



To: Mr. Atkins, Acting Superintendent
Ms. Malone, Chairperson of the Board
Members of Newport Board of Education

July 31, 2025

Special Education Services and Programming

My name is Kerri Johns-Niemann, and I am honored to serve as the Acting Director of Special Education for Newport Independent Schools. I come to this role with twenty-four years of experience in special education, with a focus on supporting students with exceptional needs through evidence-based practices, collaborative leadership, and a commitment to compliance and equity.

My professional background includes eight years as a classroom teacher and sixteen years as the districtwide educational diagnostician here in Newport. Throughout my career, I have worked closely with teachers, administrators, and families to ensure that every student receives the individualized support they need to succeed.

I am excited to serve Newport in this new role and to work alongside the Board to continue building and strengthening services for our students with disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to reintroduce myself—I look forward to collaborating with you and keeping you updated on our progress and initiatives in special education.

Program Initiatives

1. As part of our commitment to preparing students with disabilities for life beyond high school, we are in the process of securing a partnership with The Point Arc to strengthen our post-secondary transition initiatives. The 1:1 Pre-Employment Transition Skills (Pre-ETS) Program is scheduled to begin this fall. Through this program, an instructor will come to Newport to work directly with participating students once per week, providing up to 15 hours per quarter of individualized instruction focused on essential pre-employment skills.

These expanded services demonstrate our commitment to ensuring equitable access to meaningful transition programming for all students with disabilities, regardless of eligibility or placement. By investing in these partnerships and programs, we aim to equip our students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to pursue employment, further education, and greater independence after graduation.

2. In response to current district data and the increasing prevalence of autism among our students, Newport Independent Schools is proactively moving forward with targeted autism initiatives. These efforts reflect our daily commitment to evidence-based practices and individualized support that remove barriers to students' access to the general curriculum and overall success.

Across all grade levels and settings, our staff work collaboratively to address the diverse academic, communication, sensory, and social-emotional needs of students with autism. Educators, related service providers, and support staff engage in specialized daily practices that directly serve the needs of students with autism. These practices are intentionally planned and consistently applied within both general and special education environments, ensuring that students receive the individualized support necessary to thrive.

3. To strengthen the effectiveness and quality of our special education programs, the district will implement targeted strategies to support and retain special education teachers. This includes enhancing access to high-quality professional development, expanding mentorship and coaching opportunities for new and experienced staff, and creating systems to recognize and address workload and well-being. Through these efforts, we aim to reduce turnover, build instructional capacity, and ensure consistent, high-quality services for students with disabilities.

Special Education Service Programming Rates (May 2025):

Special Education Population

238 Students

Related Service Enrollments:

Speech & Language- 80
Occupational Therapy – 40
Physical Therapy – 7
Mental Health Therapy- 25

Alternate Service Locations:

- Regional Schools – 8 Students
- Home/Private School Students – 1 Student
- Newport School of Innovation- 4 Students
- Campbell Regional Detention - 11 Students

504 Programming Rates – 34 Students

Respectfully Submitted,

Kerri Johns-Niemann