

**Organization B
Shoreline Public Schools
Special Education Program Review**

Proposed Special Education Program Review

The overarching purpose of the proposed special education program review in SPS is to assess the alignment between the instructional practices, structural supports, and continuum of services available for students with disabilities and the priorities of the district's Strategic Instructional Plan and mission statement: ***To provide a collaborative learning community which engages all students in learning the academic and work-life skills needed to achieve their individual potential and become responsible citizens.***

To examine the extent and nature of the alignment, ... proposes a mixed-methods review of the program to provide formative feedback to SPS in three main areas: (1) infrastructure and systems, (2) instruction and evidence-based practices, and (3) stakeholder communication. The proposed project review team will collect and analyze extant data, conduct observations, and convene a small sampling of focus groups to explore the sample questions (below) in each category addressed in this review.¹ Findings from the review will be used to inform the development of a 5-year strategic plan for SPS leadership to meet targeted priorities and to create a communication plan that enhances stakeholder engagement.

Infrastructure and Systems: Special education structures, protocols, and processes are critical to providing effective services that meet the needs of students with disabilities. We propose to examine the existing infrastructure in SPS to better understand the current strengths of the system supports and to identify the areas to enhance and improve the continuum of services available in SPS to meet the needs of its students with disabilities.

- Among students with disabilities, what are the most prominent educational placements (e.g., general education classrooms, resource room, support center, etc.)? How do placements vary by disability category, race/ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status?

¹Upon award, Organization B staff and SPS leadership will meet to collaboratively refine, adjust, and finalize the framing questions for this program review.

- What service delivery models are utilized for the provision of special education placements (e.g., resource room, support center, etc.) and related services (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech/language therapy, etc.)? How do these service delivery models differ in pre-K, elementary, middle, and high school settings?
- Is there evidence of protocols and practices related to identification and provision of special education services (e.g., pre-referral intervention process, screening and progress monitoring, MTSS)? Is there evidence of consistent use of these protocols and practices across the district?
- Is there a comprehensive, district-wide system for collecting universal screening and progress monitoring data that are used systematically to measure outcomes for students with disabilities?
- What are the various positions, roles, and responsibilities across SPS staff who manage ongoing tasks related to the delivery of special education services (e.g., district staff, building administrators, teachers, psychologists, etc.)?
- What mechanisms are in place for providing professional development to instructional staff in the district? Does the district engage in a system of coaching, mentoring, and/or communities of practice?

Instruction, Evidence-Based Practices, and Assessment Outcomes: The use of research-based strategies and evidence-based practices is critical to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities and to ultimately achieve increased outcomes. Data from the 2015-2016 administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC) indicate that, on average 37% of students with disabilities enrolled in grades 3-8 meet the standards on assessments of English Language Arts (ELA) and 32% meet standards on assessments of mathematics. These data also suggest a larger achievement gap as students with disabilities progress through the grades. On average, 47% of third grade students with disabilities meet SBAC standards in ELA and mathematics and 16% of eighth graders with disabilities meet standards in ELA and math. As such, we propose to examine the current instructional practices in SPS to better understand the current strengths of the instructional supports and to identify the areas to enhance and improve the continuum of services available in SPS to meet the needs of the students.

- To what extent are students with disabilities engaged in the general education instructional curriculum?
 - Do students with disabilities receive instruction in a curriculum aligned to their grade-level standards? Are students with disabilities placed across a range of general education classrooms at their grade level?

- What are the outcomes² (i.e., in program data, progress monitoring data, state assessment data) for students with disabilities across settings in SPS? For example: students with disabilities in resource room placements, those in self-contained classes, and those who spend the majority of their instructional time in inclusive general education placements etc.?

²Upon award, Organization B project staff and SPS leadership will meet to further operationalize the notion of “progress” and “outcomes” as they relate to this question. Project staff propose data collection on existing outcomes including in-program data, grade reports, and progress monitoring data as a mechanism to provide a baseline of performance of students with disabilities. Additional data collection and analysis activities including measuring growth trajectories of students with disabilities and other complex analysis will require significant adjustments to the scope and budget of this proposal.

Stakeholder Communication: Stakeholder communication is a critical component of special education planning and service delivery. Effective communication across parents, students, teachers, and leadership can help highlight the roles of stakeholders invested in increasing outcomes for students with disabilities and can help increase the likelihood of success. We propose to examine the existing mechanisms and practices used for communicating within and across schools in SPS between leadership, instructional staff, and community stakeholders.

- What current practices are in place to foster communication between SPS leadership, school staff, and external stakeholders in the community around special education service delivery and student progress?
 - What mechanisms are in place for general education and special education staff to communicate with each other about student progress?
 - How effective are the current efforts of SPS to communicate effectively with parents, community, and staff about the priorities, student progress, and procedures related to students with disabilities?
 - How do district and school leaders plan to strengthen communication with relevant stakeholders?

Scope of Work

Task 1: Project Management and Kickoff Meeting

Past experience has shown that the most effective beginning step in conducting a review is the convening of a face-to-face kickoff meeting with district leadership and key project staff. We propose to convene the kickoff meeting post award of contract. Both the project director and relevant project staff will travel to Shoreline to conduct a kickoff meeting with key representatives from SPS to review and discuss the program audit plan; identify extant data sources; and finalize a schedule for site visits, focus groups, interviews, and other relevant tasks.

