Act Early to Simplify End-of-Year Special Education Reporting & Data Review

Four districts discuss how and when they use their special education data to get a jump start on end-of-year planning.
INTRODUCTION

Year-end reporting: does it send shivers up your spine? It takes a lot of time to collect the data, and even more time to review it — and it’s no secret that time is already hard to come by in special education, especially at the end of the year.

Yet end-of-year data offers an extraordinary opportunity to efficiently close out this school year and plan for the next, so you can hit the ground running. By getting a jumpstart early, you’ll have more time to compile your reports AND use data to make planning and staffing decisions for the next school year.

To get a better understanding of how end-of-year data can be effectively leveraged with such limited time, we asked four districts to share their challenges and best-practice tips.

As you’ll see, this is not a one-size-fits-all process! But it’s exciting to see common themes around proactively using data as an end-of-year planning tool.
What Your Peers in Special Education Say About the End-of-Year Reporting & Review Process
When does your organization’s end-of-year data review process typically start?

Pekin Public School District 108:
“January, but we update and review caseloads and numbers of special education students in the district and in each school on a monthly basis, in preparation for end-of-year review.”

South Sector — United Independent School District:
“April.”

Pine Tree Independent School District:
“May. We like to take a month to make sure everything is under control before people leave for the summer. It takes about 1-2 weeks total, with all individuals involved, start to finish.”

Katy Independent School District:
“We start reviewing in January or February, to nail down student population numbers and staffing needs as early as possible before the end of the year.”
Who reviews the data and what’s involved?

Pekin Public School District 108:
“The director of special education, special education coordinator and the secretary meet as a team, monthly, then have an end-of-year meeting in June. Monthly meetings don’t take long — the June meeting takes longer.”

South Sector — United Independent School District:
“The special education director along with special education process facilitators meet to discuss and review data.”

Pine Tree Independent School District:
“Primarily, me (the special education director) and my secretary. But other administrative and assessment staff members understand how to analyze reports, and we do discuss as a team frequently.”

Katy Independent School District:
“Starting in January, we review the data as a team of three or separately, as needed — these are shorter meetings designed to ensure all of the data is in the best shape possible and showing a live view of information, also to ensure we’re not losing any data. At the end of the year, the district leadership team sets aside three days for a comprehensive review of all the data from the past year.”
Does end-of-year data review help you measure the efficacy of this past year’s program?

Pekin Public School District 108:
“We currently use the data more to plan ahead. We don’t use the data to consistently measure program, student or staff success — but that would be very helpful, if there was a way to do it efficiently.”

South Sector — United Independent School District:
“This is our first year reviewing.”

Pine Tree Independent School District:
“Yes. The goal of the district is to include as many students as possible in the general education program, and the end-of-year data paired with assessment data and discipline data can help us determine the effectiveness of the program.”

Katy Independent School District:
“We currently use the data more to plan ahead than look back. We don’t really use the data to consistently measure program, student or staff success — though we do use it to keep us organized throughout the school year.”
How does data help you plan for the next school year?

South Sector — United Independent School District:

“Identifying programs and systems that proved successful this year, anticipate staff development needs, changes in programs and procedures that were not effective this year and planning for the beginning of the next school year.”

“Resource planning benefits translate to students, too, because staff can be moved more effectively to better support students.”

Pekin Public School District 108:

“It’s helpful for resource planning in our special education program at the campus level. For example, we had a building that started the year with one teacher and twelve special education students. But eight or nine of those students ended up needing more attention from teachers and paraprofessionals because of the disability types. Reviewing disability code data at the end of the year allows us to make better projections as to pull out services for teachers and paraprofessionals, so we can more accurately plan effective caseloads and decide if we need to hire more teachers or paraprofessionals.”

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Placement of service data will tell us how many students are in inclusion and how many are going to be in resource by campus next school year. We’ll use data to plan staff and decide if we’re going to have to move staff, add staff or take away staff to cover kids. Because of the data, this process can now be done in advance of the school year starting. Resource planning benefits translate to students, too, because staff can be moved more effectively to better support students. I can now preemptively pair the right students with the right staff. We’ll also use data to make sure resource planning aligns with budget.

Katy Independent School District:

“It’s helpful in compliance planning. Seeing a live view of how many students we’re evaluating on a monthly and yearly basis. To make projections for how many special education students will be in our district, and moving around to various schools within our district, in the coming school year. We also use it to see enrollment trends at each campus as we determine how we’re going to staff educational diagnosticians and speech pathologists for each campus.”

“[Year-end data] is helpful in compliance planning. Seeing a live view of how many students we’re evaluating on a monthly and yearly basis.”
Which data and reports are most helpful?

Pekin Public School District 108:
“Student grade, program, educational environment code, disability code, address path, projected campus for coming school year.”

South Sector — United Independent School District:
“Data for transition planning, behavior intervention plans, special education next annual review dates, re-evaluation review dates. We’ll review audit reports, demographic reports and discipline reports.”

Pine Tree Independent School District:
“Student name, date of birth, grade, campus, instructional arrangement code, speech code, related services data. We use the annual state-specific special education and FIE reports. The 504 report helps to identify students with dyslexia, so we can compare teacher caseloads.”

Katy Independent School District:
“Student disability code, how many transfer students are in our district, how many students are evaluated each month, how many meetings are held each month, how many students we started with in our special education programs — and how many we end the year with, pending referrals, reports to make sure the status for each student is filled in to our data management system.”
What challenges do you face?

Pekin Public School District 108:
“Not enough time. Having to manipulate some of the data manually.”

South Sector — United Independent School District:
“Staff has continued to work on active files instead of creating drafts; it is imperative to have the ability to lock active files once (student information) is archived to help maintain active and historic student records.”

Pine Tree Independent School District:
“Finding the time can be challenging. The accountability piece has been somewhat challenging. Keeping track of what student information has and hasn’t been archived — in the past, this has been difficult to determine.”

Katy Independent School District:
“Not enough time. We want to make sure we benchmark and archive all of our data each month so we don’t lose any of it, and keep a running record of historical data. Losing live data is a major concern. Lack of interconnectedness in some of the data systems our district uses can be a challenge.”
It’s safe to say that end-of-year data review in special education is a MAJOR effort — but all four districts used insights gathered during this process to inform plans for the next school year. Time and data loss were common challenges, while better compliance and resource management were common goals.

Do these themes resonate with what you’ve experienced in the trenches? Are there other ways your team can use data that will positively affect your students and staff next year?

For information on how our state-specific IEP & Special Education Management software can help you protect, archive and benchmark your data, please visit:

FrontlineEducation.com/Special-Ed-Interventions

These interviews have been edited for brevity and clarity.

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