

**OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND PUPIL SERVICES**

201 Park Street
FORT ATKINSON, WI 53538
P: 920.563.7804
F: 920.563.7809
WWW.FORTSCHOOLS.ORG

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION FOR ADDITION OF CERTIFIED STAFF POSITION(s)

BOARD MEETING DATE(s): Thursday, May 19, 2016

POSITION TITLE: Special Education Teacher - Cross Categorical (2 Positions)

FTE: 2.0 FTE

STATEMENT OF NEED: In order to determine the need for additional Special Education staff, we need to review changes that were approved the BOE and implemented by the District over the 2015-2016 school year. In May 2015, the Director of Special Education presented to the Fort Atkinson School District- Board of Education (BOE) a plan for restructuring of the Special Education Department. This plan involved the addition of 1.0 FTE of Special Education staff at Fort Atkinson Middle School and 1.0 FTE of Special Education staff at Fort Atkinson High School. The addition of these staff, at the time, was predicted to bring the Fort Atkinson Middle School average caseload from 14.83 to a more manageable 12.71 and Fort Atkinson High School from 20.17 to, still the highest in the District but a vast improvement, at 15.13. At that time, the Director of Special Education informed the BOE that after a year of implementation, we would review the additional staffing and its impact on students and programming.

It was also presented, at that time, Fort Atkinson students with disabilities should be held to similar standards as, and be educated with, their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. In order to achieve this mission, the District needs to be able to offer a full range of services similar to the Elementaries at the Secondary levels. This would include opportunities for those students to access the same level of rigor within the regular education classroom as non-disabled peers and have the supports in place such as pre-teaching, re-teaching, and differentiation of concepts in order to assure success, as well as, access to research based interventions specific to their disability area. This belief is still one that Administration stands behind and is driving the current request for additional staff. Furthermore, it was presented that the establishment of this model required three components: Strong Response to Intervention (RtI) Model, Professional Development, and Adequate Special Education Staffing.

Update - Strong RtI Model: Fort Atkinson's RtI model continues to grow. Early and diverse intervention options have been key to assisting struggling learners, both regular and special education, in keeping up with the State's academic benchmarks and accessing the District's core curricular programming. Access to these interventions in the District's RtI system has included special education students; however, it is being realized that at the secondary level, access to these resources by Special Education students due to inadequate Special Education staffing is creating barriers to other students intervention access. As a result of the implementation of additional academic and behavioral interventionists, there has been a decrease in referrals for Special Education, greater access to early intervening services for students who are struggling, greater collaboration among administrative staff, teachers, and parents regarding students' learning, and increased accuracy in the identification of students with a learning disability.

Update - Professional Development: Professional development in the area of co-teaching has been implemented at the secondary level. Staff assigned to a co-teaching role have been trained on the model and provided an instructional coach 3 times throughout the 2015-2016 school year. Staff will additionally be coached one more time in the fall of 2016-2017 school year. Staff have been coached in the areas of: Student Engagement, Co-teaching Role Options, Communication, Lesson Components, Classroom Management, Classroom Climate and Learning, Differentiation, and provided the opportunity to collaborate with their coach and goal set for the future. The coaching model has been a positive experience for staff. Students now have access to the common core curriculum, while still benefitting from support from Special Education staff. Additionally, Special Education staff have received professional development on the Comprehensive Intervention Model (CIM). CIM is a systemic and layered design for increasing the literacy achievement of struggling readers in kindergarten to eighth grades. CIM is based on the belief that teachers must be experts in observing the changes that occur over time in children's literacy behaviors and be able to make moment-to-moment decisions based on their children's strengths and areas of need. We will continue to study the impact of this intervention training on students. This has been implemented at the Elementary level, but at the Secondary level it has been difficult due to scheduling and high caseloads. Additionally, there will be a need for ongoing training in these areas in order to continue to make gains.

Update - Adequate Special Education Staffing:

Despite the addition of 2.0 FTE Special Education teachers in 2015, staffing levels and access to programming continue to be inequitable between elementary and secondary levels. The District has experienced a large influx of Special Education students over the course of the 2015-2016 school year. Many with significant needs. Across the four elementary school buildings, average caseloads for cross categorical students range from 9.3 students per teacher to a district elementary high of 11.0 students per teacher. At the secondary level, caseloads range from 12.83 at the Middle School to 14.17 students per teacher at the High School. Caseloads are determined by the total number of cross categorical students divided by the total building special education teacher FTE. The disparity in caseload size makes it difficult to provide the same or comparable level of inclusionary programming at the secondary levels as compared to the elementary levels.

The elementary levels remain at an adequate staffing level to continue to provide quality integrated programming to students with disabilities and require no additional FTE at this time. Additionally, given current projections for the 2016-2017 school year, the District will be able to re-allocate 1.0 FTE of Special Education staff at the Elementary level. The secondary buildings will both require additional special education teacher FTE to accomplish successful transition programming, implement research based instructional practices, maintain classroom appropriate SE student ration, provide specialized instruction interventions, and sustain an integrated delivery model. While the addition of Special Education staff prior to the 2015-2016 school year has brought average caseload sizes down, it has not brought them to a level that is manageable given State mandates, implementation of best practices, implementation of RDA, and implementation of needed interventions for Special Education students at the Secondary level.

