

Parent Discussion

January 10, 2024



Question #1

Update on Inclusion Task Force

The inclusion task is expected to resume meeting in spring 2024.



Question #2

Update on the agreement by District in March 2023 to post information about MSEA on the District website. On May 9 th , 2023, District told MSEA once the redesign of the website was complete, info regarding MSEA would be part of the special education department page.

This was reconfirmed in the fall. When will this be completed?

With the changes to the district website information and links posted has been significantly reduced [Special Education](#). Under the regulation KI-R for PTOs may post flyers. I recommend collaborating with site PTOs to post flyers with alliance information (I could coordinate getting contact information from sites). *OSEP requires states to identify a parent advocacy group to meet the needs of parents. Arizona has chosen RSK as the parent support and advocacy organization.*



Question #3

Please provide an update on Carrie Carstens efforts to find a teacher who is interested in bringing United Sound to a school campus.

Ms. Carstens took a position in Casa Grande Elementary District. She had communicated with the director of creative and performing arts that there was a desire to build an inclusive music program. Our team will continue to work with his department and encourage the development of a program.



Question #4

Does the District plan to continue with its Sp.Ed.Itorial Podcast? It stopped after August.

With Devon Roethlisberger transitioning to the role of director of compliance she is utilizing a monthly newsletter format to communicate updates to our special education staff. The newsletter is sent via email to principals, teachers, related service providers. Here is a sample of the most recent newsletter When there is critical information that needs to be shared between monthly newsletters we send out “newsblasts” via email to staff.

December Newsletter



Question #5

Our community has learned the 4 self-contained autism classes at Kerr Elementary will be moving next year. Can you provide more information on where this program will be moved?

Yes, four autism programs currently located at Kerr will move to another elementary site. We have met with the teams, from both locations, to discuss next steps for an efficient and positive transition. We will begin cascading communication to parents at both locations by end of February.



Question #6

Our community has learned that Trish Malotte, Coordinator for Special Education: Specialized Programs (Autism Programs) resigned. We'd like to know who has filled this position and their qualifications. Staff have expressed concerns that individuals in this and other positions, such as autism coaches, do not have basic familiarity with AAC.

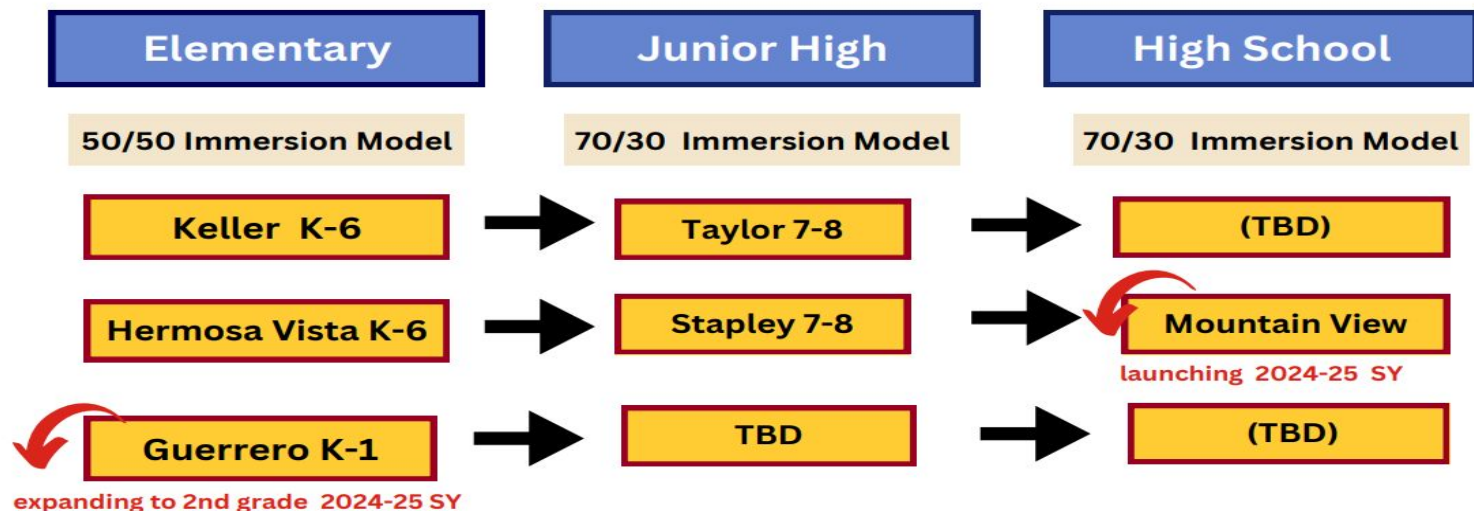
Each candidate who possessed the qualifications aligned to the job description and [Vacancy Posting](#) for the role was interviewed. The candidate chosen met all qualifications of the job description and started in the position just before the December break. Use of AAC which includes communication devices, systems, strategies and tools that replace or support spoken language **are** common best practices in our classrooms . Our team (including coaches, teachers and certified staff) receives ongoing professional learning from our district assistive technology team. When a special need of a teacher or student is not readily understood by a member of our team we have a process to request the support of one of our two assistive tech specialists who are highly trained in the many devices and tools available to our students. This is the district website for [MPS AT LINK](#).