In addition to the kickoff meeting, the project director will manage the ongoing project through internal project meetings, project reviews, and budget and labor oversight.

Task 2: Data Collection and Analysis

For this special education program review, we will collect extant data and district documents (Task 2a) and conduct observations and focus groups (Task 2b). These data collection activities will be used to gather information related to infrastructure, instruction, and communication around special education program delivery across schools in SPS. We propose to conduct the program review during **four site visits**. Each visit will be attended by a team of two Organization B staff with expertise in special education program delivery, instructional best practices, and behavior interventions for students with disabilities. Site visits may span a period of 2–3 days and will include observations and focus groups. The proposed program review will inform the development of a final report delivered to SPS (Task 4).

Task 2a. Extant Data and District Document Review: To address the program review questions, we will collect extant data at the state, district, school, and student levels. Organization B will gather extant data from SPS, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and other publicly available data sources to evaluate the areas of focus. In addition to the collection of extant data, Organization B's team will also conduct a thorough appraisal of available district documents related to special education practices in SPS. Anticipated extant data may likely include but is not limited to:

- Student enrollment and demographic data, such as race, ethnicity, gender, grade level, disability status, disability category, socioeconomic status, and educational placement;
- Attendance rates for students with disabilities;
- State assessment (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) outcome data for students with disabilities;
- Progress monitoring outcome data for students with disabilities, as available;
- Grade reports and/or in-program progress reports for students with disabilities;
- Frequency data of office discipline referrals for students with disabilities
- District- and school-level documents and/or protocols related to special education service delivery;
- District- and school-level policies related to special education service delivery;
- Any protocols or practices specifically related to students with behavior need
- The district's Strategic Plan;
- Rate of attendance at and evaluation reports of special education professional development offerings;
- Master schedules; and
- Staffing and organizational charts, including the ratio of special educators and paraprofessionals to students with disabilities in all schools, including specialized inclusion programs and schools.

Task 2b. Focus Groups: Project staff from Organization B will travel to SPS four times during the 2017–2018 school year to conduct observations and focus groups. Site visits will last 2–3 days and we propose to spend one day at each site. Project staff will work with SPS leadership to finalize the site visit logistics and details; however, we propose to visit eight sites including: one preschool site, four of the nine elementary schools, the Cascade K-8 community program, one middle school and one high school.

Focus Groups: To supplement the data collected through the document reviews and data reviews, we will conduct six focus groups related to priority areas identified with district leadership. The content of the focus groups may provide more detail about special education service delivery that is not captured by the observations or other data collected and will sample participants from all sites across the district. For example, focus groups will likely explore issues relevant to a specific site’s procedures and protocols for special education; address the ways in which general education and special education teachers work together; discuss the provision of remedial instruction, intervention, and how they relate to students meeting graduation requirements; and additional human and structural resources that may impede or support the effectiveness of special education program delivery (e.g., schedules, time, availability of materials, professional development needs, etc.).

We propose to conduct the following focus groups: (1) staff and building leadership from general education, (2) special education staff (i.e., teachers, paraprofessionals, and support service staff) at the elementary level, (3) special education staff (i.e., teachers, paraprofessionals, and support service staff) at the middle and high school level, (4) district leadership, (5) students, and (6) community stakeholders (including parents). Project staff will work with SPS leadership to finalize the selection of focus groups. Focus group questions will derive from existing focus group protocols from Organization B and from those used in comparable local district reviews (i.e., University Place, Franklin Pierce, Kent, etc.), and they will be refined to include priority topics and questions from SPS district staff. Focus groups will be scheduled during site visits and will likely occur before or after school as best fits the schedule of the participants. Each focus group will last approximately 45–60 minutes.

Organization B staff with expertise in facilitating focus groups with educators and educational leaders will conduct focus groups with SPS leadership, staff, and community stakeholders. The facilitators will take detailed notes and record the focus groups with permission. Data from the focus groups will be transcribed, and facilitators will debrief after each group is completed. Organization B project team members will code the data using NVivo software. Organization B staff will assess the notes and debriefings to verify and highlight key findings and themes from the coding. Organization B will summarize the major themes and present recommendations in the final report that will be shared with SPS.

Task 3: Summative Report

After all data are collected and analyzed, Organization B will lead report-writing efforts to summarize the findings and submit a summative report to SPS leadership and staff. Global outcomes of this report will provide district leadership with:

- A clear description of strengths and areas of growth as they relate to the delivery of special education programs in the three categories addressed by this review: infrastructure, instruction, and communication;
- Suggestions for a 5-year plan that addresses the identified priorities and provides specific recommendations for addressing gaps; and
- Recommendations for developing a communication plan for the board, community, parents, and staff that discusses the purpose and intended outcomes of the review and the plan for addressing identified gaps.

Project staff will deliver the summative report to SPS according to the timeline of tasks (Exhibit 1) and work in conjunction with district leadership so that all relevant stakeholders can respond to or clarify any items and use the scores and recommendations for timely school improvement planning. Upon culmination of the project review, Organization B will meet in person, or virtually, with SPS leadership to discuss the summative findings and to help plan and implement the recommendations, as desired by the district.