The District continues to attract students with special needs which has had an impact on staffing levels. Over the course of the 2015-2016 school year, the District enrolled a total of 30 new transfer students compared with 15

during the 2014-2015 school year. The Fort Atkinson High School had 14 new students with disabilities transfer into the District compared to 1 transfer out of the District. The Fort Atkinson Middle School had 5 new students with disabilities transfer into the District compared to 2 transfers out of the District. The Elementary levels had 11 students transfer into the District compared to 4 students transfer out of the District. It should be noted, that the 11 Elementary students have been spread out across all 4 Elementary buildings. Additionally, it should be noted that several of the students moving into the District at the Secondary level have been students with high levels of needs including significant behaviors that have warranted significant levels of staffing and support.

Given the District's recent audit findings and DPI complaints, it is important that as a District we are able to offer a true range of services that are consistent across the District. Student should be able to access the same level of services regardless of their building enrollment. Currently, at the elementary level, there is greater access to services than are currently available at the secondary buildings. At the elementary level, a student is able to access the regular education environment for core instruction and then be able to have a double dose of instruction by being provided a pull-out session for pre-teaching, re-teaching, or scaffolding of instruction. Additionally, students at the Elementary level are able to access additional targeted interventions specific to disability. At the Secondary level, there is limited to the additional needed supports to be successful in the regular classroom. For example, a student could access a core class for English Language Arts and then have access to a Guided Practice course. Within guided practice classes, Special Education staff modify, adapt, and differentiate lessons for completion by students. Often times this is done with larger than ideal class sizes. Within the current staffing levels at the Secondary, there is no availability of staff to provide the needed "double dose" of instruction for pre-teaching, re-teaching, or scaffolding of instruction. Secondary staff also need to have the capacity to implement new structures, interventions, and supports with fidelity, currently, this is not possible with current staffing levels.

Additionally, in Fall 2017, new Special Education laws specific to Results Driven Accountability (RDA) will go into effect. In the past, special education requirements have amounted to making sure certain actions were taken by the school. But there was never any guarantee that these steps were the only ones needed to actually make a difference for this particular student. What RDA means is that measurable learning for students with disabilities is now an additional requirement in and of itself. States are allowed to choose a focus for RDA; Wisconsin has chosen literacy outcomes, because these are an area of challenge for many students with disabilities in the state. The Department of Instruction is recommending best practices, which as a District we are already working to implement, such as:

- strong literacy instruction;
- culturally responsive curriculum and instructional practices;
- meaningful access to grade-level, standards-based education;
- strategies for family engagement;
- collaboration between special and general educators; and
- multi-level systems of supports (Response to Intervention; Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports).

In order to implement the above listed best practices District-wide, additional Special Education staffing is needed at the Secondary level.

The State of Wisconsin recommends that, with a typical distribution of disability prevalence, 65% or more of the students with disabilities should be served inside of the regular education environment 80% or more of the day. Less than 10% (9.4%), should be in the regular education classroom less than 40% of the day. Illustrated below, one will see that at the secondary level, we are making progress towards the State's recommendation.

State of WI Recommendations for Special Education Programming		
Building Level	% of students with disabilities served inside the regular class 80% or more of the day.	% of students with disabilities served inside the regular class less than 20% of the day.
Elementary		
2014-2015 Elementary	71%	6%
2015-2016 Elementary	70%	5%
State Recommendations	65% or higher	9.4% or less
Middle School		
2014-2015 Middle School	48%	12%
2015-2016 Middle School	55%	1%
State Recommendations	65% or higher	9.4% or less
High School		
2014-2015 High School	61%	16%
2015-2016 High School	82%	6%
State Recommendations	65% or higher	9.4% or less

Update - Caseload Sizes

To establish adequate staffing levels at the secondary level within an integrated programming model, the following staffing additions are recommended:

- Addition of 1.0 FTE special education staff at the Fort Atkinson Middle School
- Addition of 1.0 FTE special education staff at the Fort Atkinson High School
- Reallocation of 1.0 FTE elementary special education staff to the Fort Atkinson Middle School

This additional special education teacher FTE brings the Fort Atkinson Middle School average caseload from 12.83 to a more manageable and Fort Atkinson High School from 14.17 to, still the highest in the District but a vast improvement, at 9.89.

The secondary staffing additions will allow opportunity for the following:

- Continued strong inclusionary programming at FAMS and FAHS

- Consistent co-teaching options for all students
- Allows for many combinations of options available to students and special education teachers when designing programming consistent across the District
- Creates a single, seamless, and unified services delivery system for K-12 students
- Embraces the legal mandates to educate students alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible
- Allow for appropriate proportions of Special Education to Regular Education students with classrooms
- Allows for access to reading and math interventions within special education programming
- Provide additional supports for core instruction such as pre-teaching and re-teaching instruction to help support special education students in regular education classes

If, as a District, we are not able to add additional staff at the Secondary level, there will continue to be an inequity in services for Special Education students at the level. Best practices, such as Special Education students being able to access needed additional supports and interventions to be successful in the General Education classroom setting will continue to be implemented at a level that is inconsistent across the District. Perhaps the largest concern, is that as a District we will continue to provide unequal access for Special Education students to the least restrictive environment possible. The largest impact of this could result in additional complaints filed with the Department of Public Instruction by parents on behalf of their Special Education students.

Recommendations

To establish adequate staffing levels at the secondary level within an integrated programming model, the following staffing additions are recommended:

- Addition of 1.0 FTE special education staff at the Fort Atkinson Middle School
- Addition of 1.0 FTE special education staff at the Fort Atkinson High School
- Reallocation of 1.0 FTE elementary special education staff to the Fort Atkinson Middle School

Fiscal Impact

Total expenditure for additional 2.0 FTE Special Education teaching staff is \$140,000 (\$70,000 total package budgeted per teacher).

Total New Budget Expenditure: \$140,000.00