous submissions at the Parent Focus Group forums, (2) data and subsequent charts compiled from survey questions, and (3) meetings and conversations with stakeholders to include district employees, parents/guardians/families, and other community members.

### **Support and Development for Teachers and Staff**

Our teachers and staff are vital to special education learning outcomes, achievement, and overall success. It is very clear that teachers and related staff care about their students and are devoted to their progress, academic achievements, social development and beyond.

- ★ Concerns exist regarding dually certified teachers being able to effectively address the needs of all students in their classrooms. The district should consider reevaluating this practice so as to minimize teacher burn-out and to strengthen outcomes for students (disabled and non-disabled peers alike).
- ★ State requirements allow teachers with Praxis-only credentials to teach special education classes however, this might not be a best practice considering there are specific skills, coursework, background knowledge, and experiences that many would consider important when working with students with disabilities.
- ★ The district should have robust and interactive conversations with teachers and other support staff regarding the utilization/revitalization of authentic team classrooms. With the increased number of special education students being served, it is imperative that we identify classroom paradigms that maximize student learning opportunities.
- ★ Professional development sessions should contain focused areas pertaining to special education and offered to both special education and general education teachers.
- ★ The district should consider development of a manual for special education staff that contains guidelines for IEP writing, best practices, classroom strategies, and ideas for facilitating family support systems as it pertains to special education students.

## **Program Development**

There are many opportunities that exist within current programs and future program development.

- ★ The recently established Autism program is a model entity that illustrates clearly the district's responsiveness to trends and a commitment to student success. With foundational components now in place, the district should consider expansion elements that will allow the needed growth in this program to occur.
- ★ Opportunities are present for the expansion of mental health services. The district should consider establishment of a focus group that can further examine and discuss mental health trends as it relates to student success initiatives, behaviors in classrooms, peer interactions, family support dynamics, and the determination of discipline measures. In turn, this may cultivate other opportunities for partnerships with state agencies, private entities, and community groups.
- ★ The G. W. Carver Academy is a very unique setting within IRSD. It is recommended that the district consider researching other similar settings that are model programs in other school districts throughout the state and region. In addition, it may be beneficial for the district to establish a *Carver Working Group* that can compile relevant information and make recommendations to leadership on future initiatives.
- ★ The Howard T. Ennis facility is a very unique setting within IRSD. Concerns exist regarding the aging facility and space available to address student needs adequately. It is the hope of the SETF that funding will be available in the near future to construct a new facility.
- ★ Transition services within the district should be considered as an area for evaluation and possible reconfiguration. Focus should include not only services for graduates but strengthened opportunities for transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school settings.
- ★ Stakeholders agree that the establishment of the Parent Council has been outstanding in that it promotes communication, a flow of information, and community support surrounding our special education students.

## **Utilization of Resources**

Resources are often considered fluid and malleable. As such, focused strategies are necessary in this area.

- ★ Technology audits are practical ways to assess current inventories, establish needs, and plan for future acquisitions.
- ★ Non-traditional funding opportunities may exist and would be practical considering the current financial climate.
- ★ Opportunities for teachers and staff to learn, practice, and teach one another about technology resources are encouraged.

## **Celebrating Success**

While the Task Force recognizes the on-going duty to identify areas in need of strengthening, it is equally important to recognize and celebrate the many successes that occur within our district and to cultivate opportunities that foster a climate that embraces diversity.

- ★ Establishment of the Special Education Week was a milestone achievement that involved many creative and collaborative initiatives. It is recommended that this week continue to be recognized as an opportunity to highlight awareness, celebrate uniqueness, and foster student success initiatives. Establishment of a *Special Education Week Working Group* is recommended to plan, implement, and lead activities.
- ★ The selection of Special Education Ambassadors provided the district an opportunity to recognize leaders who support special education students and initiatives both in the classroom and outside of the classroom in a meaningful and tangible way. It is suggested that this practice continue and possibly be expanded to community partners.