Improving the Individual Problem-Solving Process for All Staff and Students

Patrick Lau

A Capstone Project Submitted to Western Oregon University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Science in Education

August 17, 2025

Western Oregon
UNIVERSITY

MASTER'S DEGREE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Completion Term: Summer 2025

Type of exit requirement: <u>Professional Project</u>

The supervisory committee met with the candidate for a final evaluation in which all aspects of the candidate's program were reviewed. The committee's assessment and recommendations are:

Recommendations:
- ✓ Degree should be awarded

Recommendations:
- ✓ Exit Requirement has been approved

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WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED

☐ Thesis

☑ Professional Project

Titled:

Improving the Individual Problem-Solving Process for All Staff and Students

Graduate Student: Patrick Lau

Candidate for the degree of : Masters of Science in Education

and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment of the requirements of this master's degree.

Committee Chair:

Name: Alicia Wenzel   Signature:
Date:

Committee Members:

Name: Steven Nelson   Signature:
Date:

Name: Erica Manzo   Signature:
Date:

Director of Graduate Studies:

Name: Signature:
Date:

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MASTER'S DEGREE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

1. For those candidates that complete a non-testing exit requirement, the final meeting with the supervisory committee will take the place of the written examinations. During this meeting, all aspects of the candidate's program will be reviewed. The thesis, professional project, portfolio, action research project, etc. which the candidate has completed in lieu of other requirements will be the main concern of the evaluation committee. The committee, however, should extend the examination into areas of knowledge and competency which may not be drawn upon in the culminating project.

2. The committee should validate that the candidate has attained the competency and knowledge expected of one who has earned the Master's degree in the particular area of the candidate's program.

3. Please report your assessment of the candidate. The committee might report that the candidate has met this requirement satisfactorily and recommend that s/he be awarded the appropriate degree. (NOTE: In some programs there may be additional exit requirements.) On the other hand, the committee may need to report an unsatisfactory level of competence and recommend that the degree not be awarded. In this instance, please recommend any remedial activities or alternatives which are appropriate.

Name of candidate: Patrick Lau   Date of report: 8/17/2025

Type of exit requirement: Professional Project

The supervisory committee has met with the candidate for a final evaluation in which all aspects of the candidate's program were reviewed. The committee's assessment and recommendations are:

A grade of _____ for _____ quarter hours of credit

Level of performance in the oral interview: ☐ Above Average

                                               ☐ Average

                                               ☐ Below Average

                                               ☐ Failing

As appropriate, the quality of the candidate's exit requirement is: ☐ Satisfactory   ☐ Unsatisfactory

Recommendations:

☐ Degree should be awarded

☐ Degree should not be awarded (*Attach Remediation Plan to form*)

Committee Chair:

Name: Steven Nelson _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Committee Members:

Name: Alicia Wenzel _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: Erica Manzo _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

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ABSTRACT

This professional project centers on the enhancement of the Individual Problem Solving (IPS) process through the implementation of a structured, schoolwide support system designed to benefit both students and staff. Throughout the 2024–2025 academic year, a diverse team of educators collaborated to update, streamline, and refine the IPS framework. The primary objective was to provide teachers with an accessible and efficient document that enables them to clearly articulate a student's concerns, strengths, and areas of need. By simplifying the referral process and ensuring consistency in documentation, the updated IPS serves as both a practical tool for classroom teachers and a guiding framework for determining the most appropriate supports, including potential special education services. Ultimately, the aim is to leave a sustainable, user-friendly process that enhances teacher effectiveness, promotes early and accurate interventions, and fosters equitable access to support for all students.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Each school and district follows its procedures and expectations for special education services; however, one of the most critical elements is the referral process. At Washington Elementary School, the primary focus of this project was on improving the Individual Problem Solving (IPS) process. This process is designed to "locate, identify, and evaluate all resident children with suspected or established disabilities" (Special Education, 2023). Unfortunately, the IPS process at Washington Elementary had become inconsistent and lacked clear guidelines. Additionally, many staff members were unfamiliar with essential procedures and documentation requirements, which hindered the timely and effective provision of support to students who needed it.

