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## **CITY SCHOOLS OF DECATUR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PARTNERSHIP**

The following *scope of work* is intended to guide activities associated with a research and evaluation partnership to support City Schools of Decatur’s Office of the Superintendent (hereafter referred to as *CSD-REP*).

### **CSD-REP TEAM**

CSD-REP is a partnership between the Office of the Superintendent of Schools and the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) at Georgia State University. CSD-REP team members include (additional members will be identified as needed):

- CSD Team:
  - Dr. David Dude, Superintendent
    - Lead CSD Contact: [ddude@csdecatur.net](mailto:ddude@csdecatur.net); 404-371-3601
  - Heidi Whatley, Director, Student Support
  - Frank DeFillippo, Coordinator, Special Education
  - Christen Gibbons, Coordinator, Gifted and School Psychologist
  
- CEHD Team:
  - Dr. Nicole Patton Terry, Executive Director, The Urban Child Study Center
    - Lead CEHD Contact: [npterry@gsu.edu](mailto:npterry@gsu.edu); 773-301-7402
  - Dr. Susan Ogletree, Director, Center for Evaluation and Research Services
  - Dr. Kevin Fortner, Assistant Professor, Research, Measurement, and Statistics
  - Dr. Robert Hendrick, Research Affiliate, Center for Evaluation and Research Services
  - Dr. Dashaunda Patterson, Assistant Professor, Special Education
  - Dr. Gwendolyn Benson, Associate Dean for School, Community, and International Partnerships

### **CSD-REP PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of CSD-REP is to support CSD in achieving its goal of building “the foundation for all children to be their best, achieve their dreams, and make the world a better place.” CSD has a long tradition of promoting academic achievement and overall well-being amongst all of its students, by providing a rigorous curriculum and robust programming in pre-k through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. In order to ensure that it is not only providing effective educational programming but also responding appropriately when concerns are identified, CSD has adopted a policy to continuously evaluate its educational programs. By establishing a regular schedule of program evaluation with an independent third-party entity, CSD confirms its commitment to offering one of the “top ten community school districts in the nation”.

#### Special Education Program Evaluation

In its inaugural cycle, program evaluation activities during the 2016-2017 academic school year will focus on the special education program. The special education program is housed in the Department of Student Supports, which coordinates programs and services for students with special learning needs, including

special education, gifted and talented education, school psychologists, social work, speech and language pathologists, occupational and physical therapy, and health needs. In addition, the department works with the Department of Instruction to implement a Response to Intervention process. Through RTI, CSD offers a continuum of supports to all students, intensifying interventions for students who may need additional programs and services to succeed in school. Currently, CSD offers some kind of special services support to 56% of its students (e.g., early intervention and remedial education plans, special education, gifted and talented, and 504 Plan), with approximately 850 students being served through special education with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP; 10%) or a 504 Plan (6%). This rate (17%) is higher than that typically reported for by districts for supporting students through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; i.e., students who have IEPs) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; i.e., students who have 504 plans). With substantial growth projected in the both size and diversity of the district, it is imperative that CSD investigate how well it serves students with special needs.

Thus, the primary goal of CSD-REP are to evaluate how well CSD implements the processes and procedures around ensuing compliance, effective instruction, student achievement, and parent engagement in its special education program. The evaluation will focus primarily on programs and services provided to two groups of students:

1. students who are served through provisions outlined in IDEA and ADA. These students have an IEP or 504 plan, and participate in the Tier 4 Special Education program within the RTI continuum.
2. students who are served through other support programs and services to improve achievement. These students do not have an IEP or 504 plan and participate in Tiers 2 and 3 programs within the RTI continuum (e.g., Early Intervention Program; Remedial Education Program).

In addition, there may be students and families who have interacted with special education programs but may not be currently receiving special education services through CSD (e.g., students who are in the process of being evaluated for special education services; students who have been evaluated but deemed ineligible to receive special education services; students who have been exited from special education services; students with disabilities whose families chose not to enroll them in CSD). Recognizing the value that this group's perspective may bring to the evaluation, we will include opportunities to engage with this unique population. Specifically, CSD-REP will accomplish the following objectives:

