

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 149

EC 306 523

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 TITLE Special Education Program Evaluation: 1996-97.  
 INSTITUTION Des Moines Public Schools, IA.  
 PUB DATE 1997-12-00  
 NOTE 43p.  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*Disabilities; Educational Finance; Educational Objectives;  
 Elementary Secondary Education; Financial Support;  
 Individualized Education Programs; Program Evaluation;  
 Public Schools; School Districts; \*Special Education;  
 Teaching Models  
 IDENTIFIERS \*Des Moines Public Schools IA

ABSTRACT

This evaluation report presents data on the special education program in the Des Moines (Iowa) public schools. The school district's mission statement is followed by a context evaluation, which finds that more than 8,000 Des Moines students receive special education services on either a daily or short-term basis throughout the year. Also noted is a contractual arrangement that enables the district to employ its own support personnel. A section on input evaluation finds three primary sources for funding special education in the district: the state weighted funding formula, the Area Education Agency support dollars, and federal funds. Revenue for the 1996-97 school year totaled over \$42 million. The section on process evaluation notes the variety of service delivery models used to meet students' identified educational needs and the annual development of overall program goals to improve district programming to ensure compliance with state and federal law. The section on product evaluation finds all students in special education have individualized education programs (IEPs) and that efficacy of special education is measured by consumer satisfaction surveys, a review of IEPs, and the district's special education withdrawal rate. Finally, future plans include better student progress monitoring, evaluation of program efficacy, upgrading the work force, and a change to a problem solving/interventions model of service delivery. A diagram of this model is appended. (DB)

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ED 420 149

# SPECIAL EDUCATION

## PROGRAM EVALUATION 1996-97

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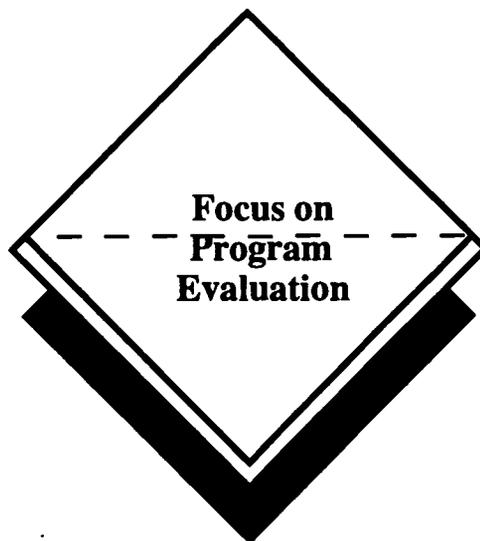
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**Des Moines, Iowa 50309-3399**

**December, 1997**



EC 366523

# **Special Education**

## **Evaluation Abstract**

### **Context Evaluation**

Approximately 4,225 Des Moines students receive special education instructional and support services on a daily basis. These students are enrolled in programs designed to meet the unique needs of students with behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, mental disabilities, speech/language disorders, hearing impairments, physical disabilities and visual impairments. Throughout the year, an additional 4,000 students receive some form of short-term special education service.

A contractual arrangement with Heartland Area Education Agency 11, enables the Des Moines Public Schools to employ its own support personnel including physical therapists, occupational therapists, work experience coordinators, itinerant vision teachers, speech-language pathologists, consultants, school social workers, and school psychologists. These personnel provide vital services to students with special needs enrolled in public or non-public schools. Services are also provided to other students through consultation with school staff and direct work with students and families as needs arise. As required by law, each student receiving special education services has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that addresses specific educational needs and any identified support services.

### **Input Evaluation**

There are three primary sources for funding special education instructional and support services. They include the state weighted funding formula, Area Education Agency (AEA) support dollars, and federal funds. Revenue generated during 1996-97 school year totaled \$42,783,210. These revenues support human resources, materials, equipment and transportation expenditures. Human resources consists of 374.7 special education teachers, 346.3 associates, 128.8 special education instructional support staff, 8 special education administrators, 4 special school administrators, 3 deans of students, 2 specialists, and 8 secretaries for a total of 874.8 staff.

### **Process Evaluation**

The purpose of special education is to provide specialized instructional and support services to students with disabilities. This is accomplished by serving students in a variety of service delivery models designed to meet identified educational needs. Special Education develops goals on an annual basis to improve district programming and assure compliance with state and federal laws.

### **Product Evaluation**

All students in special education have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed to meet their unique needs. The diversity of students served by special education programs makes it difficult to provide concise data relative to outcomes. Efficacy of special education programs is measured by consumer satisfaction surveys, a review of IEPs, and the district's special education withdrawal rate. Several accomplishments, primarily related to the Neighborhood Schools initiative are also summarized.

### **Future Planning**

Plans for improvement include implementing and expanding the concepts incorporated in the Neighborhood Schools initiative. In addition, efforts will be made to increase collaboration with regular education and with community agencies. Other future plans include: studying the efficacy of new service delivery models, developing a system that includes all special education students in district assessment, maintaining current funding levels and, working with the Department of Education in implementing the new Rules of Special Education and amended Individuals With Disabilities Education (IDEA) regulations.

A copy of the complete report is available upon request from the Department of School Improvement and Employee Relations, Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1800 Grand Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa 50309-3399. Telephone: 515/242-7836. All evaluation reports are submitted to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Educational Research Service (ERS).

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

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**December, 1997**

**DISTRICT MISSION STATEMENT**

**DES MOINES INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
DES MOINES IOWA**

**"THE DES MOINES INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT WILL  
PROVIDE A QUALITY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM TO A DIVERSE  
COMMUNITY OF STUDENTS WHERE ALL ARE EXPECTED TO LEARN."**

**DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

**"THE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION WILL PROVIDE  
SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES  
TO MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES."**

## CONTEXT EVALUATION

### History

The Des Moines Public Schools has had a long and exemplary history of providing instructional and support services to students with disabilities. Most of the program development in the field of special education has been evolutionary and has reflected the political philosophy of the times. Today, special education programs and services are provided in all of the Des Moines Public Schools as well as to non-public school students.

### Historical Perspective

- 1900s - 1920s Program for students with mental disabilities  
"Visiting teacher" program (predecessors to social workers)
- 1930s "Speech correctionists" (predecessors to speech-language pathologists)  
Smouse Opportunity School - served students with physical disabilities and health impairments
- 1940s Physical therapy initiated  
"Developmental classes" for elementary students with mild mental disabilities  
Psychological services initiated
- 1950s Slinker School - programs for students with severe mental disabilities  
North High School - vocational work-study program  
Hospital programs developed
- 1960s Orchard Place and Des Moines Child Guidance Center - contract to provide programs for students with behavioral disorders  
Instructional programs developed and expanded for students with learning, behavioral, hearing, vision, and mental disabilities  
Increased judicial involvement on behalf of parents and advocacy groups  
Special education State law revised
- 1970s Section 504 Rehabilitation Act  
Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142)  
Area Education Agencies (AEA) developed  
Significant expansion and growth of special education programs and services  
Ruby Van Meter School opened  
Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) developed  
Autism programs developed
- 1980s Building Intervention Cadres (BIC) initiated  
Transitioning Youth to Employment (TYE) initiated at Central Campus  
Building accessibility studies undertaken
- 1990s P.L. 94-142 amended to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA P.L. 101-476) mandated programs for students with autism, traumatic brain injured and transition services for all special education students  
Renewed Service Delivery System (RSDS) - initiative by State of Iowa to pilot innovative practices  
Special Education in Neighborhood Schools - initiative to serve special education students to their neighborhood school  
Use of Assistive Technology for students with unique physical and instructional needs  
Iowa Special Education Rules revised July, 1995  
IDEA Amendments of 1997--P.L. 105-17

While the passage of P.L. 94-142, accompanied by subsequent legislation and judicial interpretation, provided the legal impetus for growth, the role of dedicated parents and many advocacy groups must be emphasized. Innovative and dedicated special education staff have also contributed significantly to the evolution and refinement of special education programming.

### **Governing Policies, Standards and Regulations**

In order to comply with the laws that regulate the provision of special education instructional programs and support services it is necessary to have complete familiarity with state, federal and case law that relates to special education. Brief descriptions of the policies, standards and regulations that affect special education services are provided below.

Special education instructional and support services are governed by regulations found in P.L. 105-17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These regulations require that all students, regardless of the severity or type of disability, receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) and that this education be with non-disabled children to the maximum extent appropriate (Sec. 121a.550). A continuum of placements from full-time regular education to special schools must be available. Support services are defined as "...transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a disabled child to benefit from special education..." (Sec. 121a.13). Guiding the provision of any service to children are specific due process procedures insuring that parents are full partners in all decisions regarding evaluation and placement (Sec. 121a.500).

An outline of the pertinent legislation is provided below.

#### **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

- Prohibits discrimination against handicapped in employment
- Prohibits exclusion of handicapped from federally assisted programs
- Requires building accessibility for handicapped
- Requires non-discrimination in schools

#### **Education of All Handicapped Children of 1975(P.L. 94-142)**

- Mandates free appropriate education (FAPE)
- Mandates least restrictive environment (LRE)
- Mandates Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Mandates procedural safeguards

#### **Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act (P.L. 98-524)**

- Mandates equal access to vocational programming
- Requires vocational assessment
- Requires curriculum adaptation
- Requires counseling services

#### **Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-457)**

- Mandates special education services for all 3-5 year olds
- Requires instruction for parents
- Provides voluntary participation to serve infants, toddlers and families (birth-2).

#### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1991 (P.L. 101-476)**

- Amends P.L. 94-142
- Includes autism and traumatic brain injury
- Includes transition services

## **IDEA Amendments of 1997--P.L. 105-17**

Significant amendments to evaluations, re-evaluations, eligibility determinations, IEP teams, IEP goals, goals for behavioral needs, alternative educational settings, manifestation determination, reporting suspensions and expulsions by race and ethnicity.