In the Salem-Keizer School District, the Individual Problem Solving (IPS) process functions as a structured system to identify and support students who may have disabilities while ensuring compliance with the Child Find mandate under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. The IPS process emphasizes early intervention and relies on data-driven decision-making to determine whether a student may need special education services (Salem-Keizer School District, n.d.). This proactive approach helps ensure that students receive the appropriate support as early as possible to enhance their educational success.

Key steps in the IPS process:

- **Identification of Concerns**: Teachers or staff observe students displaying academic or behavioral difficulties.

- **Referral and Documentation**: Concerns are formally documented, and a referral is submitted to the school's **Student Support Team (SST)**.

- **Data Collection and Intervention**: The SST gathers relevant academic and behavioral data to inform targeted interventions.

- **Implementation of Interventions**: Interventions are delivered within the general education setting to address the identified needs.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**: Progress is consistently monitored to determine the effectiveness of the interventions.

- **Decision Making**: Based on collected data and team observations, a decision is made regarding whether a special education evaluation is warranted.

Collaboration with parents is essential at every stage of the IPS process to promote transparency and support shared decision-making. As key partners, parents must understand their rights and responsibilities under the law, and their perspectives should be valued equally when identifying appropriate interventions and supports for their child (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004; Salem-Keizer School District, n.d.). The ultimate goal is to ensure that each student receives the support they need and to determine whether special education services are necessary to address their unique educational needs.

Participation in the IPS process revealed several areas that require improvement. Specifically, there was a lack of detailed and consistent data collection, insufficiently thorough teacher input, and unclear documentation of interventions attempted prior to referral. Strengthening these components is crucial for accurately identifying students with potential disabilities and ensuring they receive timely and appropriate support services.

Project overview:

This project aims to strengthen the Individual Problem Solving (IPS) process within the Salem-Keizer School District's Special Education (SPED) framework. Specifically, it addresses

the need for a more structured, data-informed, and accessible referral system for general

education teachers supporting students with academic or behavioral challenges. Currently,

inconsistent procedures and a lack of formal guidance can hinder early intervention efforts and

delay the identification of students who may need special education services.

Aligned with district goals around **equity, inclusion, and early identification**, this initiative

proposes the development of a standardized IPS toolkit and professional learning opportunities

focused on:

- Clear referral protocols,

- Documentation and intervention tracking,

- And collaboration between the general and special education teams.

Research supports this direction. Aspden et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of "the

development of more formal referral policies and procedures, as well as enhanced professional

support and development that targets teachers' need for knowledge of and connection with

specialist agencies" (p. 294). Furthermore, Voulgarides (2021) highlights how unclear or

inconsistent referral practices can reinforce inequities, particularly when systems fail to account

for the social and cultural contexts in which families and educators operate. Wohl (2022) also

argues that the U.S. Department of Education has untapped authority to guide schools toward

more equitable special education practices through clearer regulatory frameworks.

The Salem-Keizer School District's commitment to providing professional and efficient

support services underscores the importance of this initiative. The district's Special Education

department is dedicated to ensuring that all students, from birth to 21 years old, may be eligible

for specially designed special education services in compliance with the IDEA (Salem-Keizer

School District, n.d.). This project aligns with the district's mission to enhance instructional

equity and ensure that students with suspected disabilities receive prompt and appropriate support.

At Washington Elementary, the lack of a consistent referral system has resulted in uneven practices; some teachers referred numerous students, while others made no referrals at all. Additionally, many staff members reported that the existing IPS process was challenging to navigate and lacked clarity.

