




The
SUPERINTENDENT'S GUIDE to Shaping
Special Education Departments that **WIN**



A useful guide with tips for building a special education department that is set up for academic and financial success.



15% OF ALL PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS RECEIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES.

*That's **2x** the number of students who received special education services in the late 1970s.*

With a critical need to provide special education students with the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in their least restrictive environment (LRE), **the time to act is now.**

Our nation's most complex learners need district-level support from a top down approach, starting with YOU – **the superintendent.**




This guide will address many of the special educational complexities that keep you up at night and aim to provide you with tips to help you build and retain a special education department in your district that is set up for academic and financial success – *for both your staff and students.*

15% PERCENTAGE of public school students receiving special education & related services.



Building Trust & Practicing Transparency

Your role as superintendent extends far beyond administrative leadership. It requires building trust and collaboration between your staff, your students, and their families. **Transparency in communication, training your staff in empathy,** and also **proactive problem solving** can help to establish a community that supports your district and believes in its ability to provide meaningful educational opportunities that comply with state and federal requirements, alongside strong academic outcomes for ALL students.

		
<p>The Art of Transparency</p>	<p>Training in Empathy</p>	<p>Proactive Problem Solving</p>
<p>Creating easy-to-digest guides that detail the IEP process and/or hosting forums to engage families</p>	<p>Providing professional development for staff to learn empathy best practices and how to actively listen to family concerns even when decisions don't perfectly align with their expectations</p>	<p>Implementing conflict resolution protocols to help mitigate disputes before they escalate</p>

How Trust & Compliance Go Hand-in-Hand



When school districts fail to meet the mandated requirements for special education, two things can happen:

1.



Families will lack confidence in the district's ability to provide quality education

2.



Legal action may be taken against the district to protect the rights of their child.

Federal, state, and local laws are put in place *for many different scenarios and for many different reasons*—and special education and related services are no exception. Families need to **trust** that their children are provided with the education they have a right to receive.

As the superintendent, your job is not to be an expert on all things special education, but to effectively oversee what is being offered and implemented in the department to ensure these requirements are

met. *After all, districts spend millions every year on preventable compliance issues in your special education department (mediation, due process, formal hearings, associated administrative fees, etc.).*

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Your role with compliance zeros in on the training and professional development opportunities that are provided to your special education staff. Granting opportunities for your Special Education Leadership Team and teachers to stay up to speed on federal, state, and local laws is imperative to remain in compliance (*your district can't be compliant if your educators are not up to date on the requirements*) and build trust with the community.

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Navigating Budget Complexities in Your District

Specially designed instruction and services are expensive. Special education teachers, related service professionals, assistive technology, and adapted core curriculum are a few examples of costly necessities for a high-quality special education department. Nationally, these cost billions of dollars every year.

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Special education services are funded at the federal, state, and local levels, with most district funding coming from the local level. While responsibilities vary district to district, as the superintendent, you play a large role in influencing and managing the annual budget and ensuring budget allocation aligns with your district's high-priority needs.

Nationally, specially designed instruction and services cost billions of dollars every year.

Having a solid grasp on high-priority needs within your special education department will be the first step in maximizing ROI:

- Does your district have access to a standards-based, adapted core curriculum for students with moderate to severe disabilities? Or are teachers piecemealing different resources to build their own curriculum for students?
- Is your district experiencing a shortage of highly-qualified special education staff?
- Is more professional development needed?
- More assistive technology?



Once needs are identified and aligned against your district's forecasted budget, taking an active role in evaluating vendors for different resources can make all the difference.



The Right Spend on The Right Resources



Often times, when your district is in the early stages of evaluating vendors for various resources, conversations typically begin in one of two ways:



1. A Special Education Teacher or Coordinator is tasked with researching different vendors depending on different needs



2. A Special Education Director reaches out to different vendors to facilitate evaluation

While scheduling challenges can make your participation challenging in this process, your early-stage involvement will ultimately save time in the long run on discussion points such as:

- Whether or not a particular vendor aligns to your district's overall goals
For example: Is your Special Education Department speaking with a vendor who may actually be a good fit for other departments in your district?

- Any challenges posed to the overall district
For example: Will the district incur additional financial implications from a vendor that is being evaluated (i.e: added professional development or new technology resources)?
- Family and board member buy-in
- Long-term success for the district vs. short-term fixes
- Return on Investment (i.e: are we actually using what we are paying for?)



With budget in mind, your oversight on the allocation of funds to the right resources will help you shape the success and return on investment within your special education department.

Data Driven Decisions that Yield High ROI

To understand whether or not your special education programs are producing a high return on investment (both financially and academically), consider the costs of the special education services in your district against student growth rates:

- Is your adapted curriculum helping to boost student achievement rates?
- Are students actively engaged in their own education?
- Are your established programs helping to reduce future costs (think staff turnover and teacher retention costs) related to special education and support services?

Resources, like TeachTown's K-12 standards-first, adapted core curriculum, [enCORE](#), that effectively track and report on student progress—whether that is through benchmark assessments, behaviors, IEP goals, etc.—will be a strong indicator of what trends are happening and what instructional strategies need to be adjusted or maintained to achieve results.

If you're looking to see your district's dollars at work, the answer lies in the data.

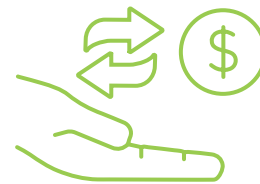
Also, whether you're in a school board meeting, or perhaps in the middle of a heated conversation with a parent—having the ability to refer back to student data is necessary to indicate measurable student growth cannot be underscored enough. *If you're looking to see your district's dollars at work, the answer lies in the data.*



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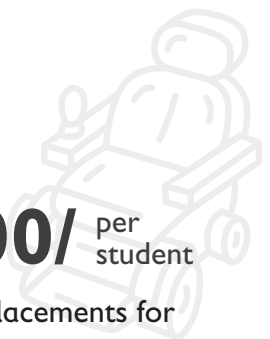
Swap High Out-of-District Placement Costs with Adapted Curriculum Cost-Savings

District budgets are pulled and stretched in every way imaginable to try and cover the needs of your students and your staff who serve them. *One portion of your budget that likely uses a significant amount of spend? Out-of-district placements.*

Out-of-district placements for students with moderate to severe disabilities can cost upwards of \$100,000 per student. While out-of-district placements may be a necessity in some cases, implementing equitable and inclusive access to the general education for your students with moderate to severe disabilities can help reduce the number of students referred for out-of-district placements.

\$100,000/ per student

Out-of-district placements for students with moderate to severe disabilities



How Curriculum Impacts Out-of-District Placements

By offering access to a state and federally-compliant curriculum in-house, students whose only option at one point may have been an out-of-district placement, would now be able to receive their right to FAPE within your district. An academic and financial win-win across the board.

A K-12 standards-aligned and evidence-based adapted core curriculum, like TeachTown's enCORE, uses adapted grade-aligned content, high-quality, differentiated literature and integrated technology **and** is more affordable than the high cost of out-of-district placement fees.

OUR SUITE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SOLUTIONS offers students with moderate to severe disabilities equitable and inclusive access to the general education curriculum and the individualized interventions that support their success.

Scan the QR code to schedule a 1:1 consultation with a member of our team to learn more.



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