

# Parent Discussion



# Question #1

Update on Ms. Baca's agreement in April meeting to record a special education update, since the previous board meeting had audio difficulties.

Completed and posted on website.



# Question #2

Parent and teacher community both would like to see data on the effectiveness of the SPIRE program.

[SPIRE Research-Based Reading White Paper](#)

[SPIRE Effectiveness](#)

[Study Intensive Reading Intervention](#)



# Question #3

Why aren't high school teachers trained in SPIRE? When will this happen? Many parents report their students were thriving with it in junior high, and once they move to high school they are losing critical skills.

**District Response:** High school teachers are trained in iSPIRE (the high school version of SPIRE). There is an October training scheduled for those teachers hired after the beginning of the year and missed training.

Preschool  
K-8  
High School

Sounds Sensible  
SPIRE  
iSPIRE

Teachers trained & using  
Teachers trained & using  
Teachers trained & using



# Question #4

How often does the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services visit programs throughout MPS to know how they are functioning on a daily basis?

**District Response:** I visit schools weekly on Wednesday mornings. For example this morning I was at Porter to visit classrooms and meet with the site principal.

Each member of the director leadership team make weekly visits to schools and the team debriefs observations during our weekly director meetings. We calibrate for concerns and celebrations.



# Question #5

We'd like to see increased transparency with updates on promised training. MPS set a goal to train educators in LETRS. It would be great if you posted the number of educators trained in it (and their names) on MPS' website.

**District Response:** [List of professional learning](#) starting summer 2023 and forward.

October 16th is full day of professional development for teachers and IAs (optional).



## Question #7

Please provide an update on teacher/IA vacancies this year as compared to last year. We'd like to know if MPS' retention model and raises have helped.

	9/14/2023			9/13/2022		
Special Education	Filled	Vacant	% Vacant	Filled	Vacant	% Vacant
Teacher	544.200	21.800	4.01%	507.300	42.800	8.44%
Instructional Assistant	416.440	70.472	16.92%	395.808	138.756	35.06%
Clerical Support	45.591	2.175	4.77%	39.938	7.063	17.68%
<b>TOTAL FTE</b>	1006.231	94.447		943.046	188.619	
* ASPAA September 2023: Special education assistants 16.3% state-wide.						



# Question #7

All students deserve qualified, consistent Instructional Assistant (IA) support. The MI Programs are understaffed year after year due to the significant discrepancy in pay between their positions and the IA's for other programs. What is the District doing to hire and **retain** qualified IA's?

**District Response:** There are programs that have IA II in their staffing model. These are EDP, AUT, MO and SID.

Other programs including pre-k, resource, MI have an IA I staffing model.

There are job descriptions for the IA I and IA II positions. There is a different scope of work for each role.

## Current IA Staffing/Vacancies Recruitment/Retention





## Question #8

The Mountain Movers Club at Red Mountain HS participates in “Social Fridays.” Students in the Applied Program and gen ed students socialize through games and activities each Friday. This has been a great step in listening to parental/community feedback. Do our other high schools have a weekly similar initiative?

**District Response:** Each high school have programs unique to their school and community. For example at WWHS our students with IEPs work alongside their typical peers in the Amazon Working Warriors program [Working Warriors](#). RMHS does an amazing job in the performing arts program with an annual performance. MVHS has a united PE approach for many of their students. Skyline schedules different events to encourage social time with peers [Skyline](#).



# Question #9

Parent community would like to hear an update on United Sound program at Poston.

**District Response:** The teacher at Poston in 2022-2023 left the district at the end of the year. United Sound has not continued.



# Question #10

Teachers and parent community are both reporting that the special education department is denying the provisions of 1:1 aide support, and overruling team decisions regarding this, which is a violation of FAPE. (IDEA mandates that the decision is made by the IEP team, which includes individuals knowledgeable about the student's needs). If a student requires a 1:1, or additional support, who makes that decision and what is the District policy?

**District Response:** IEP teams work as a team. There are processes of collecting data and demonstrating student needs. No one member of the team can deny a supplemental aid. Additional support is determined by a process. Once the team has collected data and the IEP team meeting is scheduled the team discusses the proposed need for additional adult support.

Research has shown that constant proximity (1x1 IA) is detrimental to increasing independence, peer relationships, less direct instruction from teacher, etc. Research has shown that an effective classroom "team" of teacher and IAs results in better outcomes for students. For this reason data collection is extremely important as a 1x1 IA is the most restricted LRE on the special education continuum and research shows it can be detrimental to student progress and positive outcomes for independence. We work with our teams to create IA mapping schedule to ensure the needs of all students is strategically met.

[Research](#)



# Question #11

Community member: I have screened so many MPS students that do not have phonemic awareness, which is the most foundational skill that determines if you will be a good reader or speller. LiPS is the only research-based method to address lack of phonemic awareness. Why doesn't MPS have a research-based system such as this, or an instructor trained in a researched based method to address this issue?

**District Response:** What works clearing house on LiPS® was found to have *potentially positive* effects on alphabetics, reading fluency, and math, no discernible effects on reading comprehension, and *potentially negative* effects on writing for students with learning disabilities. No studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations examined the effectiveness of LiPS® on students with learning disabilities in the general reading achievement, science, social studies, or progressing in school domains. Here is the full article on the evidence on LiPS [WWCH](#). Based on the science of reading research and a RFP process (which included parental participation) our department chose Sounds Sensible, SPIRE and iSPIRE as our Tier III intervention program. Here is the full article and evidence on [SPIRE](#).