1. to examine the academic, social, and behavioral outcomes of:
  - a. students who participate in special education (Tier 4) programs in CSD
  - b. students who participate in Tier 2 and 3 programs in CSD
  - c. students who do not participate in Tier 2-4 programs due to current step in the evaluation process, choice, or ineligibility.
2. to examine administrative processes and procedures related to the success for students in Tiers 2-4, including for example:
  - a. compliance with state and federal guidelines for supporting students with special needs
  - b. child find, referral, evaluation, and eligibility process activities

- c. teacher-student ratios and service delivery capacity
  - d. funding formula for serving students with both high- and low-incidence special needs
  - e. district's organizational structure to support students with special needs
  - f. principal's role and efficacy in special education and RTI process
  - g. communication and interactions with families at individual schools and at the central office
3. to examine teacher factors related to the success of students in Tiers 2-4, including for example:
    - a. teacher credentials and years of experience
    - b. teacher turnover rates
    - c. professional learning opportunities offered, participation rates, and need
    - d. instructional practices used to support students with special needs
    - e. communication and interaction with families
    - f. efficacy in serving students with special needs
  4. to examine parent and community factors related to the success of students in Tiers 2-4, including for example:
    - a. interactions with principals, teachers, and student supports personnel at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and for different disability groups
    - b. knowledge of special education law, rights, and due process
    - c. knowledge of continuum of services offered by CSD to support students with learning needs
    - d. expectations for "compliance" vs. "ideal services", and what should be offered by CSD

By accomplishing these objectives, CSD-REP activities will help the district and its stakeholders better understand how well it is serving students with special learning needs. It will also lay the groundwork for ongoing partnership initiatives focused on ensuring that all children thrive in CSD. In order to accomplish these objectives, the CSD-REP team proposes a research and evaluation plan that includes the following activities from January to December 2017:

- gather administrative and student performance data to examine trends in outcomes for students participating in Tier 2-4 programs and the instructional staff that supports students in these programs as far back as the 2010-2011 academic school year;
- gather administrative data to examine characteristics of procedures, processes, staffing, and instructional programming in place to support students in these programs;
- conduct interviews, focus groups, and surveys with administrators, principals, teachers, and parents to examine their interactions with and impressions of these programs; and
- provide assistance with interpretation of results and recommendations for next steps.

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

The CSD-REP team will work collaboratively to accomplish the goals and objectives within a reasonable timeline. In order to inform CSD and its stakeholders, the team will provide a final report of the findings, as well as additional support materials as needed (e.g., presentations, briefs). Roles and responsibilities include the following:

- build a research and evaluation team to support the partnership and carryout the proposed activities: faculty, research scientists, and graduate research assistants at The Urban Child Study Center and the Center for Evaluation and Research will collaborate to carry out the activities listed in this scope of work, including:
  - hiring, training, and managing data collectors to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data. Note that timelines for data collection will be determined collaboratively with the Office of the Superintendent, with completion of activities dependent upon the approval of the scope of work, contract, and availability of schools, teachers, and parents. The Office will support coordination of these activities to ensure timely completion;
  - housing data collected from CSD-REP. Data sharing agreements will be developed so that CSD can share administrative data (at the individual student, teacher, classroom, and school levels) with CEHD to complete research and evaluation activities;
  - conducting analyses of quantitative and qualitative data sources, culminating in a comprehensive report of findings with recommendations for next steps no later than September 1, 2017 (a preliminary report can be made available no later than May 31, 2017);
  - participating in meetings and conducting outreach with appropriate personnel and stakeholders to provide information about the partnership and the research and evaluation process and findings (e.g., district and school staff, school board, parents); and
  - maintaining compliance with CSD's and GSU's Institutional Review Boards to ensure the ethical conduct of all research and evaluation activities, compliance with FERPA and HIPPA laws, and adhere to data sharing agreements established between CSD and GSU.
  
- quantitative methodological approaches and analyses: the CEHD research and evaluation team will collaborate with CSD staff to obtain administrative data at the individual student, teacher, classroom, and school levels beginning with the 2011-12 school year to the most recent data available.
  - *Obtaining data.* The obtained data should contain fields to enable merging of individual data files. The CEHD team will attempt, to the extent possible, to minimize the effort and time required by CSD staff to provide data. The CEHD team has great flexibility on the formats and file sources for data provision and will work with CSD staff to identify processes that will simplify data transfers and minimize data support needs. Some data that may be useful for an evaluation of this type may be stored in non-electronic formats. The CEHD team will collaborate with CSD staff to identify the feasibility and labor required to collect administrative data of this type. Final decisions on collection of this data will consider the resource costs of collection, informational value of data, and whether or not sampling is suitable to determine collection strategies for these types of data.
  - *Analyses and reporting.* The CEHD team will merge and compile the data obtained from CSD to provide a longitudinal picture of the recent and current state of special education services provided by CSD. The report will include information concerning outputs (number/proportion of students served, the characteristics of teachers serving students, financial resources devoted to special education services, numbers of students referred for