In response to this feedback, the leadership team reviewed the previous IPS documents, which revealed that several key questions were either missing or needed further clarification. To update the IPS form, examples of student strengths and weaknesses were added, and the section addressing behavioral and health concerns was expanded. A new section was added to the document specifically for recording data collection and detailing the interventions that had been implemented. These revisions were essential for helping teachers remain accountable for implementing and tracking accommodations. As a result, teachers began to understand the IPS process as a structured pathway for students to receive Tier 3 intervention support (Salem-Keizer School District, n.d.).

The IPS document was also aligned with several Special Education eligibility criteria, ensuring the team did not overlook any requirements. In previous years, the IPS document was emailed individually to teachers with student concerns, which, over time, made it challenging to locate. To address this, the leadership team created a centralized Google Drive folder accessible to all staff, providing a convenient and consistent location where every team member could access their students' documents in one place.

To ensure clarity and improve the quality of referrals, the leadership team implemented the following measurable steps:

1. **Reviewed and revised** all components of the IPS document to ensure alignment with current eligibility criteria and district policy.

2. **Added structured sections** for student strengths, areas of concern, prior interventions, assessment data, and relevant behavioral or health information.

3. **Provided professional development** on how to complete the revised IPS form effectively and consistently.

4. **Transitioned to a shared Google Drive system**, with organized folders by grade level and student name, to ensure easy, trackable access to IPS documents.

5. **Established reviews** of IPS submissions to ensure fidelity and consistency across grade levels and teachers.

These revisions have helped create a more comprehensive and accessible overview of each referred student. Teachers and support staff now report improved confidence in navigating the IPS process and increased understanding of how it supports accurate and timely identification of students who may require Tier 3 interventions or Special Education evaluations (Fletcher et al., 2024). As a result, schools are better equipped to meet diverse student needs through informed, collaborative, and responsive practices.

Purpose of the IPS process implementation:

The goal of this initiative was to establish a functional and practical IPS process to guide the referral of students for Special Education services. While the school had already taken initial steps, such as scheduling regular meetings with teachers to discuss student concerns, additional key components were necessary to ensure the process was comprehensive and successful. Implementing these steps would help create a more consistent, data-driven approach to identifying students who may require further support or evaluation.

To support clarity and access, the following structure and steps were implemented:

1. **Created a shared Google Drive folder** labeled "Washington IPS Process" accessible to all relevant staff.

2. **Organized subfolders by grade level** within the main folder to ensure ease of navigation.

3. **Created individual folders for each teacher** within their respective grade-level subfolder.

4. **Set up a unique IPS referral form** inside each teacher's folder for every student of concern.

Once the Google Drive structure was established, a [Google Slides presentation](#) was developed to guide staff through the new system. The training presentation included:

1. **An overview of the IPS process**, its purpose, and how it aligns with district goals and special education eligibility procedures.

2. **Step-by-step instructions** on accessing grade-level and teacher folders, as well as locating the correct student referral form.

3. **Guidance on accurately completing the IPS form**, including how to document concerns, input relevant academic and behavioral data, list prior interventions, and communicate why a referral is being made.

These steps were designed to ensure that documenting concerns and presenting a clear, data-driven case for student referral would be accessible and manageable for all teachers.

To evaluate the project's success, the leadership team would analyze data from the 20% of students with the lowest performance in the school. They would examine which interventions these students received and whether they had been referred through the IPS process. If

implemented effectively, these students would either have been identified through Special Education evaluation as having a learning disability or placed in a Tier 3 intervention group that aligned with their specific needs (Fletcher et al., 2024). This ensures that no student falls through the cracks and that each receives the targeted support necessary for academic growth and success.

Addressing equity

This project addresses equity by ensuring that all teachers are adequately educated on the referral process for Special Education and are supported in helping every student succeed. Although Salem-Keizer Public Schools (District 24J) has a district-level system in place for referring students for SPED services, it became evident that the interpretation and implementation of this process varied significantly from school to school (Salem-Keizer School District, n.d.). Conversations with teachers from various schools revealed inconsistencies in how referrals were handled. This resulted in a lack of continuity and confusion among teachers. As a result, the inconsistency not only impacted their confidence but also had a ripple effect, impacting not only teachers but also students and their families.