### **"Rules of Special Education" Code of Iowa 281, Ch. 41 (July, 1995)**

Provides definitions, levels of service, class size, support services, licensure, transportation, tuition students, special schools provision, evaluation and identification, facilities, finance and appeal procedures, confidentiality of information, IEP, parent participation and compliance

### **"Manual of Policies and Procedures, Special Education, Des Moines Public Schools"**

Provides referral/staffing procedures, guidelines for programs and services, three year reviews, least restrictive environment, facilities, evaluation, IEP, record keeping, confidentiality, procedural safeguards, graduation and post school plans.

## **Program Description**

### Overview

Des Moines Independent School District serves students ages birth to 21 as identified and described in the Rules of Special Education. Student needs range from those requiring accommodations or other support in the regular classroom to students served full time in special education classrooms or special school settings. Disabilities and needs of students vary across the district and within buildings. Therefore, the specific design of special education instruction varies according to the individual needs of students enrolled in a given school.

Students are educated in general education programs with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible with support, such as accommodations, collaboration, team-teaching, and consultation. General educators and special educators collaborate regularly to meet the needs of these special education students. The goals of collaboration include addressing the student's learning style, emphasizing student strengths, and planning for instructional methods, such as cooperative learning, which will enhance the likelihood of successful learning within the general education environment.

It is useful to think of special education students as falling into one of three distinct groups. The first and largest group consists of those special education students who participate in the general curriculum for the vast majority of their day. These students receive the same course content as general education students but may also receive tutorial or remedial assistance with curriculum modifications and/or adaptations.

The second group consists of students who spend part of their day in a traditional classroom setting, but for whom significant modification to the general curriculum must be made. These students often receive parallel instruction designed by the special education teacher. This instruction is based on the general curriculum's goals and objectives, but is specifically modified to meet the individual needs of the student.

Group three consists of students with significant impairments for whom the general education curriculum is not relative to their life goals. For these students, special education focuses on the development of a wide range of skills that cannot be perceived as traditional academics. Specific instruction in areas such as independent living, functional academics, work experience and social skills are of primary importance.

### Instructional Methods

Each student enrolled in a special education program must meet state and federal eligibility guidelines and must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as required by law. The IEP is developed on at least an annual basis by the parent, regular education teacher, special education teacher, building administrator, an individual who can interpret evaluations, and the child, when appropriate. The IEP includes: (1) a statement of the child's present level of educational performance; (2) a statement of annual goals in each area of need, as well as short-term objectives; (3) a statement indicating which special education and related support service will be provided; (4) a specific indication of the extent to which the child will participate in the regular education program; (5) a projection of the dates services will be initiated and anticipated duration of services; (6) a statement or procedure for annual evaluation of the objectives and goals; and (7) a post-school plan for a student age 14 or older.

Special education programs are designed to foster the development and growth of students who have not been successful in regular education programs. The instructional methods utilized by special education teachers are as varied as the students they serve. Educational information is assessed, individual needs are identified and an IEP is developed prior to special education placement. Effort is made to match instructional strategies to student learning styles. Instructional methods that are used include: individualized instruction, small and large group learning, prescriptive teaching, cooperative learning, computer-assisted instruction, and behavior management.

### Disability Categories

Twelve disability categories have been established by the State Rules of Special Education (Education (281) - 41.5). They are: (1) Autism; (2) Behaviorally Disordered; (3) Communication Disability; (4) Deaf-blindness; (5) Deafness; (6) Head Injury; (7) Hearing Impairment; (8) Learning Disability; (9) Mental Disability; (10) Orthopedic Impairment; (11) Other Health Impairment; (12) Visual Impairment including Blindness. The complete definitions of these twelve disability categories are included in the state rules, and can also be found in the district's Manual of Policies and Procedures for Special Education.

### Levels of Special Education Services

Three levels of special education services are provided in accordance with the state rules of Special Education (Education (281)-41.132(9)) and include:

**Level I:** A level of service that provides specially designed instruction for a limited portion or part of the educational program. A majority of the general education program is appropriate. This level of service includes modifications and adaptations to the general education program.

**Level II:** A level of service that provides specially designed instruction for a majority of the educational program. This level of service includes substantial modifications, adaptations, and special education accommodations to the general education program.

**Level III:** A level of service that provides specially designed instruction for most or all of the educational program. This level of service requires extensive redesign of curriculum and substantial modification of instructional techniques, strategies and materials.

### Service Delivery Model

The Iowa Rules of Special Education (July, 1995) provide two options for the delivery of special education services. One option is to continue with the provision of services through the traditional models (e.g. resource, special class with integration, etc.) The second option allows districts to offer alternative ways of meeting the needs of students identified for special education. With this option, districts must submit a detailed description of their plan (District Developed Delivery System) to their AEA. This plan is typically a set of individual building plans which address all of the content components required by the state.

Consistent with the Neighborhood School concept included in our District Improvement Plan, Des Moines has selected this second option. The philosophy of our Neighborhood Schools Service Delivery Model is as follows:

To the maximum extent possible all students with disabilities are educated with non-disabled peers in their neighborhood school. A 'neighborhood school' is best defined as the school a student would attend if he/she did not have a special education need. The following philosophy is supported by the district:

Every child with special education needs should attend his or her neighborhood school UNLESS the staffing team, through the IEP, identifies specific instructional or support needs that cannot be provided in that environment, even with reasonable accommodations.

Due to the size of the Des Moines district, general service parameters and responses to the state required questions have been delineated in the District Developed Delivery System. However, to allow individual buildings flexibility, the staff of individual buildings were asked to provide building specific information. This process enables buildings to provide services which meet the unique needs of the students served within their neighborhood. These individual Building Plans are available through the Department of Student Services or at each building.

### **Enrollment**

As of December 1996, 13.2% of the district's enrollment, or a total of 4,225 Des Moines students were identified as needing some type of special education instruction. Of that total, 3,894 students received service in Des Moines while 331 were tuitioned out to other districts as the result of placement by the Department of Human Services in residential facilities or foster homes. Table I on the following page lists the December, 1996 enrollment count by level/weighted factor and program.

**Table I**

**DES MOINES SPECIAL EDUCATION ENROLLMENT BY  
LEVEL/WEIGHTED FACTOR AND PROGRAM MODEL**

**DECEMBER 1996**

	Level I		Level II	Level III		Total
	RM/RC 1.7	SI/SM 1.7	CC 2.4	CS 3.6	SP 3.6	
High	478	194	250	105	0	1027
Middle	536	193	236	54	0	1019
Elementary	752	238	430	147	9	1576
Special Schools	1	2	8	412	83	506
Other Programs	16	10	19	52	0	97
Subtotal by Level	2,420		943	862		4,225
<b>Total Sp. Ed.</b>	<b>1,783</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>770</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>4,225 *</b>

Key to Levels and Programs:

	Level I	Level II	Level III
Program	RC - Resource	CC - Self Contained	CS - Self Contained, severe
Model	RM - Resource Multicategorical		SP - Severe and Profound
	SI - Special Class With Integration		
	SM - Special Class with Integration Multicategorical		

\* These figures do not include tuition in students or individuals receiving speech and language services only.

In addition, throughout the 1996-97 school year 1,588 students received speech/language services (681 of these students were not enrolled in any other special education program) and 304 students were tuitioned into weighted special education programs from other districts. An additional 700 Des Moines students and 1100 tuition-in students received short-term services in psychiatric residential or hospital diagnostic classrooms within Des Moines.

**Neighborhood Schools Initiative**

The Neighborhood Schools Initiative was formally started in 1991 but was a natural outgrowth of the initiatives and best practices begun well before then. It has now evolved into the driving force of our current service delivery system. As such, it represents not just the effort to serve special education students in their neighborhood school to the fullest extent possible, but also encompasses a number of changes in our special education instruction, identification process, support staff services, and administrative structure.

Instruction

The Neighborhood Schools Initiative represents: (1) the move away from geographically clustered disability-specific programs to more flexible service delivery models which allow individual buildings to develop services based on the needs of their neighborhood students; and (2) the move to more multicategorical services which emphasize the blending of building resources, increased collaboration, and shared decision-making. At the same time it also represents and promotes the maintenance of a full continuum of services including special schools and settings for students who need that level of service.

### Identification

The move to neighborhood schools represents the move away from the establishment of disability labels and programs to a more functional problem-solving assessment model which focuses on the provision of appropriate interventions and services as part of the ongoing instructional process.

