

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

01. Approval to adopt criteria for the Teacher Unit Allocation Methodology to Support Programs for Students with Disabilities. (Has cleared the APA process with public comments included in the backup material)

Teacher Unit Allocation Methodology to Support Programs for Students with Disabilities

Summary of Current Methodology

The current methodology is a combination of interpretation of State Board of Education policy and Office of Special Education operating procedures that have guided allocation of teacher units for Special Education programs since 1983. Staffing ratios are determined by the disability category and educational placement of the student, along with subjective application of the process by districts and office staff. Educational placements of students include:

- **Self-Contained** in which students receive special education and related services for the full school day or for all but one period per school day;
- **Resourced** in which students receive special education and related services for at least two regular classes each school day, one of which must be academic; and
- **Regular/Inclusion** where students receive special education services for no more than one period each school day.

Rationale for Change

During the past decade, there have been major shifts in the philosophy of special education resulting in new service delivery models and options. More recently, state efforts to improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities have been facilitated through the *Modified Mattie T. Consent Decree*, and *Mississippi's Revised Policies and Procedures for Implementation of IDEA-97*. There have been increasing concerns that the current teacher unit allocation methodology does not adequately support these changes.

The primary legal change to impact staffing needs is the reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997 Amendments* (IDEA-97) which requires that all students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum. Furthermore, students with disabilities are to be educated in regular education classrooms with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Students' IEPs must include goals and objectives related to meeting the child's needs and enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum.

Consistent with the intent of IDEA-97 and pertinent case law, the Mississippi State Board of Education, in October, 2002, approved changes to the *Policies and Procedures for Implementation of IDEA-97* which require careful consideration of factors pertaining to educational placements, and reinforce the importance of a unified service delivery system that supports students in general education classrooms.

The above changes have resulted in the need to re-examine both the conceptual and operational premises on which special education teacher units are allocated to school districts.

Current Methodology	Need for Change
Programs serving students through more restrictive placements (self-contained) receive more support.	Programs serving students in more inclusive placements should receive greater support. Support is needed for the general education teacher for the portion of the day students with disabilities are served in the general education classroom.
Teacher units are based, in part, on the child's disability.	Allocation of teacher units should not be based on disability, but on intensity of services needed.
There is no differentiation for preschool, elementary, and secondary programs.	There should be differentiated support for students at the preschool, elementary, and secondary levels.
Student placement along a comprehensive LRE continuum is not a major consideration.	Teacher units should be based on the LRE continuum of options AND the amount of time the student requires specially designed instruction and services.

Proposed Methodology

The proposed Teacher Unit Allocation Methodology gives consideration to two factors:

Educational Placement Levels of Support

Each student will be assigned a weighted value based on these two factors. After calculation of the total number of weighted students, teacher units are determined by the following formula:

Pre-K: 18 weighted units = 1 teacher
 K-2: 22 weighted units = 1 teacher
 Gr. 3-12: 27 weighted units = 1 teacher

I. Educational Placement

The first factor in determining the teacher unit allocation is the educational placement of students with disabilities. These placements represent options along the least restrictive environment continuum.

- **Regular Education/Early Childhood Setting**
Ages 3-5: Early childhood setting designed primarily for children without disabilities
Ages 6-20: General/regular education classes for more than 80% of the school day. (Removed from general education for no more than 20% of the school day)

- **Resourced**

Ages 3-5: Special education setting part time; remainder of time at home or in early childhood setting designed for non-disabled children

Ages 6-20: General/regular education placement between 40-80% of the school day (Removed from regular education for 20-60% of the school day)

- **Self-Contained**

Ages 3-5: Program designed primarily for students with disabilities

Ages 6-20: General education class less than 40% of the school day (removed from regular education for more than 60% of the day)

- **Home/Hospital**

Education provided in the home or hospital setting in accordance with the student's IEP.

II. Levels of Support

The second factor of the proposed methodology is the intensity of specially designed instruction received by the student from an appropriately licensed special education teacher and related services received from an appropriately licensed related service provider (except for transportation services). It is proposed that the following levels of support be reflected in the teacher unit allocation methodology:

Minimal Support: The student receives specially designed instruction/supports for at least one period per week or less than 5 hours per week.

Targeted Support: The student receives specially designed instruction/supports for at least one period per day or 5 to 12.5 hours per week.

Sustained Support: The student receives specially designed instruction/supports for at least half of the school day or more than 12.5 to 24 hours per week.

Intensive Support: The student receives specially designed instruction/supports for the full school day or all but one period per day, or more than 24 to 30 hours per week or more.

Other Instructional Support

- Adaptive Physical Educators are specifically trained to make adaptations, modifications, and accommodations in order to provide a safe, successful physical education experience for students with disabilities. The ratio for Adaptive Physical Educators is 48:1 with a minimum of 25. The maximum class size is 48 students.
- Speech/Language Pathologists are responsible for organizing and implementing the assessment and services for communication and related disorders through various service delivery models. The ratio for Speech/Language Pathologists is 48:1 with a minimum of 25. The maximum class size is 48 students.

Educational Placement	Levels of Support			
	Minimal <5 hrs/wk	Targeted 5-12.5 hrs/wk	Sustained >12.5-24 hrs/wk	Intensive 24+ hrs/wk
Regular Education (removed no more than 20% of the school day)	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0
Resourced (removed 20-60% of the school day)		1.5	2.0	
Self-Contained (removed more than 60% of the school day)			2.0	3.0
Home/Hospital	2.5	4.0	4.5	5.5

w.u. = weighted units

Maximum Class Enrollment

In keeping with State Board Policy IDDF-15, the maximum class enrollment for each type of special education program is outlined below. The maximums are not used in calculating the number of units earned, but are to prevent class overloads.

Resource	18
Self-Contained	14
Home/Hospital	12
Preschool (3-5) Home-Based	16
Preschool Combination (Home/Community)	16
Preschool School-Based, Full-Day	14
Preschool School-Based, Single Half-Day	14
Preschool School-Based, Two Half-Day	24

SPECIAL CONDITION

No local school district's teacher unit allocation shall increase or decrease more than 10% of the previous school year's **funded** teacher units.

Mississippi State Board of Education approval will be required for any exception to this special condition. Exceptions must be based upon substantial increases in the prior year's December 1 Child Count (required by the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education to generate federal funding for special education in the state).