At Washington Elementary, observations revealed that some teachers felt uncertain about how to respond to their students' academic and behavioral challenges effectively. This uncertainty was from a lack of clarity around the appropriate steps to take before initiating a referral for Tier 3 support. Raben et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of Response to Intervention (RTI) as a prerequisite to SPED referrals. RTI holds teachers accountable for utilizing all available supports before escalating to Tier 3 interventions. The revised IPS process addresses these gaps by providing a clear, structured pathway. It reduces confusion, eliminates assumptions, and promotes consistency in how student concerns are documented and addressed.

As a result, teachers are now more empowered to make informed decisions and support students more equitably and systematically across the school.

Key roles within the IPS framework: A multi-tiered system of supports

Implementing a practical IPS process requires a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach aligned with a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). General education teachers, support staff (such as behavior specialists, school counselors, speech-language pathologists, and reading and math interventionists), administrators, and families each play vital roles in identifying student needs, applying targeted interventions, and ensuring equitable outcomes.

Teachers: Frontline Observers and Data Contributors

Teachers were among the most critical stakeholders in the IPS process. They played a central role in both identifying student needs and implementing effective interventions. Collaboration between classroom teachers, reading and math specialists, and special education staff was key to identifying and implementing the most effective support for students (Kangas, 2018). Teachers were not only responsible for collecting and analyzing academic and behavioral data but also for completing IPS forms thoroughly, participating in intervention planning meetings, and initiating referrals when students did not respond to Tier 1 or Tier 2 supports. Their firsthand knowledge and experience of students, combined with their professional judgment, made them instrumental in driving timely and equitable decision-making. Without active teacher engagement, the IPS process would lack the depth and context needed to support struggling learners effectively.

Supporting staff: Behavioral and targeted academic intervention specialists

Supporting staff, including behavior specialists, counselors, and Tier 2 interventionists, play an equally critical role in the IPS process. These professionals contribute by developing

individualized behavior plans, implementing evidence-based interventions, and collecting progress-monitoring data (Kangas, 2018). They support students who require more targeted assistance beyond what can be provided in the general classroom, helping to close learning gaps and address emotional and behavioral challenges. When Tier 2 interventions are insufficient, the data gathered by support staff becomes a crucial component in the decision to elevate a student to Tier 3 services. This ensures that referrals are grounded in documented evidence rather than assumptions or inconsistencies in practice. Their work not only supports students directly, but it also strengthens the entire system by providing a bridge between general education and Special Education services.

Administrators: Facilitators and accountability leaders

Principals and assistant principals were significantly impacted by the demands of student support, both behavioral and academic, throughout the school day (Dovigo, 2020). Many high-level behavioral incidents required their immediate attention and could not be delegated to other staff members. To manage these challenges more effectively, students with persistent concerns were referred to the IPS process for additional support. Administrators also facilitate communication between staff and families, making sure that decisions are transparent and inclusive. Their leadership is essential in maintaining fidelity to district policies and promoting equity in service delivery.

Families: Essential partners in decision-making

Families are critical partners in the IPS process and the special education system. Their insights, cultural perspectives, and knowledge about their child's strengths and challenges significantly contribute to the accurate identification and appropriate support planning. Families must understand their rights and responsibilities and be actively involved in all stages of the

problem-solving and referral processes (Voulgarides, 2024). Meaningful family engagement promotes trust, ensures interventions are contextually relevant, and helps secure student success.

Collaboration between stakeholders

With these roles clearly defined, the collaborative efforts within the IPS create a dynamic and responsive system designed to meet the diverse needs of students. Understanding how each stakeholder contributes to the process not only enhances communication and accountability but also ensures that interventions are data-driven, equitable, and effectively targeted.

PSEL and NELP Standards

In developing and refining the IPS process, it was essential to ground the work in recognized leadership frameworks to ensure the approach was both practical and sustainable.