### Support Services

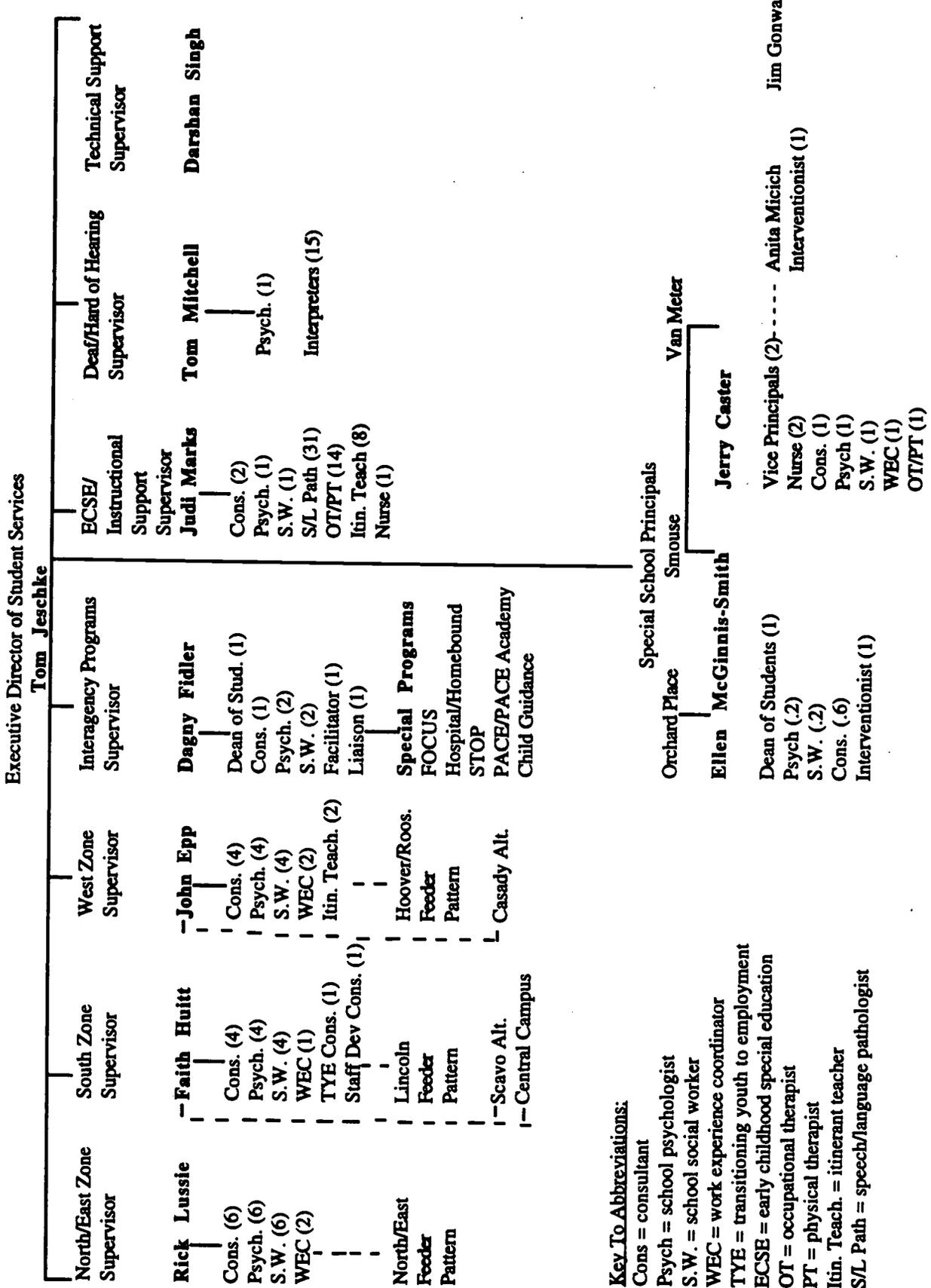
A wide variety of support services are provided by over 150 support personnel. These specialists are assigned to schools within a specific geographical area or zone. The major organizational change in the provision of support services brought about by the Neighborhood Schools Initiative has allowed more flexible inter-disciplinary teaming and collaboration. Support Services staff include the following positions: school psychologists, social workers, consultants, work experience coordinators, speech-language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, early childhood interventionists, special school nurses, itinerant teachers for the visually impaired, parent educators, interventionists for students with autism and challenging behaviors, and sign-language interpreters. Job descriptions for these important personnel can be found in the Process section of this report.

### Administrative Restructuring

The Neighborhood Schools Initiative, which was fully implemented in 1996, resulted in the formal restructuring of all aspects of the special education department. The district is now divided into four special education zones; the south zone, the west zone, the north/east zone, and the special schools/ interagency programs zone. A special education supervisor has been assigned to each zone to provide direction to several interdisciplinary teams of psychologists, social workers, consultants, and work experience coordinators. Three special education supervisors continue to provide district-wide supervision in the areas of early childhood special education, speech and language services, deaf and hard of hearing services and technical support. This restructuring has enhanced efficiency and enabled teams to provide better services to buildings, children, and families within the district.

Table II on the following page represents the overall restructuring that has occurred through the neighborhood schools initiative.

Table II  
Department of Student Services  
Special Education Division



Special Education Supervisors provide direction and support to building administration and instructional staff in the provision of special education services.

## **Operational Goals**

The Department of Special Education is guided by the following goals:

1. Assist classroom teachers in the implementation of effective early intervention strategies for students experiencing problems in the regular classroom which affect learning.
2. Involve parents as part of the decision-making team for special education students.
3. Modify the learning environment through collaborative efforts with regular educators.
4. Consider and recommend education in the least restrictive environment.
5. Develop and implement a quality IEP for all special education students to assist them in realizing their potential.
6. Provide comprehensive academic, vocational education and support services.
7. Develop collaborative relationships with community agencies.
8. Provide transition planning for all special education students to assist them in adjusting to adult community living.
9. Assist students and teachers by participating in a team problem solving approach.
10. Support building efforts in the implementation of site-based management, school improvement, and the Neighborhood Schools Initiative.

## INPUT EVALUATION

### Budget

During the 1996-97 school year, the district received \$42,783,210 for special education instructional and support services. The sources of revenue were primarily weighted state dollars, state/AEA flow-through dollars and various federal funds. A breakdown of the specific revenue sources is found on Table III below. \*

Table III  
Revenue  
1996-97

State Funds through AEA 11	\$5,834,900
Federal Part B	1,383,014
Federal 619	198,600
Federal Part H	83,653
Parent-Educator Connection Project	15,000
Weighted Budget	32,643,301
<u>Tuition In</u>	<u>2,624,742</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$42,783,210</b>

As in years past, the actual expenditures for special education programs exceeded revenues. During the 1996-97 school year expenditures were \$1,055,350 or 2.47% over revenues. This is a state wide phenomenon which has occurred since 1987 when the state changed its special education funding structure to reduce spending at the state level. Due to state and federal requirements, the program need for those expenditures remained and the cost has had to be absorbed by local school districts. Currently, districts are able to recoup the overages through the cash reserve property tax levy which must be approved by the state.

Table IV  
Expenditures  
1996-97

	AEA	Federal	State Weighted	Total
Salaries	\$4,284,842	\$1,293,426	\$17,308,272	\$22,886,540
Benefits	1,207,620	360,775	5,723,890	7,291,985
Travel	39,302	13,300	5,519	58,121
Transportation	-----	-----	842,506	842,506
Purchased Services **	64,849	2,070	1,728,396	1,795,315
Supplies / Materials	39,809	8,254	306,520	354,583
Equipment	48,166	1,846	85,252	135,264
Facility Management	-----	-----	270,016	270,016
Indirect Costs	<u>150,000</u>	-----	<u>9,663,190</u>	<u>9,813,190</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,834,588</b>	<b>\$1,679,671</b>	<b>\$36,324,301</b>	<b>\$43,838,560</b>

\* Phase II money is not included in Revenue or Expenditures

\*\* \$1,659,694 of this total is tuition-out expenses

## Human Resources

The Department of Student Services, Division of Special Education, currently employs a total full time equivalency staff of 874.8. The following is a breakdown by position type.

<u>Position</u>	<u>Full Time Equivalent</u>
Special Education Administrators	8.0
Special School Administrators	4.0
Deans of Students	3.0
Teachers	374.7
Associates	346.3
Speech-Language Pathologists	27.0
Occupational and Physical Therapists	13.9
Consultants	19.5
Early Interventionists (Birth - three years old)	7.1
Autism and Challenging Behaviors Interventionists	2.2
Social Workers	17.9
Psychologists	18.0
Nurses	6.1
Work Experience Coordinators	6.0
Itinerant Teacher for the Visually Impaired	.8
Neighborhood School Coordinator	1.0
Hospital Homebound Teachers/Associates	8.3
Parent Educators	1.0
Specialists	2.0
<u>Clerical</u>	<u>8.0</u>
<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>874.8</b>

## **Inservice and Staff Development**

Many inservice and staff development opportunities are offered to special education and general education staff members. The vast majority are offered during the contract day and are provided at no additional cost to the district. These opportunities are listed in the Process Evaluation section of this report. Four programs which encompass considerable planning and extensive training required a special budget for the 1996-97 school year. They include the following:

Autism Training (Project TEACCH)	\$10,000
Sign Language Training	2,000
Reading Curriculum--Hearing Impaired	1,000
Neighborhood Schools Staff Development	<u>22,000</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$35,000</b>

## **Instructional Supplies and Materials**

Special education instructional programs use many of the same textbooks and materials as used in general education programs. Special education students are included in districtwide textbook adoptions. Alternative textbooks, supplemental materials, and specialized adaptive materials are purchased with special education weighted dollars. These are utilized to supplement the district curriculum and are tailored to meet the various needs and learning styles of students. The funds to purchase these materials (\$296,520) are allocated on a per pupil basis to individual schools. Schools are given the latitude to determine how expenditures of these funds should be made. In 1996-97 an additional \$16,000 was provided to support the district's new reading adoption. In 1997-98 another \$27,000 was again provided to purchase additional reading materials. These materials are used to support the inclusion of special education students in the general education reading curriculum. Textbooks and materials addressing daily living skills, social skills, career/vocational skills and functional academic skills, are used with students who need alternative curriculum offerings. Specialized textbooks and adaptive materials are also provided for use with severe disabilities students who are deaf or hard of hearing, visually impaired or physically disabled.

## **Equipment and Assistive Technology**

Most students participating in special education use the same furniture and equipment as other students in the district. When called for in the IEP, "adaptive equipment" is provided to students with unique physical and instructional needs. Approximately \$65,000 was used in 1996-97.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandate, the district is responsible for providing any assistive technology a student needs to meet goals and objectives specified in the IEP. This may include such devices as a Speech Viewer for deaf students, telecommunication devices, captioning equipment, Braille printers, special chairs, micro switches, augmentative communication devices, amplification equipment, and specialized vocational assessment equipment. As access to technology has improved, additional students continue to be identified as needing assistive technology. Last year, approximately \$40,000 was spent on assistive devices. The assistive technology team also purchased over \$10,000 of equipment to use in assessments and for trial placement with students with assistive technology needs.

## **Interagency Programs**

Des Moines Public Schools provides many education programs for students in conjunction with the following community agencies: Broadlawns Hospital, Lutheran Hospital, Iowa Methodist Medical Center, New Beginnings, Des Moines Child Guidance Center, Orchard Place Residential Center, PACE, FOCUS, Mercy Franklin, the Department of Human Services, and the Juvenile Court. Those community agencies provide appropriate classroom space, plant maintenance services, and a significant portion of the furniture and equipment necessary for effective classroom operation. The district provides the instructional components of the program at a cost of over \$2 million.