# Question #12

Not all sports are offered as Unified Physical Education classes. For high school sports, what is the District doing to ensure students with disabilities are afforded a level playing field? What is the district doing to ensure the students are able to have access to and participate in these interscholastic activities when there are no safety risks involved? The District states they promote “inclusive opportunities,” however, this is not what is happening at the campus level. Where does a parent/student access the criteria for “cut” sports, such as swimming? What are the criteria for a cut vs non-cut sport? The guidelines don't appear to be uniform across the district; Westwood swim is a no-cut sport, yet RMHS is. This creates inequitable access for students with similar disabilities, depending on the school they attend.



## Cont..

**District Response:** Disabled students don't automatically get onto sports teams (BB, football, track etc.) or into extracurricular groups, such as a Spanish Club, if they cannot meet the basic entrance/membership requirements with accommodations, modifications, aids or services. This means if a student wants to join the track team, and there are minimum requirements, the student must meet those basic requirements. Student athletes are entitled to reasonable accommodations in sports, unless the accommodation would cause a fundamental alteration of the activity or would constitute an undue burden. If a student wants to participate in sports or extracurricular activities and a parent believes support may be needed, this should be discussed with the student's IEP or 504 team as early as possible. A MPS example a deaf student played basketball and required an interpreter during the game to translate the coaches instructions. This is an accommodation that allowed the student to participate in the sport.

Each school will have different approaches for different sport teams. Parents interested in particular sports should meet with their school to understand the opportunities for different sports and extracurricular activities their child is interested in participating. If the child requires accommodations or modifications they should meet with their IEP team to discuss and plan for developing accommodations and modifications.



# Question 14

There seems to be no standard math curriculum in the applied program. From year-to-year different teachers are using different methods, practices, materials, approaches, worksheets, etc., which greatly impact a seamless, quality education. Please explain this lack of consistency.

**District Response:** There is an adopted curriculum used in our applied programs. Teachers have been trained in and are implementing envisions (Savvas).



# Parent Survey Results

Percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.

- 2018 : 686 completed, 87.1% satisfied with level of engagement
- 2019 : 222 completed, 89.6% satisfied with level of engagement
- 2020: 287 completed, 87.1% satisfied with level of engagement
- 2021: 1,009 completed, 85.2% satisfied with level of engagement
- 2022: 600 completed, 88.3% satisfied with level of engagement
- 2023: 1,165 completed, 89.7% satisfied with level of engagement





# Intentional Next Steps to Improve

Administrators are available to discuss my questions or concerns - 44.1 %  
strongly agree, 42.9% agree, total: 87%

My school helps me play an active role in my or my child's education - 44.2%  
strongly agree, 44.9% agree, total: 89.1%

The school explains what choices I have if we disagree -- 35% strongly agree,  
41.6% agree, total: 76.6%

Overall, I am satisfied with how my or my child's school makes it easy for me  
to be involved - 48.6% strongly agree, 41% agree, total: 89.6%



# Suggestions to Discuss

Similar to Spanish dual language programs, consider offering dual language American Sign Language programs. It could reinforce language concepts with concrete multi/sensory techniques on a campus that hosts a deaf and hard of hearing program. This could create an inclusive environment for students and open up opportunities to make friendships with combined recess, lunch, etc.

**District Response:** ASL courses are taught as a world language at all six high schools. Mesa Public Schools has a World Languages and Dual Language Immersion department who work to provide exceptional language development opportunities for all students.

While the special education department recognizes the rich value of American Sign Language, there are some critical differences that make it a less desirable choice for dual language immersion.



- Spoken languages are processed through the auditory channel which innervates the same centers in the brain no matter the language system. ASL begins as a visually-processed signal requiring an extra set of processing skills and pathways in order to learn. This effect is less impactful for native users of ASL, but is nonetheless still present to a small degree.
  - ASL does not have its own orthographic representation; meaning, it can not reinforce literacy directly. In fact, native users of sign language have an extra burden for literacy in English for which they are often supported by a teacher of the Hearing Impaired. Being deaf is not a learning disability but the language system does create a heavy load of extra learning.
  - English and Spanish or English and French are actually linguistically closer relatives than English and ASL. ASL uses signs to represent ideas which in English may require several words. ASL also relies on body language more than its spoken English relative.



# Suggestions to Discuss

Seek out and create more opportunities for students receiving special education services to shine and showcase their talents and gifts. Examples could be entering national drawing contests, working toward individual goals and awards that show students' strengths, providing leadership opportunities.

**District Response:** We have examples throughout the district of students with disabilities excelling in the arts, athletics, TSW experiences, science fairs, drama performances, graduation/promotion ceremonies, leadership recognitions, etc. Recently a MVHS student was elected to the Arizona Association of Blind Students board to serve as secretary treasurer. He is a leader and model for braille reading in the MV community. Our badminton unified sports team was recognized at a board meeting for their competitive accomplishments. Our classroom teachers seek out ways to recognize We highlight the accomplishments of our outstanding students annually during student service awards. The video of the awards ceremony is on our website.



# Suggestions to Discuss

Please add friendship benches on playgrounds to promote social interactions.



# Suggestions to Discuss

Consider routinely inviting therapy animals onto all MPS campuses. Parent community reports tremendous value such as having a calming effect, helping kids with self-regulation, learning to care for animals (feeding, brushing, playing ball) and increasing positive feelings about the school environment. Parent reported that often the costs of transportation for students in the SID classes limited field trip opportunities, however, one school's PTO contributed to helping bring Pawsitive Friendships to the class several times throughout the year, and students and staff loved it and it was a huge success. Parent community would like MPS to consider expanding therapy animals in greater numbers across campuses.

[Paws and Peers](https://pawsandpeers.com/)

<https://pawsandpeers.com/>



# Updates on Prior Items

Provide update on this suggestion from last meeting:

On the [Special Education Org Chart](#) on MPS' website can you add hyperlinks for emails so parents know how to contact staff?

Website updated 9/25/23