This project addressed multiple competencies outlined in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards, which serve as guiding frameworks for effective and ethical educational leadership. These standards were not simply acknowledged but were intentionally embedded throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Individual Problem Solving (IPS) process.

The leadership team reviewed each relevant standard to ensure alignment with best practices in equity, instructional leadership, stakeholder engagement, and data-informed decision-making.

Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate for, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values that prioritize high-quality education, equity, and inclusion, and the academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 1, Subcategory (b).

The development and implementation of the IPS process directly aligns with Standard 1, Subcategory (b) of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), which emphasizes the importance of developing an educational mission that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student. Specifically, Subcategory (b) calls for leaders to "develop an educational mission for the school to promote the academic success and well-being of each student."

The IPS process functioned as a structured Tier 3 intervention designed to identify and support students facing persistent academic and behavioral challenges. The IPS system provided a transparent, equitable, and data-driven pathway for early identification of students at risk. By documenting student concerns, analyzing academic data, and implementing targeted interventions, the process enabled teachers to address student needs and improve outcomes proactively.

Additionally, the IPS process aligns with the school's mission, which emphasizes equity, inclusiveness, and high expectations for all students. Decisions would be made collaboratively, with input from teachers, specialists, administrators, and families. Effective special education reform requires procedural compliance and a thoughtful, student-centered approach that ensures access to supports (Wohl, 2022). By balancing legal requirements with individualized care, schools can create inclusive environments where all students have the opportunity to thrive.

PSEL Standard 1, Subcategory (c).

In collaboration with members of the school and the community and using relevant data, develop and promote a vision for the school on the successful learning and development of each child and on instructional and organizational practices that promote such success. This standard

also highlights the need to align instructional and organizational practices with that vision to foster school-wide success.

Collaboration between teachers and intervention specialists was key in determining the next steps for the IPS process. These collaborative discussions provided an opportunity for teachers to review student data, reflect on the effectiveness of current interventions, and identify areas requiring further support. In many cases, the team recognized that additional data was needed, such as updated academic progress, behavioral observations, or intervention tracking logs, to more accurately assess a student's needs. Intervention specialists supported teachers in selecting appropriate tools and methods for gathering this information (Kangas, 2018). By working together, the team ensured that all instructional decisions were informed, intentional, and tailored to support the whole child.

PSEL Standard 1, Subcategory (d).

Subcategory (d) emphasizes the following: Schools must articulate, advocate, and cultivate core values that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education; high expectations and student support; equity, inclusiveness, and social justice; openness, caring, and trust; and continuous improvement. The IPS process was a clear reflection of these values in action. It provided structured, student-centered support for those experiencing academic or behavioral struggles, reinforcing the belief that every student can succeed when given the right opportunities and interventions.

The IPS process provided a system to support students who were experiencing academic or behavioral challenges. Teachers played a crucial role in this effort by implementing targeted interventions, collecting data, and adjusting their instructional strategies to meet the needs of their students. They did everything possible to help their students thrive, often going above and

beyond their typical responsibilities. The leadership team maintained ongoing collaboration with teachers and support staff to ensure that both students and teachers received the necessary support. This partnership was crucial in fostering a school culture built on shared responsibility, professional trust, and ongoing improvement.

PSEL Standard 1, Subcategory (e).

Strategically develop, implement, and evaluate actions to achieve the vision for the school. The IPS process was intentionally designed as a support system for students and a professional development tool for staff. With the revised IPS process, struggling students can receive timely, targeted interventions that are aligned with the school's commitment to equity and academic excellence.