## **Parent Training**

The district participates in the Parent Education Connection program which is facilitated through a \$15,000 Heartland AEA grant. Three parents are employed on a part-time basis to disseminate information and provide problem-solving assistance to families and special educators. Parent Educators have been able to assist in resolving conflicts that may have proceeded to litigation. In addition, special training is provided to parents of children with disabilities. Services range from individualized problem solving training to group instruction in areas of general interest.

# PROCESS EVALUATION

## Job Descriptions

The Department of Education has defined specific education positions that the Area Education Agencies (AEA) and local districts may employ to deliver or support teaching and learning for students with disabilities. The following job descriptions illustrate the broad range of services provided by the Department of Students Services in instructional or support of students with disabilities. (See Table II, Context section, page 9)

**Executive Director of Student Services/Director of Special Education:** plans and organizes the type and location of special education services needed throughout the district; develops the special education budget to maximize the district's financial resources; provides leadership and support which fosters the development and implementation of new and innovative special education services; serves as a liaison between the Des Moines Public Schools and Heartland AEA 11 Division of Special Education; evaluates the district's special education programs to determine the short and long term goals of the Special Education Department; and oversees the management of the departments of Guidance and Counseling and Health Services.

**Special Education Supervisors:** plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the services for students in special education; plan and manage specific budgets; provide leadership and support to special education teachers and support staff in the implementation of services for students with special education needs; serve as a liaison between the Des Moines Public Schools and community agencies, Heartland AEA 11 and the State of Iowa Department of Education in all matters pertaining to special education programming in Des Moines; and provide direction and support to the parents of students with special needs.

**Principals and Vice Principals - Special Schools,** along with building principals, are responsible for the management of the building and providing instructional leadership necessary to meet the individual needs of each student in the building. Each principal, in conjunction with their staff, is responsible for developing a Building Plan that addresses service needs for special education students.

**Deans of Students - Special Schools** are responsible for working with parents and staff in supporting curriculum, instruction and behavior management plans. They assist the principal in developing and implementing special education services.

**Special Education Teachers** possess a working knowledge of curriculum and methods for individualizing instruction. They are responsible for determining individual student needs through assessment and collaboration with other professionals. They are also responsible for providing direct instruction to students with special needs and collaborating with general educators in monitoring student progress for mainstreamed students.

**Consultants** provide direct ongoing support to special education instructional programs. They are involved in planning, staff development, curriculum development, methodology, and consultation to administrative and instructional personnel regarding services to special needs students.

**Interventionists** serve as a resource to buildings for students with autism and challenging behaviors. They work closely with multi-disciplinary teams to serve students in their neighborhood school and assist staff to accommodate students returning from special schools.

**Occupational Therapists** provide evaluative and therapeutic services to students in the areas of fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination, self-help skills, activities of daily living, and gait. They are responsible for working with students and staff in order to facilitate student progress.

Physical Therapists provide evaluative and therapeutic services to students in the areas of gross motor skills, mobility, and positioning. They are responsible for working with students and staff in order to facilitate student progress.

School Psychologists assist in the identification of needs regarding behavioral, social, emotional, and educational functioning of pupils; consult with school personnel and parents regarding planning, implementing and evaluating individual and group interventions; and provide counseling services for parents, students and families.

School Social Workers provide the necessary social services to complement the building's total educational program; assist building personnel to become familiar with the services available and the procedures to request them; and serve as liaisons to appropriate community agencies and services; and provide counseling services for parents, students and families.

Speech-Language Pathologists provide a program of clinical speech/language services necessary for identifying, planning, coordinating and implementing remediation, within the total educational framework, according to the individual needs of pupils educationally handicapped by deficits in oral communication.

Itinerant Vision Teacher is responsible for providing students with the necessary materials and training in order to participate in regular school programs. This person must also work closely with regular education staff to facilitate this process.

Work Experience Coordinators provide support and assistance to instructional staff in developing and maintaining vocational instruction. They initiate contacts with employers to develop job sites and to supervise students at work. Work experience coordinators confer with students, teachers, parents, school personnel, and community agencies to coordinate vocational services.

Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant works under the direction of the occupational therapists to provide direct therapeutic services to students, makes adaptive devices or adaptations to equipment, and keeps therapists informed of student progress.

Communication Associates assist in carrying out the goals of the program by working with certain students who have articulation, language, voice or fluency disorders, under the supervision of the speech-language pathologist.

Itinerant Associate is responsible for carrying out instructional programs designed by therapists such as typing and computer skills to assist students in regular classroom participation.

Sign Language Interpreters translate the spoken word into the language of signs for deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream settings. They are also responsible for orally interpreting the signs of deaf students.

Special Education Associates provide assistance to special education programs and students under the direction of a certified teacher. Additional special education associates are assigned to the transportation department to assist students on school buses.

## **Entitlement**

A systematic problem-solving model is being piloted to determine entitlement for special education services. This process is consistent with the Iowa Department of Education's emphasis on early intervention, functional assessment, collaboration and systematic progress monitoring as outlined in the new state rules for special education. The model, which is being piloted in elementary schools, focuses on the provision of appropriate interventions and services rather than the establishment of a disability label and program placement. The convergence of assessment results, intervention data and professional judgment guides decision making.

The Neighborhood Schools Problem Solving Model consists of four stages. The majority of students will begin at Stage I. However a limited number of cases may, due to the intensity of the problem and the amount of resources needed to solve the problem, enter at another stage. The model emphasizes assisting students, families and teachers within the context of the ongoing instructional process and least restrictive environment. The process begins when concerns are expressed by teachers, parents, counselors, school nurses, principals, community providers or others having direct contact with students.

Stage I involves teacher-parent collaboration, Stage II involves the assistance of other school resources such as Building Intervention Cadres (BIC), grade level teams or community resources. Stage III involves the formal assistance by the special education multi-disciplinary team to determine whether the student is eligible for and needs special education services. Stage IV consists of ongoing problem solving which occurs during the provision of special education services.

An important feature is that the model is founded on the firm belief that effective problem solving focuses on identifying and building upon specific strengths and assets as well as identifying and addressing needs and deficits. A second feature is that the problem solving sequence utilized within all four stages is the same. This sequence utilizes the acronym "I.D.E.A.L." and involves the following five steps: (1) Identify the concern; (2) Define the problem; (3) Explore and select intervention strategies; (4) Act on the plan and monitor progress; and (5) Look at the results and determine next steps. While the "I.D.E.A.L." sequence is used at all four stages, it moves from informal consultation to more formalized planning as the problem solving efforts progress through the four stages.

It should also be noted that effective problem solving is not simply a school-based activity. For many students and families the problems and challenges extend beyond the school boundaries into the community. The process should involve all key service providers and advocates for the child and family and focus on developing a total school/community support network. (See Appendix A, page 36 for an illustration of "The Neighborhood Schools Problem Solving Model")

## **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

Once it is determined that a student is eligible for and needs special education services, an IEP is developed for each student as required by law. The IEP represents the student's instructional program and identifies student strengths, needed modifications or accommodations, post school plans and areas of instructional concern. These areas are stated in terms of goals and measurable objectives. In addition, goals and objectives are also developed for related support services such as speech and language services, occupational / physical therapy, and transportation. The IEP is developed on at least an annual basis.

## **Neighborhood School Initiative**

After approval of the neighborhood school initiative for special education students by the superintendent's cabinet, it was adopted by the school board on July 11, 1995. The districtwide steering committee developed nine sub-committees to develop an action plan. These committees were: 1) elementary personnel allocation; 2) secondary personnel allocation; 3) resource allocation; 4) elementary models and instructional delivery; 5) secondary models and instructional delivery; 6) marketing; 7) transportation ; 8) special education building plans; and 9) space allocation. Each committee had representation from across the district and made their recommendations to validation panels. A number of changes in organizational structure, materials and equipment ordering, and service delivery were made which fostered the implementation of serving special education students to their neighborhood school. (Sub-committee reports, 1995-96, are available in the Department of Student Services.)

### **Building Plans**

To insure that needed services can be provided, each building has developed a special education instructional delivery plan as part of the Neighborhood School Initiative. The building plan includes (1) availability of unique services; (2) building mission statement; (3) building structure and organization; (4) accommodations and modifications within general education; (5) student identification process; (6) collaboration between general and special education; (7) blending special education services with other programs; (8) demographics; (9) special education service delivery; (10) caseload monitoring; (11) placement decisions; (12) evaluation plans; (13) staff development needs; and (14) process used to develop the plan. Building plans are available in Student Services or at each building.

### **Monitoring Services**

Formal monitoring of special education services are accomplished through compliance visitations conducted by Heartland AEA 11. Due to its size, one-third of the district's special education programs are reviewed each year. These visitations focus on adherence to standards, policies and regulations. Personnel are interviewed, and audits are completed on a random sample of individual students. In addition, the following topics are reviewed:

1. Prereferral activities that building level staff and the Child Study Teams conduct to assist the regular classroom teachers maintain students in their classroom
2. The IEP developed for each child served by special education instructional and support personnel
3. The placement of each pupil into the least restrictive environment based upon their needs
4. The degree to which parents are actively involved with identification, evaluation, and placement.
5. The degree to which facilities and availability of appropriate materials affect the services
6. The professional development activities which each staff member had been involved in during the current year

Compliance Reviews are available in Student Services.

In addition to formalized systems monitoring, the Department of Student Services has also participated in addressing other factors that monitor services by collecting data on withdrawal rates, post graduate employment rates, parent satisfaction surveys, adult adjustment ratings and juvenile court referrals.

Individual student progress is a major focal point for special education services monitoring. Traditional measures of growth include standardized, norm-referenced or grade level assessments that address academic functioning. While this traditional approach may monitor the growth of some special education students who participate in the general education curriculum, it clearly is not applicable to students with other identified special education needs. Monitoring the progress of a very diverse special education population is becoming increasingly complex. In addition to IEP progress monitoring, recent amendments to IDEA require that students with disabilities be included in state and districtwide assessments by July, 1998, and in alternative assessments by July, 2000. During the 1997-98 school year the district will be working with the Iowa Bureau of Special Education, Heartland AEA 11, and the Department of School Improvement to further address the assessment of special education students.

