

Parent Mentor Questions

PARAs

How are para-professionals trained and used throughout all grade levels in the district?

- **Specify how paras receive training to manage students with behavior issues?**

Para-educators are staff, who assist licensed personnel (teachers and specialists) in providing services to students with disabilities. Para educators assist students in the classroom and the entire school setting. Para educators are assigned in a variety of ways, most typically to the intensive learning centers.

Paras receive training both on the job and in training sessions offered during two full days per year. In addition, paras can choose to take additional training in many areas. Our Instructional Resource Team provides professional development in the area of behavior at least 2 times per year and are is available to assist in individual or small group trainings with school personnel. The lead teacher also provides training for the paras assigned to her classroom

- **How does a student's IEP reflect use of paras**

Student's individual education plans reflect the amount of adult support a student needs, whether that support be with a teacher or a paraeducator. Hours of support are reflected on a student's "Special Education and Related Services" page of his/her IEP. The hours on the IEP do not reflect 1 to 1 support for a student. Rather, they indicate the amount of instructional support the student requires. It could be 1-1 or small groups.

- **What district guidelines do schools use to determine how para hours are used within each building? (such as use of 'shared' paras and substitute paras)**

Case managers fill out a rubric on students who they anticipate may need or require paraeducator support. The hours assigned to support that student are based on the collective rubrics and assigned to the building. Case managers, together with their principals, hire, assign and schedule the paraeducator duties. Often the principal of the building will do the schedules for paraeducators and obtain input from case managers. In some instances, case managers will assign and schedule the paraeducators. Shared hours are encouraged, as research shows that 1:1 paraeducators can actually be detrimental to a student's success. Parafloaters and substitute teachers assist when new students with high needs move into the district or paraeducators assigned to Intensive Learning Centers or students with significant support needs being served in their home school are absent.

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EMOTIONAL ISSUES

- **How are we addressing the emotional needs of all students?**

BVSD has begun the process of adopting new counseling standards and becoming a positive behavior support district for the first time. With the adoption of both restorative justice for discipline, and positive behavior supports, we are meeting the emotional and behavioral needs of students through rewarding the positive and using natural consequences when mistakes are made. In addition, the Jim Fay and Foster Cline program, *Discipline with Love and Logic* has been utilized in many buildings. Jim Fay's son was recently here to train teachers. He'll be coming back and has offered a parent component. It is highly recommended for parents who might be unfamiliar with the concepts. There is a special section in this program for students with special needs.

- **How is BVSD collaborating with outside agencies to support behavior for students in neighborhood schools?**

BVSD has a joint operating agreement with many community agencies to support students and families emotionally. We jointly operate limited programs for students K-12 which include Mental Health support for the families and students as well as Department of Social Services support. In addition, the Family Resource Center supplies mental health support to several of our schools. These mental health workers are funded through city-sponsored grants, in the case of Lafayette and Boulder, general fund dollars and Mental Health dollars. BVSD school psychologists and social workers also support student emotional and behavioral needs in the schools.

We consult with private therapists and their input can be helpful. However, IEPs are developed by the team and are based on a child's educational needs at school.

- **What are the choices for a secondary student with emotional problems that the district cannot provide for? (Such as a student with Autism, with behavioral challenges or an emotionally fragile student without behavioral issues?)**

The comprehensive high schools have:
Intensive Learning Centers. This service supports mental health needs through affective education, therapy groups, individual counseling with social worker or therapist depending on student need. This service is IEP based. Students may or may not need to be in a self-contained setting, or some combination of supports wrapped around them.

Day treatment is available in the rare instance that a student's mental health needs can not be met. Currently we have Halycon which works in cooperation with Boulder Mental Health and Department of Human Services.

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In addition staff can:

- develop behavioral support plans, based on a function behavior assessment- basically what is the behavior, where and why does it happen, what can we do differently
- access the IR team
- collaborate with outside therapists, psychiatrists, or other providers with permission on how to assist students who are emotionally fragile.

Curriculum:

- High school curriculum is accommodated for most students. A small percentage of students with significant support needs will need to have modified curriculum. For example, a student may demonstrate knowledge by preparing a power point presentation rather than writing a research paper.

Social skills: generally taught in ICAN.

- Positive Behavior support teams (supported by CDE) are being formed mainly in elementary and middle schools. These look at the overall school climate and how it can be adjusted to be respectful of all students

Training:

- High schools FTE (number of hours for teachers) was reduced. This is due to a formula that looks at all factors in a school, declining enrollment, SSP students, severity of students, free reduced lunch, minority etc. Overall as a district special education has increased fte. Additional fte was given to each high school to support the number of students not being identified but needing interventions. This is a new process and is emerging as staff work through the process of supporting all students, and sharing resources.

Each parent should be able to access the student support process, right now this looks different at each school. At the high school, start with your student's counselor.

- **What are the inclusion strategies in BVSD?**

We have 4 guiding principles for meaningful inclusion:

1. All education is general education and supported in part by interventionists, some of whom are funded through special education.
2. Resources are configured to support all students.
3. We begin and end discussions with data.

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4. The district supports the work of schools, not the other way around.

We promote these principles through instruction within the general education classroom and through purposeful pull-out from the general education classroom. Students are enrolled in schools and classrooms first and can be purposefully pulled out to receive the targeted, focused instruction they require to be as successful as they can be while in their classes.