evaluation, etc.) and information on outcomes (student performance, engagement, discipline, etc.). For additional context, the CEHD evaluation team will incorporate information from the academic literature and other publically available sources to provide comparative indicators of special education services provision in other, or similar, local education agencies. The final reporting is intended to provide a comprehensive picture of the current state of special education service provision in CSD and the longitudinal context to determine recent longitudinal trends in service provision. The overall evaluation will assess CSD's compliance with regard to special education services, performance of students receiving services, and stakeholder perceptions of expectations and provision of these services.

- qualitative methodological approaches and analyses: the CEHD research and evaluation team will collaborate with CSD staff to conduct surveys, interviews, and focus groups with administrative staff, principals, teachers, and parents. The CEHD team will use the *Fourth Generation Evaluation* model (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), which allows for the empowerment and enfranchisement of stakeholders while providing a definitive, mutually constructed and negotiated action-oriented plan for process improvement and utilization. The following will constitute the major qualitative data sources for the evaluation project:
  - *Interviews with special education central office personnel, principals and board of education chair*. An interview and associated protocol guide will be used in the implementation of semi-structured interviews to capture stakeholder perceptions of the CSD Special Education Program. District personnel to be interviewed include the Superintendent, Special Services Director, Special Education Coordinator, Gifted Coordinator, Director of Assessment and Accountability, RTI Specialist, the nine school principals, and the Chair of the Board of Education. These interviews will last generally 45-60 minutes and will be held in a private, convenient location for the stakeholder. Interviews will focus on but will not be limited to such aspects as perceived quality and impact of the Special Education Program, including use of evidence based practices; RTI implementation; disproportionality of students served; communication with other stakeholders; and the continuum of SPED services currently available to students in the system. Up to a total of 16 individual interviews will be conducted.
  - *Focus groups with special education teachers, general education teachers and parents*. Focus groups will be conducted with Special Education Teachers, General Education Teachers and interested parents of students in the school system. Two focus groups of both teachers and parents will be held at each of the nine school sites for a total of 36 one-hour focus groups. Each focus group will include 6 or more participants. As qualitative research generally follows an emergent paradigm, modifications to the semi-structured interview protocol and/or guide will be informed by the addition of relevant data gathered from the individual interviews and focus groups with CSD stakeholders.
  - *Qualitative open-ended questionnaires for special education teachers, general education teachers and parents*. The online questionnaire instruments constructed for CSD will be

hosted by Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). The CEHD team uses Qualtrics to provide a secure bank of servers to host evaluation and research online data administration for GSU. Qualtrics provides the insight platform, firewall protected servers, and global data reliability. Qualtrics treats all data as highly confidential and does not classify or represent the data because only the university has access to those data collected. All data are safeguarded using industry-best security practices that prevent unlawful disclosure.

- *Analyses and reporting.* Three basic categories will be used when reviewing the text: description, analysis, and interpretation. Transcriptions from the interviews and focus groups will provide raw qualitative data that is descriptive in nature. These data will be thematically reduced and coded to assess the degree of consensus among sources. Finally, an in-depth interpretation of the data collected will be conducted. In some instances, concept maps will be developed. Where pertinent, data analysis will be linked to current educational policy.

Given these roles and responsibilities, the scope of work will be completed according to the following timeline (see Table 1) and include the following measures (see Table 2):

**Table 1. Timeline of Activities**

	Winter 2016	Spring 2016	Summer 2017	Fall 2017
Hire and train research and evaluation team	✓			
Gain approval from GSU and CSD human subjects review boards to conduct research and evaluation activities	✓			
Design survey, interview, and focus group protocols	✓			
Establish focus group and interview schedules and locations	✓			
Establish data sharing procedures between GSU and CSD	✓			
Collect administrative and school-based data from CSD	✓	✓		
Conduct focus groups and interviews throughout CSD	✓	✓		
Analysis, reporting, & interpretation of data		✓	✓	
Preliminary reporting			✓	
Final reporting				✓
Meeting with GSU and CSD team members, and CSD teachers, staff, parents, and other community stakeholders	as needed			