### Staff Development/Training Efforts

Over the last three years, a wide variety of inservice options were made available to district staff through the Department of Student Services. A primary focus of each of the opportunities was accountability through the assessment of student progress. Topics were selected based on needs identified by district staff and requests from individuals or groups for specific training. Training was provided through discipline and zone meetings, classes, seminars, workshops, conferences, and conventions.

Special education teachers, regular classroom teachers, Student Services support staff, and others participated in a variety of inservice activities to increase their knowledge and skills. Table V below is a chart of training activities over the past three years with the number and discipline of staff trained as well as the outcomes from the training.

Table V  
Training Activities

Inservice	Number of Participants	Expected Improvement
Dynamic Assessment a. Survey Level Procedures b. Potential for Change c. Evaluation and Decision Making	30 30 30	Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) will be better able to functionally assess speech and language skills while determining effective instructional strategies.
Performance Monitoring a. I-SEE (Pilot) b. Mastery Monitoring c. Curriculum Based Assessment	7 100 150	Teachers will be able to determine effectiveness of interventions while providing a data base for decision making.
Technology a. BoardMaker b. KE:NX c. Low tech adaptations for the classroom d. Strategies for children functioning at young levels	35 10 40 60	Teachers and support staff will have improved skills in meeting the needs of students who have assistive technology needs to benefit from a free and appropriate public education.
Apraxia: Treatment Ideas	30	Improved skills in improving the sound production of students with apraxia
Teach Me To Learn	30	SLPs will have improved skills in collaborating with teachers.
Collaborative Consultation	125	Improved communication and use of the collaborative approach in problem solving.

Inservice	Number of Participants	Expected Improvement
Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders	70	Improved skills in meeting the needs of students with autism and pervasive developmental disorders
Circle of Friends	70 staff 120 students	Improved assistance to students with autism to facilitate social interactions and improved social skills of these students.
Iowa Behavioral Initiative	275	Improved intervention skills of support and administrative school staff and community agency staff in working cooperatively to address the needs of students with challenging behaviors.
Medically Fragile Students and Individualized Health Plans	57	Improved skills of nurses related to developing and carrying out Health Plans
Strategies for Meeting the Social-Emotional & Behavioral needs of Kindergarten students	20	Improved skills of Extended Day Kindergarten teachers
Safe & Positive Behavior on the Bus	125	Improved strategies drivers and associates can use to handle behavior problems
Introduction to the New Reading Series	85	Improved skills of support staff in using the components of the Scholastic Reading services for special needs students
Sign Language Training	55	Improved sign language skills of staff
Awareness and Adaptations for Youngsters With Traumatic Brain Injury	40	Increased knowledge base of school staff regarding traumatic brain injury and adaptations to assist youngsters
Associate Orientation	37	Increased understanding by associates of classrooms and instructional expectations
Teacher & Paraeducators Working Collaboratively	105	Improved working relationships between staff
BIC Training	150	Improved skills of teachers in the use of support systems within the school
Developing Neighborhood School Plans	500	Improved skills of support and building staff in developing meaningful Building Plans
Project REACH (Elementary School Attendance)	48	Social Workers trained in the process used in this project
Problem Solving Assessment Model	80	Improved awareness and skills in the new process for identifying and serving students with special needs
Crisis Prevention Institute Training	120	Improve staff abilities to better handle discipline and behavior problems that arise in school
IEP Training a. New Teacher Training b. Training in new procedures and forms	78 870	a. Improved skills of new teachers in district procedures b. Improved skills of all special education staff in new requirements and procedures
Special Education for ESL Tutors	15	Improved skills to facilitate appropriate referral, behavior definition data collection, and strategy use with students who have special needs
Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)	38	Increased skills of teachers in specific reading strategies

Inservice	Number of Participants	Expected Improvement
Reading Instruction For Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students	15	Improved skills in adapting reading instruction to deaf students and to develop a progress monitoring system

### **Influence of Technology**

Technology is beginning to have an increased influence on direct and indirect service to students with disabilities. Support staff and administrators keep current on the development of technical tools and use these tools to assist students in school performance, provide record keeping, and assist with instructional programs. The forms required for the IEP in special education are available to staff on computer disks. Many staff maintain data bases of the students they serve which assists with accountability and required reporting processes.

Teaching and direct service staff use technology for instructional programs and record keeping. Typing is a unique area of instruction for students not able to write using traditional methods. Various methods and devices are available for teaching students to use computers to successfully complete required class assignments. Additionally, the district has an Assistive Technology Team to help school staff with the identification of effective technological devices to assist students with communication and/or physical disabilities. The Team works with buildings to help resolve problems with individual children. They identify an array of devices from "low tech" to "high tech" that could be used to meet student needs. The Team also assists the school and family in identifying funding sources for purchasing the device for a student that will best meet the student's needs.

Accessibility to school buildings for students with physical disabilities has significantly improved in recent years. Devices such as a stair climber have been purchased to enable students to get around multi-level buildings that would not otherwise be accessible.

## PRODUCT EVALUATION

### Accomplishments

Des Moines Public Schools mission of "providing a quality education to a diverse population of students where all are expected to learn" is perhaps best exemplified through the comprehensive special education instructional and support services provided to students with disabilities. The district's long-term commitment to special education has resulted in a comprehensive continuum of special services for students from birth to age 21 who exhibit a variety of disabilities ranging from mild to severe in nature.

Special education programs and services are driven by Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) which have been mandated by federal law since 1975. An examination of this IEP driven process provides further evidence of the strengths inherent within the special education delivery system. IEPs represent the cutting edge of education in that they: (1) focus on identifying the individual student's educational needs, learning styles, and potential; (2) focus on maximizing individual students' skills and abilities to their fullest potential; (3) encourage joint collaboration and cooperation between parents, community resources, and interdisciplinary school teams; and (4) do not rely on comparison to standardized tests and norms as primary indicators of an individual student's success or failure.

In support of the school wide mission, the district has focused attention on shared decision-making and the empowerment of individual schools for making determinations that directly affect the students they serve. This has been the focus of special education for many years with regard to the multidisciplinary team process for developing student programs. The following list of accomplishments is indicative of some of the strengths in the special education department.

#### Special Education Students Served in Neighborhood School

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that disabled students be educated in their home school whenever possible. In many urban districts across the country this mandate has been resisted because of the significant impact it would have on existing special education programs. Like many other districts, Des Moines provided special education services in categorical programs clustered throughout the city. While this delivery system worked well, it was not in keeping with the federal mandate of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Due to a growing concern about compliance with the LRE mandate, the Des Moines Public Schools implemented the neighborhood school initiative in 1994. In 1995, the District Improvement Plan included a goal which lent support to providing students educational opportunities in their neighborhood schools. The goal stated that 95 percent of special education students served in comprehensive school settings will have the opportunity to attend their neighborhood schools by fall 1997. The focus of the goal was to ensure that special education students previously enrolled in a cluster school program would have an opportunity to attend their neighborhood school. Students identified by their staffing team as needing services in a special school setting were not considered. A review conducted to determine the progress toward this goal revealed the following percentage of eligible special education students attending their neighborhood school during the fall of 1996:

High Schools	93%
Middle Schools	97%
Elementary Schools	90%
District Wide Percentage	93.3%

These percentages are reflective of the hard work that has occurred to serve students in their home school. Historically, the elementary schools had the highest percentage of special education students attending schools outside of their neighborhood. To insure educational continuity, special education students already in special programs outside of their neighborhood schools were allowed

to continue in those placements until they transitioned to the middle school setting. This allowed a gradual transition to serving elementary students in their neighborhood schools and avoided disrupting the programming of many of the students. The percentage of elementary youngsters served in their neighborhood schools increases each year as special education students move to middle school and newly identified students are served in their home school. The table below indicates progress toward this goal over the last three years:

Academic School Year	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Percentage in Neighborhood Schools	73	87	93

#### Merging Regular and Special Education Service Delivery Systems

The Iowa Department of Education's revised rules have supported the Des Moines Public Schools' focus on merging regular and special education services for students. The state rules allow for school districts and individual buildings to develop unique plans to serve their population of special education students. In 1996-97, inservice was provided to building administrators and special education support staff on how to develop a building plan. Buildings then began the process of developing and refining their unique plan to serve students. This plan becomes the framework for how the building utilizes all of its resources in meeting the needs of special education students. The plan is a working document and is modified as the needs of the building's special education population change. A review of the building plans demonstrates the following innovative service deliveries:

- co-teaching by special education and classroom teachers
- developing teams by grade level with common planning
- organizing special education classes by content rather than categorical programs (secondary model)
- dividing special education students by lower and upper grades (elementary model)
- in-class model, whereby special education teachers serve students during the day in the general education classroom, with minimal pull-out (elementary model)

#### Administrative Restructuring

A new special education administrative structure was fully implemented in the fall of 1995. The school district was divided into four special education zones. They are: West zone, North/East zone, South zone, and Special Schools/Interagency programs zone. A special education supervisor was assigned to each zone. The remaining supervisors were assigned a variety of special program responsibilities which provide support to the zone structure. (See Table II, Context section, page 8) The new administrative structure has resulted in improved services and consumer satisfaction according to feedback from administrators, support staff, instructional staff and parents.

#### Decentralization of Funds for Special Education Materials

In support of the district's emphasis on building based decision making, the decentralization of special education funds for equipment and materials has been implemented during the last three year cycle. Funds are provided yearly to buildings based on their special education student enrollment. This allows individual buildings and the people most directly involved with students the ability to determine how to utilize these funds.

#### Adherence to Standards, Policies, and Regulations

The Iowa Rules of Special Education state that AEAs have the responsibility to "...conduct activities in each constituent school district at least once every three years to monitor compliance with the provisions of all applicable federal and state statutes and regulations and rules applicable to the education of handicapped pupils," (Department of Education, Rules of Special Education, July 1995). Due to the size of the district, Heartland AEA 11 visits one-third of the Des Moines schools each year. This allows all schools to be involved in the compliance review at least once every three years.

