

Special Education Division Contributes to MDE Strategic Plan and Aligns with MDE Internal Priorities

This document highlights how the work and plans of the Special Education Division contribute to the overall [Minnesota Department of Education \(MDE\) strategic plan \(summarized here\)](#) and its internal priorities.

Special Education Division's Work and MDE's Overall Strategic Plan

The Special Education Division makes important contributions to MDE and the agency's strategic plan. We advance MDE objectives through our mission: to provide leadership to ensure a high-quality education for Minnesota's children and youth with disabilities. The division has valuable experience supporting school districts and other partners on key challenges such as equitable outcomes, student achievement, dropout prevention, high school graduation and postsecondary transition outcomes.

Across these issues and others, we focus on children and youth with disabilities—a group with high numbers of students who are American Indian, Black and other children and youth of color. The Special Education Division has been a key resource for partners outside of MDE and for divisions within the agency on a range of educational approaches, including implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs), student assessment, assistive technology, and behavioral interventions and prevention strategies.

Below are some of the ways our division's priorities and work contribute to the objectives of MDE's overall strategic plan, grouped by specific objectives of the agency plan:

Every student deserves a world-class education

The Special Education Division:

- Supports and tracks progress on graduation rates for all students with disabilities, especially students from historically underserved groups and from immigrant communities in Minnesota.
- Promotes access to career and technical education for students with disabilities.
- Increases the ability of districts to replicate successful approaches and positive results for student engagement and achievement.
- Supports school districts that provide additional academic and behavioral support for students at risk of not succeeding in general education.
- Assists with statewide assessment and alternate assessment, including culturally responsive assessment and evaluation.
- Advocates for a person-centered, whole child approach that supports self-determination and meaningful educational experiences and learning in school and community.

Every student deserves to attend a safe, nurturing school

The Special Education Division:

- Focuses on school engagement, inclusion and participation in community, improved behavioral outcomes, reductions in disproportionate discipline, and safe and positive learning environments.
- Works with school districts and partners to prepare students with disabilities for life choices, participation in community, and meaningful education and employment after high school.
- Fosters the ability of schools and their community partners to use practices that support attendance, student engagement and learning in school and community.
- Offers training, technical assistance and support for schools on comprehensive and effective school mental health systems, including those that involve school-based mental health services, partnerships with community providers, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).
- Supports professional development for American Indian home-school liaisons.

Every student deserves to learn in a classroom with caring, qualified teachers

The Special Education Division:

- Supports programs at colleges and universities to increase diversity in the special education workforce.
- Works with partners to provide guidance, information and mentoring programs on recruiting and retaining special education teachers.
- Supports district partnerships and other initiatives to better serve American Indian students throughout the state, including Project Dream Catcher for training American Indian liaisons and cultural staff, Partners on Native Voice for PBIS and grants used to improve rates of graduation and success after high school for American Indian students with disabilities, including through increasing the number of American Indian special educators in both teaching and non-teaching roles.

MDE will provide leadership, support and partnership to every school district across the state

The Special Education Division:

- Engages with districts and offers resources and training around effective practices, implementation, data-based decision making and improvement cycles.
- Participates in Minnesota's Cross Agency Implementation Team that works with Regional Centers of Excellence to help districts and schools support change and continuous improvement.
- Uses focus area teams within the division whose work centers on equity and equitable outcomes, graduation and post-school outcomes and education in the most integrated setting for students with disabilities.

Areas of Alignment between Special Education Division Strategic Plan and the 2021 MDE Internal Strategic Plan

We reviewed our Special Education Division's 2020–25 strategic plan in the context of MDE's internal priorities from its January 2021 internal strategic plan. The MDE internal plan focuses on four internal objectives related to staffing, training and professional development, partnerships and budgets. This section highlights alignment between the Special Education Division plan and MDE agency plan based on MDE's internal objectives.

Internal Objective 1: MDE reflects the changing diversity of our student and family population

Our division's strategic plan calls for hiring talented, experienced and diverse staff and tapping professional and career development resources to retain division talent, especially staff who are American Indian, Black, other people of color and people with disabilities.

Internal Objective 2: MDE will utilize a learning organization model to support our staff in being the leader for educational support

Our plan includes a focus on staff skills to improve and increase the capacity of the special education division. The focus on skills and our plan's strategies for doing so will allow our division to align with key results noted in the MDE internal plan. These include increased participation in Tribal-State Relations Training, professional development that reflects MDE priorities, and results for equity, diversity and inclusion training.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Center

The Special Education Division's work and our strategic plan align with MDE's new Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Center. In the document that lays out MDE's overarching strategic plan, inclusivity is framed in the context of students' race, ethnicity and abilities. As a group, the population receiving special education services includes a high number of students who are American Indian, Black and other students of color. Beyond this, children and youth with disabilities bring diversity to the classroom and need to be included.

Our division works with districts to train and coach staff to implement and sustain practices that will improve outcomes for diverse populations of students with disabilities. For MDE overall and the EDI Center in particular, the Special Education Division brings an important perspective regarding the intersection of race and disability to discussions of equity, diversity and inclusion. We look forward to partnering with center staff to ensure that the EDI lens includes people with disabilities in support of schools, students and their families/guardians.

Internal Objective 3: MDE will be the leader for educational support and guidance in teaching and learning

Our division strategic plan emphasizes engaging in external partnerships to provide value and improve systems, which aligns well with this internal MDE objective and its focus on support and guidance for external educational partners. Collaboration with partners is one of our division's guiding principles, and we are committed to team-based work with partners to improve results for children and youth with disabilities. The Special Education Division identifies school district partners and works with them on implementation of EBPs. Other partners for our division include tribal organizations, colleges and universities, other state agencies and stakeholder panels, committees, councils and workgroups.

Internal Objective 4: MDE's budget reflects the values and priorities of the agency

The Special Education Division's strategic plan notes the important link between the division budget and our vision, mission, guiding principles and strategic objectives. All Special Education Division funding is targeted to serve children and youth with disabilities, while an equity lens frames the objectives and strategies of our strategic plan and drives our work. We have specific initiatives and activities that address equity, equitable outcomes and the intersection of race and disability. As other MDE divisions work to align their budgets and priorities with the agency's strategic plan, we will partner with them to ensure that students with disabilities are included and valued in budget planning and implementation.