**Table 2. Measures**

<b>Measures</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Administered by</b>
<b>Interviews</b>		
CSD School Principals	9 (each school)	GSU
CSD Administrative Staff	5 (e.g., Superintendent, Director of Student Supports, Special Education Coordinator, Student and Family Support Coordinator, RTI Specialist, others TBD)	
<b>Focus Groups</b>		
CSD Classroom and Special Education Teachers	18 (2 per school, one for general education teachers and one for special education teachers)	GSU
CSD Parents	18 (2 per school, one for families with children served through the special education program and one for families with children who are not served through the special education program)	
Community Stakeholders	1 (open to public) if needed	
<b>Surveys</b>		
CSD Teachers	1 (administered to all teachers)	GSU
CSD Parents	1 (administered to all parents)	
<b>Administrative Data</b>		
Student Information	Student characteristics (e.g., enrollment, disability category, RTI category, SES, race, ethnicity, behavior, attendance) and performance (achievement) data	N/A <i>gathered from CSD central office (and individual schools if necessary)</i>
Teacher Information	Teacher characteristics (e.g., certifications, employment history and experience, placement)	
District Information	District characteristics (e.g., special education compliance information)	

**BUDGET & BUDGET JUSTIFICATION**

A budget is attached to this scope of work, and details estimated costs of the partnership, including personnel, materials, and indirect costs. Below is a detailed budget justification for the partnership. If continued funding for the partnership is desired, then the budget can be amended as appropriate.

**Personnel**

Researchers in the Urban Child Study Center and the Center for Evaluation and Research Services in the College of Education and Human Development at Georgia State University will serve the partnership.

**Dr. Kevin Fortner**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Education Policy Studies, will serve as Principal Investigator. Dr. Fortner's research interests include program evaluation and data utilization, including research that has practical and policy implications. Dr. Fortner will provide leadership on all activities related to quantitative evaluation design, database creation, data analyses and reporting, and policy. The total cost for Dr. Fortner's work is **\$10,599.75**.

**Dr. Nicole Patton Terry**, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology, Special Education, and Communication Disorders and Executive Director of the Urban Child Study Center, will serve as Co-Principal Investigator. Dr. Terry's research interests include early language and literacy development and instruction for children who struggle to acquire these skills, including children diagnosed with or at risk for developing learning disabilities and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Dr. Terry will support the overall management and implementation of the partnership, and provide leadership all on activities. The total cost for Dr. Terry's work is **\$0 (\$9,306 donated)**.

**Dr. Susan Ogletree**, Director of the Center for Evaluation and Research Services, will serve as Co-Principal Investigator. Dr. Ogletree's research interests include program evaluation, including research that has practical and policy implications. She is also interested in the Professional Development School Model's implementation both nationally and internationally, and the impact of the model on academic achievement. Dr. Ogletree will support the overall management and implementation of the partnership, and provide leadership on all activities. The total cost for Dr. Fortner's work is **\$8,548.20**.

**Dr. Robert Hendrick**, Research Affiliate in the Center for Evaluation and Research Services and the Department of Education Policy Studies, will serve as Co-Investigator. Dr. Hendrick's research interests include program evaluation, including research that has practical and policy implications. Dr. Hendrick will provide leadership on all activities related to qualitative evaluation design, database creation, data analyses and reporting, and policy. The total cost for Dr. Hendrick's work is **\$10,498.80**.

**Dr. Gwendolyn Benson**, Associate Dean for School, Community, and International Partnerships, will serve as Co-Investigator. Dr. Benson's research and scholarly interests include preparation and retention of highly qualified educators, especially in high-needs disciplines in high-needs schools. She also works to sustain the College's Professional Development Schools network and facilitates local, national, and international outreach and partnerships on behalf of the College and University. Dr. Benson will participate in survey, focus group, and interview design, implementation, and analyses. The total cost for Dr. Benson's work is **\$0 (15,089.30 donated)**.

**Dr. DaShaunda Patterson**, Clinical Assistant Professor, will serve as Co-Investigator. Dr. Patterson's research and scholarly interests include preparation and retention of highly qualified special educators, academic strategies for students with learning and behavior disorders, positive academic and behavior interventions and supports, co-teaching, differentiated instruction, and universal design for learning. Dr.