Previous compliance review reports were consistently complimentary to the district. The most recent compliance review involved 27 buildings and an individual review of 202 individualized student programs. There were also 198 teacher interviews as part of this review. Dr. Gibson, the compliance officer, indicated in his report that the district "does a very commendable job of developing programs, revising procedures and inservicing staff". The Student Services Department responds to areas of concern with corrective action plans that are reviewed and approved by the AEA. Compliance reports are available from the Executive Director of Student Services.

#### Expanding Options for Students with Challenging Behaviors

The numbers of students, particularly young children, with severe behavior difficulties continues to increase. District principals have identified this as an area of primary concern and have requested assistance in dealing with these students. Youngsters with serious behavior difficulties are particularly challenging to serve in their neighborhood school. Many of these youngsters are successfully maintained in their home schools due to the creative programming developed by buildings, the collaboration which occurs between regular and special education teachers, and the efforts of special education support teams. In spite of these efforts at the building level, an increasing number of youngsters cannot be maintained in their neighborhood school. Often the nature of their behavior is so severe that they can prevent learning from occurring for a whole classroom when one or more adults is needed to assist in a crisis. For some students, this is a daily occurrence. Also, buildings often lack the physical space to appropriately deal with students in crisis. The department has addressed the needs of students with challenging behaviors through several initiatives. The following activities and programs represent some of the ways this challenge is being addressed.

Special programs for students with challenging behaviors exist at Smouse, PACE and PACE Academy , Scavo and Casady Alternative Schools, Orchard Place and Focus. These programs have experienced significant growth over the last three years. Several of these programs are operated collaboratively with community agencies such as juvenile court, the Department of Human Services, various hospitals, and organizations offering therapeutic services. Currently 350 students are being served in these programs.

The STOP program is a nationally recognized comprehensive model for dealing with students who have committed serious criminal offenses at school. This multifaceted program involves an extended school day and is a product of extensive school district and community collaboration. STOP serves up to ten students in a classroom. Currently there is one classroom.

A therapeutic child care (TCC) program at Mercy Franklin Center provides an alternative placement setting for young children with extreme challenging behaviors. Children from 2-6 years old can be served through this program. TCC is the only program of this type in the United States.

The Des Moines Public School district has taken a leadership role in the Iowa Behavioral Initiative (IBI). This school improvement initiative is intended to increase the ability of school personnel, families, and communities to meet the social, emotional and behavioral needs of children. Des Moines has had active participation in this effort for three years. East High School and Callanan Middle School were established as academy sites. These schools received training and assistance in developing a school-wide approach to addressing student needs.

In the fall of 1997 the department employed two interventionists to assist building staff with students who have severe behavioral needs. The interventionists have flexible schedules in order to be at a given building for an extended period of time to assist in designing programs for individual children with severe and challenging behaviors.

School/Community Problem Solving for Students with Challenging Behaviors is a major initiative that involves school personnel and community agencies who serve students with severe and challenging behaviors. An interagency work group comprised of school and community personnel developed training which focuses on school / community collaboration, strategies for use at the

building level, effective program models, and de-escalation techniques. Two days of initial training were provided to over 150 participants, including elementary principals, special education support personnel, counselors, and community agency representatives. A series of ten half day training events is planned for the current school year. This effort focuses on developing collaborative relationships between community agencies and schools so that resources can be effectively utilized in working with students with challenging behaviors and their families. One or two youngsters with challenging behavior problems are being identified in each elementary building. These students will receive intensive, focused intervention over the next year and a half. A case management format has been developed which involves families and community agencies in the intervention effort. Data from these cases will be collected through January of 1999 and will provide valuable information for determining future directions.

#### Problem Solving Model

Currently, the department is piloting a new approach to the assessment and identification of special education students. Rather than relying on standardized tests, assessments are more functional in nature and relate specifically to instructional intervention. Assessments focus on the classroom environment, curriculum, instructional practices and community support, along with the individual student strengths and concerns. Emphasis is placed on developing and monitoring interventions for individual students rather than emphasis given to identifying specific handicapping conditions. Problem solving interventions start from the time a potential concern is noted and continue as long as concern exists. Currently, seven pilot elementary schools are implementing this process. These seven schools are Hillis, Longfellow, Lovejoy, Madison, Rice, Stowe and Wright. The goal is to implement this model district wide by the 1998-99 school year.

#### Student Entitlement Guidelines

Since the last report, the Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, developed and published a set of revised guidelines for special education. (Rules of Special Education, July 1995.) The revised guidelines encourage innovative service delivery and alternative guidelines for student eligibility. In 1997, the Department of Education also distributed revised guidelines for eligibility in the areas of learning disabilities and mental disabilities. All special education staff received training on the new guidelines. Special education forms were revised to reflect changes in state guidelines. In addition to refining the problem solving process, seven pilot schools will be using noncategorical identification criteria for student entitlement.

### Surveys

Since the last program evaluation in 1993-94, the Department of Student Services has conducted a number of surveys in an attempt to measure program effectiveness and consumer satisfaction. The data collected are reported in this section.

### Parent Satisfaction Survey

Student Services support staff conducted a parent satisfaction survey in the spring of 1997. The department worked with personnel from the Department of School Improvement to ensure the survey items and scale were technically correct. A total of 80 parents, randomly selected, were contacted by phone and asked to respond to ten questions. Each question was rated on a four point scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree(3), Disagree(2), Strongly Disagree(1).

The results were as follows:

Special education Parent Survey - 1997	Average Rating	% Rated 4 or 3 (Strongly Agree or Agree)
1. The IEP meetings I attend are important in planning the educational program for my child.	3.48	97
2. The school encourages my participation and involvement in the IEP process.	3.34	94
3. My child's special program focuses on his/her most critical needs.	3.26	86
4. The Des Moines District provides quality services for students requiring special education.	3.14	89
5. The special education staff is sensitive to the problems faced by children with special needs.	3.29	88
6. I have a good relationship with my child's special education teacher.	3.18	86
7. Communication between home and school is good.	3.20	87
8. Special education support services provided to my child have been beneficial.	3.32	94
9. I was satisfied with the quality of support services I received as a parent.	3.28	86
10. Overall I am satisfied with the current special education services my child receives.	3.20	84
<b>Total Average</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>89.1%</b>

This survey was conducted once before in 1994. Two questions were added in 1997 to assess parents perceptions about special education support services. In 1994, the average rating for each of the questions was 3.04 as compared to the total average for the 1997 survey of 3.27. Ratings on each question were higher in the most recent survey. Questions 2,3,5, and 10 showed the most growth with regard to parent perception

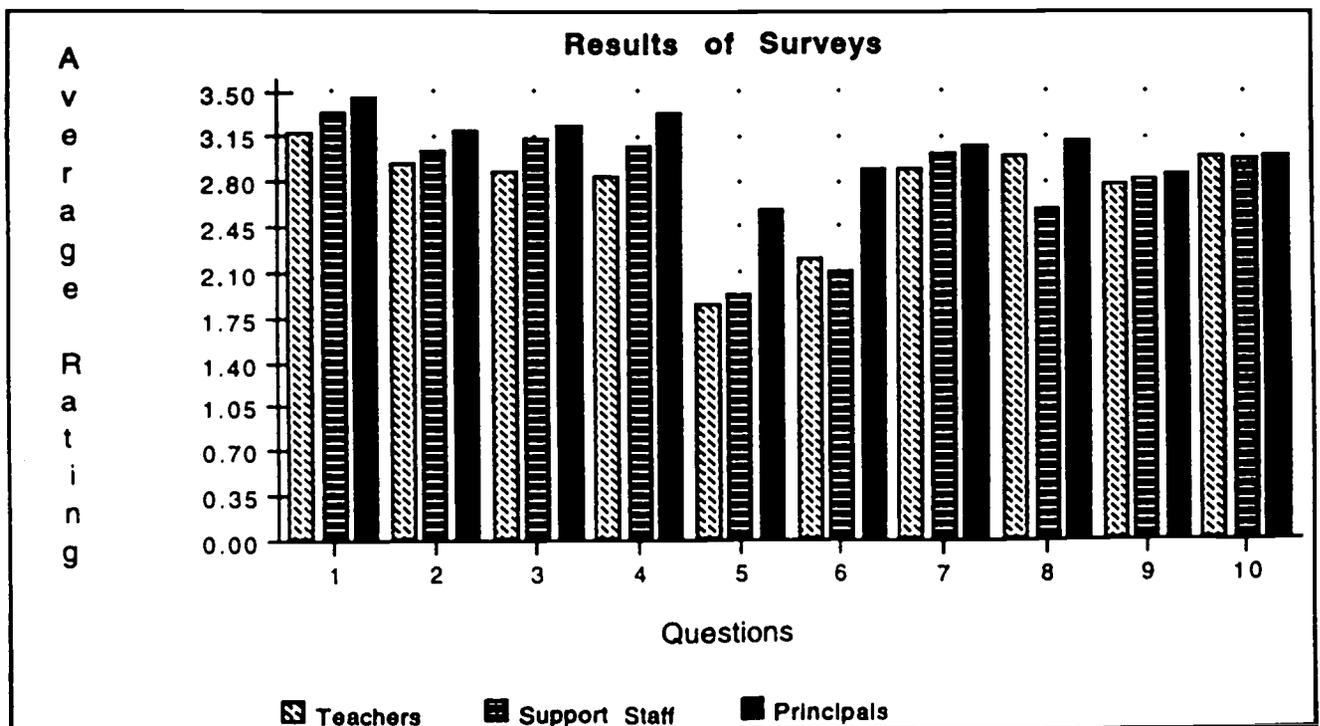
The overall results from this survey are viewed quite favorably, particularly when one considers the significant problems many families face, the stress that results from having a child with special needs, and the denial that some parents may experience as their child enters special education.

