

Report of the Special Education Coordinator

The past year has been a time of growth and change in the special education department and the Ellis School community. We have said goodbye to some and welcomed others. Thank you to staff, parents and students for their wonderful support and flexibility during these transitions. It is still the goal of the special education staff to work as a cohesive, proactive team within the special education department and then expand this sense of cohesion through the Ellis School in our Professional Learning Communities. All staff has been trained in the model of Professional Learning Communities and this model is helping to end the artificial division between regular and special education and assume a collective responsibility for the education of our students.

Response to Intervention (RTI) has been an integral part of increasing student achievement. RTI is a framework to implement effective instructional practices that matches the needs of students in a collaborative, school wide effort. While RTI is not a special education, Title 1 or a Gifted and Talented initiative, it is an important component of determining if a student qualifies for special education services. In the RTI model, students are frequently progress monitored and this information is used to make decisions about changes in instruction and applying child response data to important educational decisions. Early intervention is still one of the biggest keys to student success. It is vital to continue to front load educational interventions at a young age to reduce the over reliance on remediation of skills at a later time.

Meaningful evaluation of the staff will be in sharp focus during the 2012-13 school year. Superintendent Michelle Lana has directed administration to focus on one element from each of the following five teaching domains (outlined in the Charlotte Danielson model): Use of criteria and standards in planning lessons; Expectations for learning achievement; Engaging students in learning; Grouping of students; Use of technology. We must assist our staff in becoming more knowledgeable about what social and academic skills a student needs to access and perform successfully in the general curriculum.

Special educators must approach the development of interventions for students with disabilities with a solid knowledge of grade-level standards for the student. They need to demonstrate the ability to scaffold instruction and utilize frequent means of assessing progress to adjust instructional techniques. Use of the Common Core Standards when creating a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) will connect the unique needs of the student with the rigorous expectations of the general curriculum and increase the possibility of mastery.

I am confident that the Ellis School is well on its way to exceeding the hopes and expectations of the community to address the needs of all students.

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