

What's in a Label?

Developmental Delay vs. Categorical Eligibility and Racial Equity

History

2011: St Paul Public Schools (SPPS) confronted with racially predictable patterns of disproportionality. Black students and English Learners were overrepresented in special education and excluded from general education at a higher rate than white students with the same disabilities.

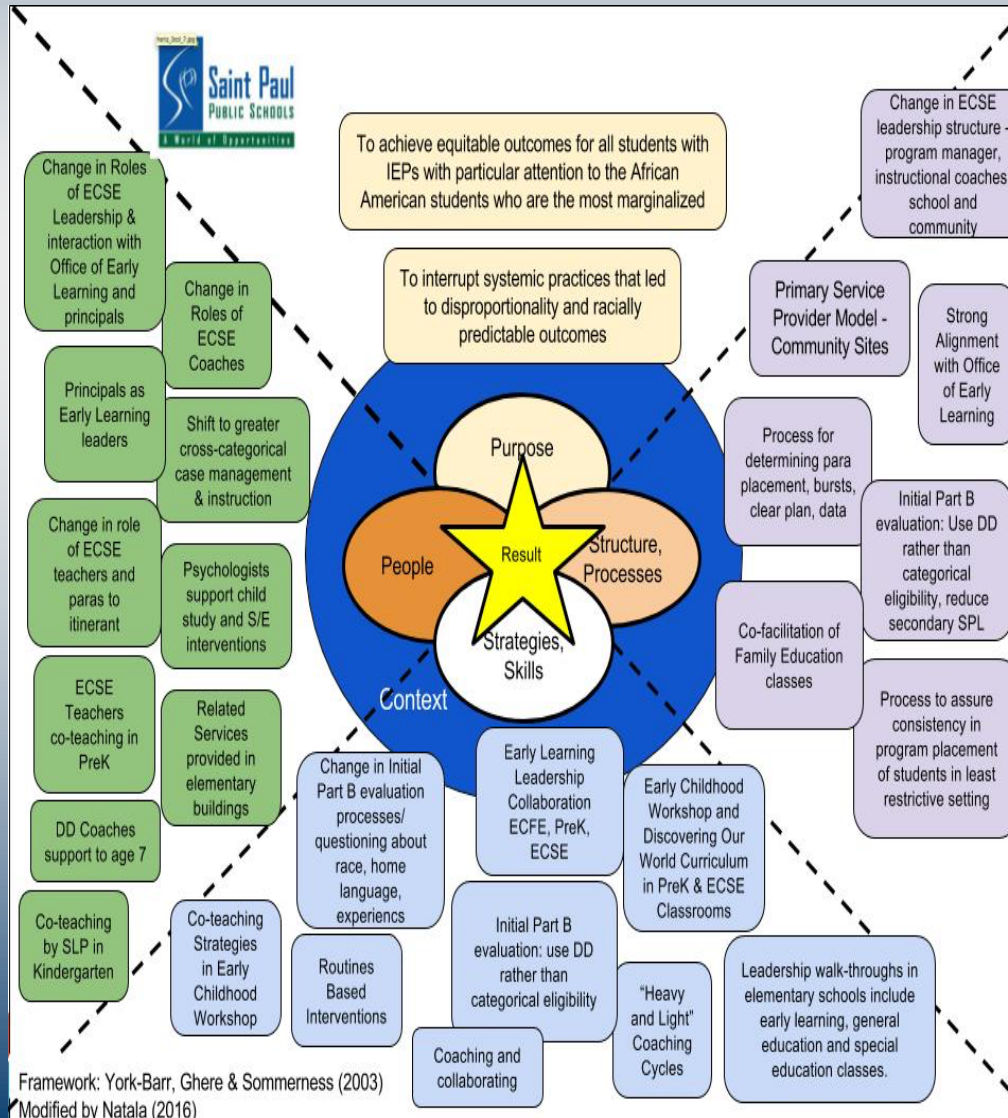
District Demographics

- ❑ 30% Asian
- ❑ 30% Black/African American
- ❑ 23% White
- ❑ 15% Hispanic/Latino
- ❑ 2% American Indian
- ❑ 40% English Learners
- ❑ 70% Free/Reduced Lunch

The absence of standardized tools for diverse, urban populations is a strong rationale for avoiding categorical labels.

“DEC believes that the categories used for older school-aged children are often inappropriate for young children. The identification of children by disability categories in the early years can result in a premature categorization or mis-categorization of children and consequently inappropriate services” (Developmental Delay as an Eligibility Category, DEC Concept Paper, 2009).

Current Practices



Response

2013: The opportunities for inclusion in general education classrooms for preschool and kindergarten children with disabilities were increased by closing separate special education sites. With an increase in inclusion, shifts in evaluation practices and placement decisions, services are determined based on student needs rather than categorical labels. Speech/Language as a secondary category is used with caution due to over identification of English Learners with a label that persists after DD expires at age 7.

2013: A school board racial equity policy was adopted. Initial Part B eligibility for categorical disabilities emerged as a root cause for the exclusion of black and brown children from general education. A conscious decision was made in 2013 to stop using categorical labels (e.g., ASD, DCD, ED) in the preschool years in favor of the use of Developmental Delay (DD) until age 7

2014: Increase in co-teaching in PreK resulted in a 20% reduction of students in Federal setting 41.