Survey of Principals, Support Staff, and Special Education Teachers

Serving students in their neighborhood schools has been a major initiative as well as a board goal during the last three year period. A survey was designed to assess the perceptions of the district's principals, support staff, and special education teachers regarding the impact of this initiative. The survey was conducted in the spring of 1997. The survey included the following questions:

1. Serving students in their neighborhood school is consistent with the district's mission statement.
2. Serving students in their neighborhood schools benefits both special and general education students.
3. The neighborhood school model provides a more natural distribution of students with disabilities throughout the district's schools.
4. Opportunities for special education students to participate in mainstreamed classes has increased with the implementation of the neighborhood schools concept.
5. Participation of parents of students with disabilities in school conferences, meetings, etc. has increased under the neighborhood schools concept.
6. Student needs are better addressed in the neighborhood multicategorical services than the former categorical disabilities models.
7. Under the neighborhood schools concept there has been increased emphasis on problem solving and interventions.
8. The building-based special education budget is more effective than the former centralized budget.
9. Our building's instructional staff has been supportive of the neighborhood schools concept.
10. The development of neighborhood schools Building Plans allows for increased site-based decision making.

Respondents were asked to rate each question on a four point scale: Strongly Agree(4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). Surveys were sent to all of the districts principals, support staff, and special education teachers. Results for the three groups are summarized below and are based on the responses of 51 principals, 68 support staff members, and 216 special education teachers.



## Survey Analysis

In general, all three groups were supportive of serving students in their neighborhood school. Of the groups surveyed, principals were the most positive about this change. They tended to feel that serving students with special needs is generally beneficial to all children in the building. Principals also felt that serving students in their neighborhood schools provides for a more natural distribution of children with special needs. This in turn allows individual buildings to provide more mainstreaming options for these youngsters.

The responses from teachers and support staff were generally positive. It should be noted that many of these staff members have had to significantly adjust how they approach serving students under the neighborhood schools model. Many have had to assume new and different responsibilities and in some cases return to school in order to acquire additional certifications. Due to the significant changes teachers and support staff have had to make in their jobs, their positive responses on this survey are remarkable.

In analyzing some of the questions, it is unclear if lower responses are due to a decline related to neighborhood schools or if there was no change noted. For example, question 5 was consistently rated lowest across the three groups. It asks if parent participation has increased with the implementation of the neighborhood schools. Based on parent surveys and IEP documentation efforts, the district has always experienced very good participation in meetings etc. by parents of special education students. It is felt that the response to this question may reflect no change in the already high involvement of parents. Likewise, it is unclear what the responses to question 6 reflect for similar reasons. Future survey questions will be worded differently in an effort to elicit a more definitive response.

Overall, the responses support the change to serving students in their neighborhood schools. The survey results also suggest that the department needs to continue its efforts in providing training for staff on effective ways to serve students on a multicategorical basis, inservicing general education teachers on the ramifications of neighborhood schools and the resources available to buildings in serving students with special needs. Teachers need to be reminded of the district's commitment to providing a full continuum of services which includes center-based categorical programs and special schools. They need further reassurance that it is recognized that not every student can be appropriately served in their neighborhood school and of other options that are available.

### Individualized Education Program (IEP) Survey

During the spring of 1997, a survey of progress on IEP objectives was conducted. The Student Services Department worked with personnel from the Department of School Improvement in the development of this survey. Goals on an IEP reflect the overall skill to be taught. Objectives are more specific, intermediate skills which must be mastered before the overall goal is achieved. At least two short-term objectives must be listed for each goal. Most IEPs include several goals. Objectives were the focus of this survey since they are the major part of the IEP which influences daily instruction.

One hundred IEPs were randomly selected from a pool of approximately 3500. These IEPs included a total of 739 objectives. Objectives on IEPs were categorized as follows: No Progress, Minimal Progress (up to 50% of criteria achieved), Progress (50% -75% of criteria achieved), Met, Not Addressed, and Not Evaluated. Table VII on the following page represents the data that was collected.

**Table VII**  
**IEP/Evaluation Survey - 1997**

Criteria	Objectives	Percentage
No Progress	41	5
Minimal Progress	21	3
Progress	220	30
Met	252	34
Not Addressed	36	5
Not Evaluated	169	23
Total Number of Objectives	739	100

IEP evaluation data indicate that the vast majority of students are making progress on their individually designed educational program. In recent years, the department has encouraged IEP teams to establish higher standards for special education students and to avoid establishing goals and objectives that can be readily achieved. This has resulted in a larger number of students demonstrating progress on objectives as opposed to having totally met the criteria for success. The department views this as positive and reflects higher standards for special education students. This finding was also reflected by the AEA Compliance Officer in his last review.

A concern from this survey was noted in the relatively large number of objectives for which inadequate or no evaluation data were recorded. This issue was immediately addressed through inservice activities and will be closely monitored.

**Special Education Withdrawal Rate**

Data regarding the withdrawal rate for high school special education students were collected for each of the three preceding school years. Withdrawals were defined as students who dropped out of school or students who did not enroll in the fall and for whom no records were requested from other districts. The following withdrawal rates for the previous three years were obtained:

Year	Special education students (9-12)	No. of Drop Outs	Withdrawal Rate
94-95	1,037	48	4.6%
95-96	1,197	57	4.7%
96-97	1,345	85	6.3%
<b>Three Year Average</b>		<b>5.2%</b>	

The current three year average withdrawal rate of 5.2% compares favorably to the previous three year average rate of 7.8%. The withdrawal rate in Des Moines comprehensive high schools was 3.9% during the 1996-97 school year. State and national rates for the previous year are not available at this time. In 1994, the Iowa Bureau of Special Education listed a state withdrawal rate for special education students of 23.7%. The national rate was 27.4%. These low drop out rates reflect the hard work done by special education teachers, support staff and parents in working with these students.

## Awards and Recognitions

### Awards/Citations Received by Staff

<u>Name</u>	<u>Award</u>
Brenda Auxier-Mailey	1997--Family Involvement Board Scholarship
Faith Huitt	DMSA Administrative Academy award for Student Achievement Cadre
Sheila Kurtz	Governor's Volunteer Award
Thomas Jeschke	1995--Distinguished Leadership Award, Midwest Directors of Special Education
Thomas Jeschke	Special Education Administrator of the Year--International CASE
Rick Lussie	CEC/MRDD--Chapter Award
Tom Mitchell	DMSA Administrative Academy award for Consultation Skills Cadre
Cal Seda	School to Work Award
Greta Spears	Iowa School Social Workers Association Career Achievement Award
Ellen Weber	Recognized for Advanced Board Training by the Iowa School Board
Stephanie Zuehlke	Middle School Rotary Teacher of the Year
Student Services Department	"Kids Are Kids" Video--Media Award

### Student Awards

- Larry Karaidos (95-96)
  - Superintendent award in Vocational Education
  - Jeanette Du Kelsky Scholarship
  - Presidential Excellence Award
  - Superintendent award in welding
  - 1st place Des Moines Technology Fair
- Thaya Evans (1997)
  - Selected student representative for Iowa Health Care Youth Mentoring Program--Represented Iowa at the Commonwealth Fund/John Hopkins Hospital Youth Mentoring Program Network conferences in Baltimore, Maryland
- Frankie Lyons (1996)
  - Volunteer of the year
  - Presidential award (vol. work at Smouse)

- Stephanie Carter (1997)  
- Laura Ann Carson Memorial Scholarship
- Terrance Butts (1996)  
- Mary Johnson Memorial Scholarship

In addition, department staff provide leadership in the field of special education by serving in a variety of local, state, and national organization. Several individuals hold or have held elected positions in state and national professional organizations. The staff regularly provides inservice training to groups both with and outside the district. Several also teach classes in the evening or the summer at colleges and universities with teacher training programs. Others have developed publications for the state and federal government or are on the editorial review boards for national publications and journals.

### Maintaining a Qualified Staff

A severe shortage of special education teachers and support personnel exists nationwide. This is an issue Des Moines will continue to confront over the next several years. This need will become more intense as the aging work force in the system nears retirement and as the number of special education students with severe needs continues to increase. Clearly, some of the most needy and challenging students for our system to educate are found in this population. Yet, due to a lack of qualified applicants, our district is forced at times to hire teachers who are not fully certified and often have little experience with special education students. Des Moines hired 41.5 new special education teachers and support staff for the 1997-98 school year. Table VIII below reflects the certification status of the personnel hired.

**Table VIII**  
**Certification Status of New Personnel**

<u>Area</u>	<u>Total Number of Staff Hired</u>	<u>Number Fully Certified</u>	<u>Number Conditionally Certified</u>	<u>Number Emergency Certified</u>
North/East Zone	14	4	8	2
West Zone	7	0	5	2
South Zone	7	0	7	0
Special Schools/ Programs	10	6	3	1
Support Staff	<u>3.5</u>	<u>2.5</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>

Hiring individuals with limited background and little experience with special education students places an added responsibility on the district to provide adequate support and on the job training. These new people are also confronted with the time consuming task of taking college courses and pursuing full certification. Each new staff member is assigned a mentor and is closely monitored by a special education consultant.

The department has addressed this teacher shortage in a number of ways. Many of our paraprofessionals have been identified as having the potential of being exceptional teachers and have been assisted in returning to school to obtain teacher licensure. Student teachers and substitutes are routinely reviewed with regard to their potential as special education teachers. The department continues to work closely with the Human Resource Department in developing recruiting strategies. Special education supervisors are responsible for developing contacts with training institutions in an effort to recruit the best graduates.

It should also be noted that conditionally certified teachers are not marginal candidates. Some have excellent instructional skills even though they lack some of the requirements established by the Iowa Department of Education (DE) for full certification. The department was able to hire some very strong teachers by petitioning the DE to award conditional status to these applicants. The department also continues to work with state licensing officials to establish certification requirements that are reasonable and ensure that applicants have appropriate, relevant training. These efforts will need to continue as the shortage of teachers in this area is expected to increase.

### **Costs vs. Benefits**

The analysis of costs versus benefits is an extremely difficult process complicated by the lack of state or national studies that address this issue. The most widely used progress monitoring system, the IEP, gives information related to individual student growth in specific areas but no overall benefits analysis.