To ensure alignment between the IPS process and the broader goals of the school community, it is essential first to consider the school's vision and mission, which are stated as follows:

To ensure alignment between the IPS process and the broader goals of the school community, it is essential first to consider the school's vision and mission. The vision at Washington Elementary is clear and desirable: *Washington is a community of engaged learners*. This guiding statement reflects the school's commitment to fostering active participation, curiosity, and lifelong learning among all students. The mission further supports this vision by emphasizing three key commitments: (1) all students will develop a growth mindset to achieve grade-level standards and persevere in life; (2) all staff will work collaboratively to promote a positive school environment that nurtures both the minds and hearts of students; and (3) parents will come to recognize and support the importance of consistent school attendance as a foundation for academic success. These principles directly inform and support the goals of the

IPS process, which aims to ensure that every student, regardless of their challenges, has the opportunity to grow, succeed, and feel valued within the school community.

The IPS process directly supports the fulfillment of the school's vision and mission by empowering and equipping teachers with the necessary tools, clear structure, and confidence to effectively address the diverse academic and behavioral needs of every student. In doing so, it promotes the development of students as whole learners—academically, socially, and emotionally—ensuring that each child receives the individualized support required to thrive within the school community.

Standard 5: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

Similar to Standard 1, the subcategories outlined in Standard 5 closely align with the core principles of the IPS process, emphasizing a commitment to equity, collaborative support, and shared leadership to meet the diverse needs of all students effectively.

PSEL Standard 5, Subcategory (a).

Subcategory (a) involves building and maintaining a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student. The IPS process was revised with the specific goal of fostering a school environment where all students feel safe, supported, and understood.

This project revised a process specifically designed to cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that actively promotes the academic success and overall well-being of every student. It centered on supporting the whole child, addressing both academic and behavioral needs, by establishing clear, proactive systems to identify student challenges

early, implement targeted and evidence-based interventions, and engage all stakeholders in a collaborative, data-driven approach. Through these efforts, the process fosters a safe and nurturing environment where each student is empowered to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

This standard stresses the importance of collaboration and teamwork among staff. Encouraging open communication, shared problem-solving, and mutual accountability fosters an environment where teachers collaborate to enhance instructional practices and ensure that every student receives the support they need to succeed. These collaborative discussions focused on identifying and refining accommodations, instructional tools, and intervention strategies that would best support student success. By relying on the expertise of teachers, specialists, and support staff, the team provided support to meet the needs of students, ensure consistency in practice, and promote equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The leadership team conducted quarterly reviews of the IPS process to evaluate its effectiveness in supporting student outcomes and guiding staff in intervention practices. This ongoing cycle of reflection and refinement allowed the team to make timely adjustments, reinforce consistent implementation, and strengthen the overall impact of the IPS process on student outcomes and instructional practices.

SKPS's Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

The Salem-Keizer Public Schools' mission emphasizes ensuring that all students master

grade-level standards, while also developing essential social and emotional skills. Their vision is that every student graduates prepared for a successful and fulfilling life (Special Education, 2023).

Vision

The primary focus of this project was to ensure that all students have the opportunity to graduate and lead successful lives. The IPS process was designed to proactively address students' academic and behavioral needs by identifying concerns early and initiating appropriate support. When there was a suspicion of a disability, the process enabled the team to request additional assessments. It outlined clear next steps for interventions, accommodations, and ongoing support. Every student, regardless of their unique needs, could be fully included and actively engaged in all aspects of the school experience.

Mission

The school's mission is centered around helping each student succeed by recognizing their abilities, interests, strengths, and areas for growth. The IPS process supported this mission by including a section for teachers and parents to share insights about the student's hobbies and strengths. This information would be shared with other staff members working with the student, enabling a more personalized approach to instruction (Kangas, 2018). This helps the school promote multisensory learning and greater student engagement across academic and behavioral settings.

Principal licensure program's Mission, Vision, and Values

The Principal Licensure Program (PLP) at Western Oregon University (WOU) aims to equip current licensed educators with the advanced leadership skills and knowledge needed to become effective building administrators in Oregon's K-12 schools. (Graduate Program, 2024)

This project was made possible through the collaboration of multiple staff members across various roles. The numerous planning and implementation meetings for the IPS process exemplify strong alignment with the PLP's mission, vision, and values. The IPS process not only supported ongoing professional development for administrators and staff but also emphasized the critical role of data-driven decision-making. By using data to guide actions, interventions, and supports were adjusted in a timely, appropriate, and individualized manner to meet each student's unique needs.