Question #7



Spanish Dual Language Immersion Pathways



K-3
Spanish: Math, Science & Spanish Language Arts
English: ELA, Social Studies

4-6
Spanish: Science, Social Studies & Spanish Language Arts
English: ELA & Math

7th grade:
Spanish for Spanish Speakers 1 & Social Studies

8th grade:
Spanish for Spanish Speakers 2 & Social Studies

Dobson High
Program currently 9th -10th
World Language / Social Studies

Question #8

The Alliance was pleased to hear the great news about Westwood HS being honored as a Special Olympics National Banner Unified Champion School. We reached out to Westwood to receive more info on this achievement. Can you please share more details on what the criteria is to become a Special Olympics National Banner Unified Champion School? We'd like to learn more about the Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement that Westwood has implemented. The Alliance would like to encourage our other high school campuses to achieve the same level of positive change.

[Special Olympics Link](#) at this site you can learn about the ten national standards of excellence.

Our director team met with Payton Bergmann on December 11th, 2023, unified champion schools specialist to understand how we could increase involvement of our high schools and junior highs with their organization. We are exploring opportunities with special olympics and our Mesa schools. Site coaches and athletic coordinators are key to this relationship. We are fortunate to have Tommy Eubanks as our district athletic director who supports these opportunities. You can learn more at www.SpecialOlympicsArizona.org



Question #9

Previously at Red Mountain Ranch Elementary, a weekly social skills group was held where all the students who receive special education services could practice skills together. This year it was canceled by the principal with no explanation and several parents were upset about it. Currently, Special Ed aides do drop-ins on the kids. Cancelling the weekly skills practice has been a big loss, and the lack of communication as to why was disappointing. What can you share about why this was cancelled?

I know the school is focusing on the teaming model. Specific decisions about groups are made at the site level by the principal. I would encourage parents who have questions to seek clarification from the principal. If a parent believes their child demonstrates a need for a social skills goal in their IEP they should request a meeting with the IEP team to consider adding a goal to their IEP. In this meeting it can be discussed the most appropriate format for skill development ie. peer social skills development opportunities. *The team that had been meeting with RMES revisited and checked in with the team this week.*



Question #10

Bullying has been a big issue at Red Mountain Ranch Elementary and the Principal and administrators are not addressing it. Families have pulled their autistic child(ren) from the school because the bullying was so bad. What is the protocol for administrators to address bullying, particularly in the younger grades?

The district has a [Policy JED](#) which addresses bullying and both informal and formal procedures to address student and parent concerns related to bullying and harassment.



Question #12

A family expressed disappointment that Dobson High School will not be offering ASL classes next year, which is causing them to dual enroll their student at Mesa Community College for their language credit. Families have also reported that it appears Westwood High School does not offer ASL either. MSEA was given information by the District during our last meeting that ASL Courses are being taught at all 6 high schools, but this does not appear to be the case for the coming school year. Please provide names of high schools who will be offering ASL classes in the 2024-2025 school year.

