

LEADING THE WAY: P-3 EDUCATION IN COLORADO

WHO:

TERA WILKINS, Family-Centered Early Education (FCEE) Program Administrator at the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB)

WHERE: Colorado Springs, CO

The CSDB is a state-funded school within the Colorado Department of Education.

The Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB) is a state-funded school within the Colorado Department of Education. The school was established for the purpose of providing comprehensive educational services for children, birth to age 21, who are blind/visually impaired and/or deaf/hard of hearing. Services are provided directly to students enrolled at the school, and outreach programs serve students, staff, and families in communities throughout Colorado.

The Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB) Family-Centered Early Education (FCEE) program believes that all children can be successful, regardless of hearing level or communication modality. The FCEE program provides family-centered services, education, and support to children who are deaf/hard-of-hearing, from birth – 2nd grade. The FCEE program focuses on developing a strong foundation of communication and language where American Sign Language (ASL) and English are equally valued.

GOALS:

Increasing Programming Efficiency and Effectiveness for Early Education (Preschool through 2nd grade)

Prior to SY 2015-2016, the CSDB Preschool and Kindergarten through 5th grade programs operated under different administrators. In 2015-2016, the preschool through second grade programs merged to become the Family-Centered Early Education Program. The staff and students are now under one administrator, collaborate in meetings, and share professional learning opportunities. This internal re-structuring translates into deeper conversations about a range of essential topics, including transitions and meeting the developmental and educational needs of students.

For the first time, a section of the strategic plan focuses specifically on this age group, which has made a positive impact. Utilizing an evidence-based resource provided by the P-3 Leadership Cadre, CSDB included parents, staff and other stakeholders in establishing the vision, mission, goals and action steps. In turn, the team views the students differently, sees the shared work more clearly, and demonstrates significant investment in the work.

Increase Family Engagement

The strategic plan specific to preschool through 2nd grade classrooms at CSDB includes increasing family engagement by connecting with families from the start. As a result of participating in the strategic planning process, staff, parents and other stakeholders are better equipped to consider and address the additional layer of complexities associated with serving students who are deaf and blind and are working with more intention to connect with and engage families.

NEXT STEPS:

Tera's team at CSDB is working to expand this cohesive and streamlined continuum to include children birth to third grade and their families. This ongoing process will include broadening the use of the Teaching Strategies GOLD™ assessment system, accessing more professional development through Colorado Shines, and including even more staff in the strategic planning process.

To further build a bridge with the birth-three early intervention services, CSDB will continue the work of developing a Birth-to-Three Task Force that includes families and other stakeholders to help inform the work of building a more inclusive teaching and learning continuum.



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LESSONS LEARNED:

Tera's team found that utilizing evidence-based planning resources to guide the development of a 3-year strategic plan specific to the P-2nd grade age groups has yielded positive results in terms of achieving clarity around the work and investment in the process. Tera has learned that involving more teachers, staff, families and other stakeholders helps to strengthen the team and increases the investment in the work going forward.

Tera and the FCEE team realize that utilizing the full team of specialists who support students and families in all aspects of planning and implementation will help the program better serve the specific population. Leveraging the expertise and valuable perspectives of an expanded team will help to critically apply standards and assessment tools, such as the Colorado's Early Learning and Development Guidelines and Teaching Strategies GOLD™, to those students who haven't had access to language from birth. This is important, as CSDB strives to create a model P-3 approach serving a unique population of students.

“As we've worked more closely with Colorado's Early Learning and Development Guidelines and other resources, we've taken a step back to make sure there are more opportunities for play-based learning... and changed some of what the school day looks like to provide a balance of developmentally-appropriate activities for our students.”