Research and common wisdom support the benefits of specific programs and services to children. Without specialized programs and services:

- Children who exhibit receptive and expressive language disorders or severe articulation disorders will not become as proficient at reading as students without these disorders.
- Severe behavior problems interfere with the learning process for the students exhibiting the problem as well as the other students in the class.
- Students with severe cognitive impairments have difficulty learning daily living skills such as grooming, communication and community living.
- Hard of hearing and deaf students do not benefit from incidental learning and have extreme difficulty with abstract concepts and the acquisition of literacy skills.

The benefits to families are likewise, difficult to quantify. How do you put a dollar amount on the value of:

- Teaching a non-verbal student to indicate what is wanted by using an audiocassette instead of screaming until the parent guesses what activity is wanted?
- Community training which enables a family to take their child to the store without tantrums or throwing items?
- Finally teaching a child to read a story to his family?
- Being able to keep the child at home while attending school instead of living in an institution with only care-taking capacity?

Often the benefits to students are hard to quantify because lifetime benefit can only be determined after graduation. Benefits include such things as increased productivity, becoming a contributor to society, and maximizing individual potential. Due to the very limited adult services available, it is imperative that every effort be made to prepare students to face the challenges of adult living before they leave the school setting. Failure to do so will only result in lost opportunities and an increasing need for government support to care for many of these individuals as they become adults.

It should be noted that one key factor which has led to increased costs over the past several years is the continued growth of the number of students requiring special education services. Currently,

approximately 15% of Des Moines students receive some type of special education instructional and/or support services. In the past five years the district has seen its special education population increase by 17% while the overall student population has increased by only 2%. This increase in special education percentages is consistent with other urban school districts.

The number of students served in special education is reflective of the needs seen in the Des Moines community. Concurrent changes and trends in community needs and services over the past five years have greatly contributed to this increase. During this five year period the community has seen a significant decrease in the availability of group home and foster care placement for children. During the same period the police department reports a 48.6% increase in referrals to juvenile court with the majority of crimes being aggressive in nature. Additionally, the advent of the state's managed care system has resulted in substantially shorter stays in hospital and residential programs. These changes have significantly increased the number of children within the community with severe disabilities who are likely to require special education services in school.

## FUTURE PLANNING

Traditional service delivery models have been called into question as special education services continue to evolve. Many of today's students exhibit increased needs as measured by severity and number. Some of the causes in our society that contribute to the increased need are greater knowledge and awareness, environmental factors that may have medical and neurological implications for youngsters, increased drug use, reduced family support for children, improved medical technology that increases survival rates, and increased poverty with nutritional and emotional implications for students and others.

School reform and transformation efforts are often focused on systemic changes needed to identify the increased needs of students and provide for them in different ways. Districts have been asked to make these changes with improved accountability to the public, but within the context of reduced resources. Listed below are initiatives and external issues that are currently being addressed by the Des Moines Public Schools. All are interdependent and of equal priority.

### Student Progress Monitoring

Most norm-referenced tests provide little information for programming purposes for many special education students. Currently, student progress is monitored through Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and objectives. Training for staff will focus on various performance monitoring systems and the relationship between instructional strategies and student growth. Specific topics will include progress monitoring, use of rubrics, mastery monitoring and curriculum-based measurements.

### Efficacy of Programs

As the number of students identified as needing special education has increased, the cost of special education has also increased. The district is working hard to contain these growing costs and still provide quality programs for students. Over the next three years, the Department of Student Services will be expanding its efforts to study the efficacy of specific programs and services. The question to be addressed is "Does the program provide the services identified as needed?" and if not, "What changes need to be made?" Several efforts are currently underway. They include:

- Participation in a national study of functional communications outcomes (speech/language service).
- Longitudinal study of program placement of students who received preschool services (early childhood special education).
- Participation in a statewide study to provide information on effectiveness of interventions related to standard life tasks (PT/OT).
- Participation in a state study to determine the amount of participation by special education students in districtwide assessment.

Throughout the next year the Department will be studying the per-pupil expenditures for various programs in an effort to see if additional measures can be taken to reduce expenditures.

### Maintaining a Qualified Work Force

The number of individuals hired without full special education certification is unacceptable. Maintaining a qualified work force in special education will continue to be an initiative in the Department of Student Services. Strategies for recruiting and retaining qualified staff will be developed. Data regarding these efforts will be reported in the next program report.

### Service Delivery/Entitlement

There is a gradual shift from the traditional refer-test-place model to a problem solving/interventions model in order to provide direct services to students. The assessment/intervention is driven by the referral questions and specific student needs. The functional assessment procedures go hand-in-hand with implementation of intervention strategies subject to modification to meet student needs. A problem solving committee is working diligently to refine the process for implementation.

### School-to-Work Initiative

This is a district goal to prepare students for the world of work and prerequisites they need to meet for gainful employment. IDEA requirement also stipulates transition and post-school plan for students 14 years of age and older. IEPs for each student include instruction, community experience, employment, post-school adult living objectives, daily living and functional vocational evaluation. Work Experience Coordinators are providing leadership to address the needs of special education students.

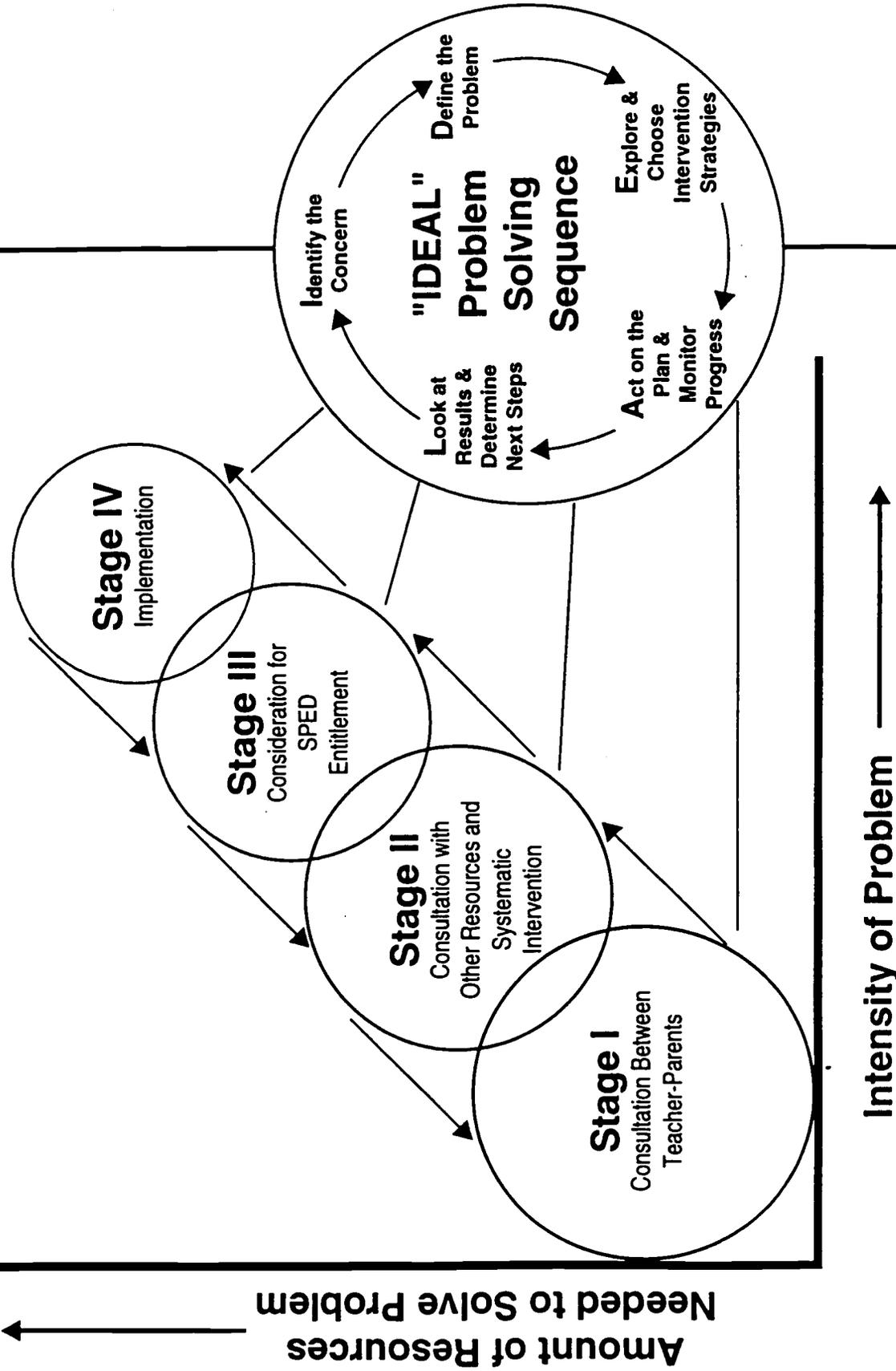
### School-Community Agencies Collaboration

The number of students served in special education is reflective of the needs seen in the Des Moines community. Significant changes in community services continue to affect the student population. Over the past five years, the Department of Human Services has increased the number of students receiving group care, foster care, and residential placement. However, caps have been placed on group care placements and managed care has reduced the length of stay in residential treatment facilities. Consequently, more students with behavioral concerns are returning or remaining in the community and attending school. Current efforts through the School/Community work group and training opportunities will be expanded to include more staff from schools and agencies. Links with Decategorization and community agencies will be continued with increased emphasis on developing closer working relationships between schools and agencies for providing services to students and their families.

### District Assessment of Special Education Students

The amended version of IDEA (614(d)(a)(4)) mandates that districts develop an evaluation system for all special education students by July 1 of the year 2000. The amended Act requires school districts to . . . "include children with disabilities in general state and district wide assessment programs, with appropriate modifications." Districts are also required to . . . "develop guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments . . ." when they are unable to participate in general state and district wide assessment programs. Assessment decisions for these students must be made on an individual basis by the IEP team to determine what assessment measures should be used fairly to reflect progress being made in both general and special education programs. This federal mandate will have a significant impact on the existing district assessment policies and will require additional resources as well. The challenge in the next few years will be to design and implement a testing and reporting system that provides useful information on all students, including those with disabilities, in the district.

# Neighborhood Schools Problem Solving Model





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