- **How do we promote meaningful inclusion, esp. at high school?**

At the high school level, in order to promote this change, several district-wide initiatives are coming together.

New curricula have been adopted that identify essential learning results and key academic vocabulary. Essential learnings and key vocabulary allow case managers to focus instruction on the most important things for students to know in an entire lesson.

We are developing alternative ways for students to demonstrate knowledge and learning. Alternative demonstrations of knowledge allow students with disabilities to show what they can do in ways other than standard paper/pencil demonstrations. These initiatives and others allow students to access the general curriculum in new ways. One example-A student who is a visual learner might prepare a presentation using drawings to demonstrate the major points using short sentences, rather than preparing an entire paper.

Most importantly, we have many ways for students to be part of high school and their communities, either through classes, extra-curricular

- **What is the ideal model for ILCs? (Discrepancy between ideal and what's really happening in the classroom, esp. in cross-cat programs.)**

The model for ILCs follow the principles outlined above. Students have the opportunity to be supported in their academic and social learning by small numbers in a highly structured and comprehensive scaffold of supports to allow them access to the general classroom unless purposeful pull-out is required.

- **When will my child's school see changes?**

Your child's school has seen some of the changes already. More and more changes become visible in more and more places each day.

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GENERAL

General question: How can there be more open, collaborative communication for parents to understand changes taking place and to provide input?

- **How/what are we doing with transition at all levels?**

Transitions are addressed in many ways. We are working as a district to ensure that the successful strategies found at one school to help a student be successful continue as the student transitions to the next level.

Transition meetings begin each spring between the sending and receiving schools teams. You can talk with the Parent Professional Partnership to help you prepare for your own child's transition

Special education students with intensive needs should have a transition staffing to ensure that service delivery and goals & objectives are appropriate for the next educational level.

- **How is BVSD addressing the epidemic of ASD?**

Our Instructional Resource Team is training many teachers and school teams in strategies to help students on the spectrum be successful in schools.

We have opened several new ILC's for students with more significant needs and used that staff to support students on the spectrum in classrooms in their school. Keep watch - we will be opening more in the future.

We send more and more teachers for training in ASD and continually look for professional development opportunities in this disability area. We support general educators' and special educators' attendance at local conferences and workshops to enhance their skills in working with students on the spectrum.

- **What can we do as parents and staff when strategies conflict with policy?**

Policies and regulations support our work in the district and are put into place to ensure appropriate educational opportunities for all students. We recommend that any parent who is concerned about practices and strategies inside of the classroom, use a conflict resolution approach. You can start by calling the Parent Professional Partnership to learn how to affectively follow the correct steps. We will recommend that you speak first with the teacher. If that conversation does not result in necessary changes, enlist the help of the case manager. If issues are still not resolved, discuss with the principal or special education coordinator from the district office. Good communication between teacher and parent helps alleviate many issues.

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TEACHER TRAINING & FUNDING

General question: Are general education and sped teachers getting adequate training to provide services in classrooms?

- **Are we providing Special Education training for Para Educators?**

Although substitute teachers are often included in district-level training that happens during full-day training, substitute teachers are often used as general education teachers and special education teachers while the trainings are held. We also provide substitutes with an IEP at a glance and critical information on students with special needs.

There is a small pool of special education para-floaters who are trained to work with students who have significant support needs... Unfortunately they cannot always meet all of the needs on any given day.

- **How will we fund teachers who are also taking on students without IEPs? (Staff at my school were cut because lower numbers of students were being identified).**

First of all, the statement in parenthesis is incorrect. No staff was cut as a result of fewer identified students. There have been consistent increases in staff at middle and elementary levels despite a 10% reduction in identified students. At the high school level, some of the comprehensive high schools saw cuts in staff simply because more and more students are choosing to use the other high school options, and special education services follow those students to the new schools. We are collecting data regarding the number of students being served through the RTI model and that data will be incorporated during the allocation process.

- **How do parents and students access the sped staff especially with more inclusion (who is the point person for parents and students to go to?)**

Parents should direct communication through the case managers or classroom teachers. Generally speaking, the case manager is the point person for parents and students.

Principals are also available to answer specific questions.

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CSAP

General Question: How is BVSD going to close the achievement gap for students in special education?

- **Do special education CSAP scores negatively affect school scores?**

Student scores on CSAP affect school scores. Whether students are identified for special education services or not, poor scores impact school scores. Despite the fact that students in special education are more impacted than in years past, CSAP scores for students with special needs have remained stable and continue to outpace the scores of other districts.

- **Is it better to have my student not take CSAP? (CSAPA is too easy and the regular CSAP would put a lot of stress on the student and have detrimental results).**

It is better to have your student take CSAP. It is also important that your student receives the accommodations identified on his/her IEP. Often students perform better than anticipated. However, a parent can legally opt out of the testing if it is thought that the testing will be detrimental to the student's well-being.

- **What is being done to provide meaningful CSAP testing for students who are above needing the CSAPA but can not complete regular CSAP even with support?**

The IEP team should work to carefully identify those accommodations that assist students in accessing the general curriculum and therefore CSAP

Due to State regulations, we currently only have the two CSAPs available.