Offering ASL 2024-2025 (confirmed with site staff):

Mountain View

Skyline

Red Mountain High School

The other schools will not be offering ASL for the 2024-2025 school year.



Question #13

Several parents expressed the continued need for General Education teachers to receive more training on communication and behavioral characteristics inherent to developmental disabilities. Teachers not knowing what “stimming” is, and telling parents that their child with autism was distracting others. Other teachers making statements like “She doesn’t look like she has autism.” What professional development training is offered to raise awareness of General Education teachers?

We rely heavily on our special education teachers to share information on individual students to ensure their success in a general education classroom. This is a key role for our special education teachers, related service providers and classified staff as they support students on their caseload to successfully participate in general education. Teachers share information on the student’s disability, modifications, and accommodations, and general information about ways to support the child. Our school psychologists do provide training to school staffs related to their onsite self contained programs.



Question 14

Have there been any changes within MPS to scale back or eliminate pull-out resource services at the elementary school level? Parents are reporting there are no options for pull-out resource services for students who do benefit from small group or individual instruction outside of a gen ed setting. What is being reported is that students are only given push in services within gen ed and pull out isn't an option other than for minimal service minute time. Thus, leaving the gen ed teacher to be responsible for modifications of curriculum and differentiation for any students that require that, all while teaching the other students the grade level standards. What this is looking like is students sitting at a horseshoe table in the gen ed room with the special education teacher working on different work – when they could be in a smaller environment that would better meet their needs.

Our team recently provided guidance that changing the the “setting” for a student’s required SDI (where a child receives their services in a GE classroom push in, or SE classroom pullout) is an IEP team decision. If the setting is changed it is required to be documented in the IEP (based on student data and ability to benefit from SDI in the GE setting). District guidance is these decisions are based on individual student need and not based on a school program choice. If a parent has concerns they should request an IEP team meeting to discuss their child’s needs and progress.



Question #15

Families would like to know what professional development training is being provided to General Education teachers on Universal Design for Learning and Peer Mediated Intervention and Instruction.

All principals K-12 currently have access to professional learning on UDL. Some identified Title I schools are required to participate in the UDL training. Following their training is it expected teachers at their sites will be trained.



Question #16

Neighboring Districts have brought in nationally renowned experts on teacher training on inclusive practices. Chandler Unified paid to bring Inclusion Specialist Shelley Moore in to provide training to teachers. Madison brought in Inclusion Specialist Julie Causton. The trainings were engaging and interactive and required attendees to complete activities.

I will share your recommendation with directors who sit on the team who plan professional learning for our general education teachers.



Recommendations

A staff member reported it would be helpful for families to know what programs are currently offered at each site – elementary to high school, and school to school. Although these change from year to year, a current snapshot would be amazing for people to see what options there are at each campus.

We have a [Program Locations](#). As we continue to develop our website I will determine where it would be appropriate to house.



Comments

Several families have continued to share various concerning reasons IEP teams have cited as to why supplementary support by a paraprofessional were being denied. These reasons included some of the following comments: A School Psychologist stated during a MET meeting that a paraprofessional would make it so her child would “not fit in.” An Area Director stated during an IEP meeting that having a paraprofessional so that her child could access the general education classroom was “not ideal because other students are competitive.” Parents were provided an outdated article from 1997 which illustrated the outcomes of poorly trained paras to support their decision(s), however, under federal law, the need for supplementary aides and supports in the general education setting is irrelevant in the LRE (least restrictive environment) analysis. The Alliance recommends the District create a committee to consider current research and case law from which to base Decisions.

The district has a process that is based on student data to determine the extent to which a child may need additional adult support.



Upcoming Work

1. MSEA will provide an update from our meeting with the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The team will provide an update to district.
2. Theresa and parent group will meet prior to the April meeting to discuss format of collaboration and moving forward should we make changes to meeting format.



Information Requested During Meeting

[District Program Description K-6](#)

[District Program Description JH](#)

[Location of Programs](#)

