

ECSU Special Education Mid-year Report – January 2017

During the 2016-17 school year, Essex Caledonia Supervisory Union has come into full compliance with Act 153 of 2010, which identified special education as a duty of supervisory unions rather than individual school districts. ECSU had historically provided related services from the SU prior to the passage of Act 153 and in the 2014-15 school year special educators moved from being school district employees to employees of the supervisory union. As the final step in compliance with Act 153 (and to avoid tax penalties for non-compliance), all special education expenditures and LEA responsibilities were shifted to the supervisory union beginning July 1, 2016. School districts did have the option to keep special education para-educators as local employees, rather than shifting them to the SU, and the schools in ECSU decided to do so.

The changes under Act 153 have allowed for more consistent decision-making in regards to how resources are allocated and services are provided to our students. Being able to spend time in the schools supporting programming and participating on teams for individual students has led to a better sense of the “big picture” of what is happening for our students and of the resources and talents we have within our staff. Connections for teachers with their colleagues in other schools, whose expertise would be beneficial in a given situation, have happened. Collaboration between school principals and the SU office about services for students and how they can be provided most effectively and efficiently has been an ongoing process. This has included looking at para-educator schedules, to ensure that we are meeting the needs of students while maximizing our opportunity for reimbursement of their costs.

In practical terms, what does this mean? To date, we have 4 less para-educators working in the SU than we budgeted for this school year. We have had no additional out-of-district placements, and are working to return some students to their sending schools. Para-educator schedules are reviewed monthly to be sure that they are being used as they were budgeted. Principals have not had to attend as many special education team meetings since there is LEA representation from the SU office, so they have been able to spend their time focusing on other aspects of running the schools. In looking at the overall budget for special education, some of the salaries of our related service providers have been able to be shifted to grants, which will lower the special education local assessments by about \$100,000 total. Evaluations and IEP meetings are happening with consistent representation across the SU, which is ensuring more equity for students. Sharing special education costs across the SU has also reduced the impact that a single high-needs student could potentially have on one town’s budget, as the impact is now spread across a larger entity.

In summary, the shifts with Act 153 this school year have been positive ones and it is exciting to see the great work that is happening with our students throughout the supervisory union.

Respectfully submitted,

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