

MEMORANDUM

To: Leah Voorhies, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support, and the Utah State Board of Education (USBE)

From: Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (Panel)

Subject: Adequate Support Staff - paraeducators and related service providers

Date: September 1, 2019

In our role as an advisory panel to the USBE, we would like to provide input and recommendations to the USBE to improve services for students with disabilities through addressing the need for **adequate support staff**. Support staff, including related service providers, school psychologists, paraeducators, and paraprofessionals are vital to the implementation of IEPs. Just as we have a shortage of qualified special education teachers in the state, we have a shortage of these aforementioned professionals as well. In our discussion as a Panel, we identified trends and concerns that may be contributing to this shortage. The following are recommendations from the Panel:

- 1) Recruiting and retaining adequate support staff centers around a need for belonging within a school community and an appropriate caseload. In order to recruit and retain related service providers, LEAs must compete with clinical and private practice employers. In the schools, these professionals are over-assigned students/schools, do not have adequate time for collaboration between the many schools they serve, and are not always included in professional development and compensation with their educator peers. We feel that these issues may be addressed through:
 - a) Caseload caps that are appropriately calculated based on direct and indirect service hours, transportation, and time required for teaming.
 - b) Including related service providers in professional development and compensation programs along with their educator peers.
- 2) These related service providers often have licensing bodies that require specific professional development and regulatory standards. These standards do not always align with what the providers are being evaluated on at the school level. We feel this can be addressed by:
 - a) Aligning annual evaluations with the standards and practices outlined in their governing bodies instead of the standards and practices used to evaluate general education teachers.
- 3) There is a strong evidence base for the utility of teaming models of service delivery used by related service providers facilitating “push in” services embedded into school routines. This model requires time for collaboration and coaching teachers and paraprofessionals.

- a) USBE can support this model by providing technical assistance and professional development funding to assist LEAs in implementing a teaming model for service delivery, where appropriate.
- 4) In order to increase the retention of paraeducators, paraprofessionals and other direct service staff, the USBE should support initiatives that increase competitive pay and benefits for these individuals.
 - a) USBE and LEAs should provide incentivized training for paraprofessionals that allows them to foster competency and belonging within their special education school teams.
 - b) The recruitment and retention of paraprofessionals is paramount to successful implementation of special education services.
- 5) Lastly, rural districts across the state struggle to recruit and retain adequate support staff.
- 6) USBE's support in creating a consortium of school districts in rural areas to address professional development needs can help alleviate some of these needs in rural areas.

Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing these recommendations. We as a Panel appreciate all of your efforts on behalf of children with disabilities throughout the State of Utah.