

PART I

THE WASHTENAW SUPERINTENDENTS' ASSOCIATION – POLICY GUIDELINES FOR DELIVERING PERSONALIZED SERVICES TO STUDENTS WITH SPECIALIZED NEEDS

The Vision

The public school districts in Washtenaw County, working together with Washtenaw ISD, envisions a future whereby all children have equal access and educational opportunity to learn with high expectations, within a meaningful and challenging curriculum, employing a differentiated instructional approach using multiple assessments to gauge student learning. All children are to be recognized for their unique needs, interests, and aspirations and have a sense of belonging in their school and community. This requires a responsive and coordinated educational system that will focus on the diverse needs of all children as well as allocate resources to build the capacity of districts, schools, and teachers to provide the services and programs necessary for success.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for this policy is to establish the relationship between this countywide collaborative vision and services for students with specialized needs for support. Ensuring equity and access to the instructional frameworks established in the vision requires that challenging expectations be set for all students. It also requires that instructional and related service staff work in concert and with mutual responsibility to ensure success for all students. A focus on prevention, without labeling students before providing personalized instructional services is a key dimension of this policy statement: we can no longer wait until students fall behind before providing them with personalized instructional intervention.

The Policy Statement

Each district, working as part of a coordinated system, will focus on delivering a personalized education in accordance with the definition established by the Conference on Teaching and Learning established by the Washtenaw Superintendent Association.

Suggested Action Steps

1. Collaborative interagency partnerships will be developed and sustained between the schools and the community. These partnerships will particularly focus on early childhood, family education and post K-12 transition services.
2. Each district, working as part of a coordinated system, will provide a safe and welcoming environment for every child; where educators are engaged with each child and their family, knows each child, and where every student is valued, challenged and respected.

3. Each district, working as part of a coordinated system, will provide prevention services including services that provide instructional interventions for students before they experience failure, thereby preventing future problems, and referrals to and placement in special education for students who otherwise would have been identified as having educationally defined disabilities.
4. Each district, working as part of a coordinated system, will focus on increasing the capacity of the teaching force to work in teams, to differentiate instruction, and to modify and personalize educational approaches to accommodate different learning styles.
5. Parents and staff within each district will provide input into the in-service and staff development needs that are necessary to support students with special needs in the general education classroom setting.
6. When students continue to demonstrate the need for more intensive support to be successful within the school's instructional framework, school teams will develop other school-based wrap around services to serve them locally.

As part of the search for a solution, school personnel will work with any parent and/or guardian from the initial request for additional support in a manner that ensures students' rights are protected.

7. All student entitlements and parent rights will be protected under IDEA 1997 and all processes and procedures will be implemented when requested and/or deemed necessary by the parent or district.
8. After a parent or a district working in a coordinated system moves to identify a student as eligible for special education services, they will first and foremost consider options within the general education program available within the local school of the student in the district. Special education resources will be refocused to provide quality support for students within the general education program.
9. An evaluation system will be designed and implemented to assess the effectiveness of the planning, prevention, and intervention support for all students.
10. A long-term stable level of funding will be sought that helps support the costs of prevention and intervention services for any student with specialized needs for educational support, including students who are eligible for special education services.

PART II

WASHTENAW SUPERINTENDENTS' ASSOCIATION – GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

All students, including those with disabilities, should have opportunities to receive their education in school and the community environments with typical, similar age peers. Specialized services will be provided for students who are eligible for special education in accordance with state and federal rules. To provide for the personalized educational needs of students with disabilities, options will be provided in general education settings as well as specialized settings. Determination of educational placements, related services and access to general education environments should be based upon a student's individual needs, not upon the label describing the student's disability.

To facilitate the development of options, the following guiding principles have been established:

1. Students with disabilities will be provided instruction that will directly help them participate in the general education program and in community life.
2. When a general education or community environment option is being designed for students currently in separate school programs, transition plans from separate services to school environments with typical peers will be developed for each student with parental involvement.
3. The promotion of positive interactions between students with and without disabilities is recognized as a valued educational activity. Students with disabilities, and those without disabilities, will have opportunities to learn from each other through the use of peer empowerment strategies, i.e., cooperative learning, personalized planning and peer tutoring.
4. Students with disabilities should begin their education in least restrictive settings, which allow for regular engagement with non-disabled peers. In assigning students with disabilities to educational programs and services, it is expected that:

First, consideration is given to each student's educational program being delivered in a setting as close as possible to the student's home (R 340.1722c).

Second, consideration is given to educating students with disabilities within the general education classroom in accordance with (R 340.1721e).

Third, if the general education classroom placement with supportive educational services is not appropriate to the individual needs of the student, then consideration shall be given to developing alternative service arrangements in a typical school setting.

Fourth, and only if it can be demonstrated that even with supplemental aids and services the student with a disability cannot be educated in a general education setting, then appropriate alternative service arrangements inside the school, district, or county will be provided. Regardless of the placement, it is the responsibility of the district to oversee the student's program and annually determine if the service configuration and placement should continued, be changed or modified.

Fifth, when it is determined that a separate set of educational services outside of the school or district are appropriate for a student, the student with a disability must be provided the opportunity to participate with non-disabled peers in nonacademic and extracurricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the person's needs (R 340.1722a).