



FINDING: PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING WANT TO BETTER UNDERSTAND SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES AND THE PROGRESS THEIR CHILD IS MAKING.

DESCRIPTION

Parents seek a system of support that empowers them to advocate for and support their child's development, especially within Special Education programming. This system requires more positive and accessible communication that builds relationships between parents and teachers to partner in support of each child in MPS.

A survey conducted by an **African American** Parent Evaluator found that although 96% of parents with students receiving Special Education services reported know what an IEP is, only 24% understand IEP terms and language. One Parent Evaluator from this group found that parents with students in Level 4 settings are happiest with their child's school and have building leaders they can relate to and who respect parents.

One **Somali** Parent Evaluator's project focused on Special Education programming, and included several questions about communication about progress towards IEP goals. Based on her community conversations, she concluded "[Somali] parents are losing hope in the Special Ed program. They don't believe it will change anything."

One African American Parent Evaluator's survey found that less than half of parents feel comfortable talking with staff about their child's needs, and only 20% feel the school creates activities where Special Education students are included.

PARENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents need support from MPS to ensure parents can partner with their child's school to support their child's Special Education needs.

For parents, this means:

- (1) Provide **parent trainings** to help parents understand Special Education services, (2) set **attainable goals** and **communicate progress** with parents; (3) accurately **estimate and deliver on needed services** of academic and behavior support and (4) ensure **documentation (e.g. IEPs)** are in **accessible language**.



MPS CONTEXT

Currently, 20% of MPS students are receiving special education services. Of those students, nearly half (45%) identify as African American.

The MPS Special Education department's mission statement reads:

The Special Education department is relentlessly focused on students receiving individualized services and equitable instruction in their least restrictive environment. We are committed to educational evaluations and services that are not predicted by a student's race.

DISTRICT RESPONSE

In response, staff from the Special Education department have updated their webpage so parents can submit a concern about their child's services to District staff.

Staff from the Special Education department are excited to partner with Minneapolis parents to **improve communication** with parents and the community. Staff would like to **review current parent engagement strategies**, such as the IEP trainings hosted by MPS and advocacy organizations and quarterly progress monitoring updates sent home. In addition, new ideas for the Spring and Summer of 2019 include:

- (1) Adapt the Parental Rights document into a short video
- (2) Create a video library of short, accessible trainings on IEPs to support the partnership between parents and case managers
- (3) Produce a glossary of Special Education terms in parent-friendly language
- (4) Develop a template to highlight stories of success with Minneapolis families
- (5) Empower parents to teach other parents how to navigate the system and advocate for their children and their needs.

Additionally, the Special Education department wants to expand the time for **Special Education Cultural Liaisons** to better support multilingual families through these communication projects—2019-2020 SY.

Finally, they will make sure the District Comprehensive Design includes cohorts of schools that support Minneapolis communities—Spring 2019.

The Minnesota Department of Education provides a 19 page document, "Parental Rights for Special Education" that outlines "special education rights and procedural safeguards afforded to parents of children age 3 through 21 under state and federal law." This document is available in 14 languages on the MPS website.

In addition, the MPS Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) brings together parents/guardians of Minneapolis students with disabilities and District staff. Parents advise on District policy and planning.