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Just as important: Understanding the special education system

BY LEA KOPKE STAFF WRITER

BROWN COUNTY - IEP, 504, LEA, IDEA, FAPE, IEE.

These are a mere taste of the alphabet soup that makes up the special education system in Wisconsin.

Parents of children with disabilities must become connoisseurs of the dish to fully understand what supports are available to their children and how they can ensure their needs are met.

Tammy Nicholson, Ashwaubenon's director of pupil services, said districts try to simplify the special education system for parents by breaking it down into steps.

"I would say if I were a parent not knowing anything about special ed, I would find it, possibly, to be challenging at times, just because we have to follow so many federal guidelines around timelines," Nicholson said. "The process can be very confusing."

To better navigate the process, she said it's important to first have a basic understanding of the big picture.

The basics

The roughly 6,000 special education students in Brown County public schools have different needs.

Jennifer Garceau, Howard-Suamico's student ser-

vices director, said districts are required to meet each student's unique needs by offering whatever services are necessary for student success.

Districts use a variety of supporting professionals, including special education teachers and aides, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, speech and language pathologists and more to meet these needs.

"It is really a spectrum of services from very restric-

tive, which is based on a student's needs, and they may need a lot of support to, you know, they are very independent and they just need minimal support," Garceau said.

Nicholson said it's important not to consider special education students as an entirely separate category.

"The student is a regular ed student first who has some additional needs that might need to go out or have a special ed teach-

er come in for a service," Nicholson said. "Just like students who may have any other need - diabetic needs, health needs, medical needs."

She said districts begin by placing students in the least restrictive method of delivery, which is in a general education classroom.

From that point, she said, students can move into a more collaborative setting, where general education teachers sometimes co-teach with special education teachers or aides.

This is sometimes done in collaborative classrooms, where the class is equal parts general education and special education students.

Students who require additional services may be pulled out of general education classrooms for specialized instruction or an alternative curriculum at points throughout the day.

"Sometimes families

Parents with students in special education programs need to familiarize themselves with a series of acronyms which reference federal and state mandates to help them through what can often be an arduous process. Press Times Photo Illustration

think having (an aide) in the classroom with the student, working with them all day, is least restrictive," Nicholson said. "That is actually one of our most restrictive environments that we have because those students are not able to work independently then and function outside of that individual, and become very adult-dependent."

She said while districts try to put kids in the least-restrictive environment possible, they also make sure a student is not put in a co-teaching environment simply because a school has the resources.

"We want to make sure it is going to be the right fit for the students as well," Nicholson said. "So it really comes down to: What does that student's (Individualized Education Plan (IEP)) look like? What does it lay out? And what is the best environment for them? And we try and fit our staffing needs to what we have with our students."

A plan of action

To determine the resources a special education student needs, each student receives a specialized plan for learning, known as an IEP.

Patti Williams, an assistant director of special education at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), said the

See EDUCATION page 8

Kramer accused of forgery

BY KEVIN BONESKE STAFF WRITER

HOBART - Village Administrator Aaron Kramer has been charged in Brown County Circuit Court with a misdemeanor count of being party to the crime of forgery after he allegedly directed a clerk last year to forge the name of the sitting municipal judge to remove a substitute judge.

If convicted, Kramer, who has an initial appearance and a plea/sentencing hearing scheduled for Sept. 16, could be sentenced to up to nine months in jail and/or fined up to \$10,000.

According to the court complaint, which was filed Aug. 19, an outside agency requested the Appleton Police Department to conduct an investigation into allegations of misconduct in office involving Kramer.

He is accused of directing the clerk, identified as "RS" in court records, to remove Carley Windorff as a substitute judge for Robert VanLanen, then the Hobart/Lawrence municipal judge, without VanLanen's knowledge or consent.

On Feb. 13, 2020, the complaint states, VanLanen requested Windorff, an attorney, to fill in for him during a medical leave. He signed an application, which was submitted to the 8th Judicial District for approval.

The complaint further states the application was approved electronically March 2, 2020, by 8th Judicial District Court Administrator Thomas Schappa.

On May 14, 2020, the complaint states, Kramer

See FORGERY page 21



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