Graduate school goals and MSEd outcomes

The learning outcomes addressed through the IPS process align closely with the Graduate Program and Program-Level Outcomes. This alignment is evident in how the process empowers teachers with practical tools and knowledge, strengthens school-wide procedures to support student success, and actively engages families as essential partners in education (Voulgarides, 2024). Throughout the development and implementation of the IPS process, the following specific goals and learning outcomes were intentionally targeted and realized:

Graduate program goals:

1. Advanced competence and skill in the mastery of concepts, principles, systems, and practices in the context of the student's specialty.
2. Advanced competence and skill in reading, interpreting, and applying the research and literature of the professional studies component of the student's graduate program.
3. Awareness and understanding of ethical, philosophical, and cultural issues that apply to the professional component of the student's graduate program.

The significant time and collaboration invested by staff members in this project strongly reflect the Graduate Program Goals. Each student who participated in the IPS process received

support through a minimum of four formal team meetings. This count does not include the numerous informal conversations and spontaneous discussions that occurred among staff members. These exchanges covered instructional strategies and classroom accommodations. Reading and math specialists collaborated closely with teachers to analyze academic data, while the behavioral specialist provided insights based on behavioral data and recommended targeted classroom supports (Wohl, 2022). Throughout the entire process, the leadership team and support staff maintained active engagement, consistently brainstorming and implementing innovative approaches to enhance support for both students and teachers.

MSEd program learning outcomes:

1. **Content Core Knowledge:** Effectively apply the professional content expertise, knowledge, skills, and dispositions of their education profession.

2. **Applied Skills:** Use research and evidence to develop environments that support and assess learning and their own professional practice.

3. **Disposition and Values:** Show commitment to and develop professional education leadership attributes.

To ensure the IPS process remained responsive and effective, regular communication and collaboration among staff were essential. Once each quarter, the SPED teacher met with classroom teachers to gather feedback and discuss their experiences with the IPS process (Howe & Boelé, 2018), fostering an ongoing dialogue that supported continuous improvement and ensured the process effectively met student needs. Most teachers expressed genuine appreciation and relief that a clear, functional system was finally in place to guide their efforts. The leadership team expressed satisfaction with the progress, sharing that more students were successfully

accessing Tier 3 support. The referrals for special education evaluations were steadily increasing, which indicated a more timely and appropriate identification of student needs.

Based on teacher feedback, several improvements were made to the IPS form. A new section was added specifically for teacher input, several areas were expanded for clarity, and examples were included to guide staff on how to complete key sections. Additionally, a drop-down feature was implemented to help teachers easily identify which stage of the IPS process they were in. These enhancements reflected a strong spirit of collaboration, as teachers and staff played a direct role in shaping the development and ongoing improvement of the IPS process (Kangas, 2018). This collaborative foundation fosters shared ownership and sustainability, ultimately strengthening the effectiveness of student support systems.

The following chapters will provide a comprehensive overview of the revised IPS process, including a detailed timeline of implementation, an examination of the resources utilized, and a discussion of the key stakeholders and their roles. Additionally, the paper will analyze the methodologies and tools employed to ensure the project's success, as well as the challenges encountered and the strategies used to overcome them. As an aspiring teacher leader, this project holds deep personal significance, as it reflects my commitment to fostering equitable and effective support systems for students. The improvements to the IPS process not only benefit the students and their families by promoting timely and targeted interventions but also contribute to the district's overarching goal of enhancing educational outcomes through collaborative and data-informed practices. Through this work, I aim to demonstrate the critical role that thoughtful leadership plays in driving meaningful school improvement.

CHAPTER TWO

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This annotated bibliography compiles scholarly articles, policy analyses, and professional resources that inform effective special education practices. The sources address data-driven instruction and interventions, the special education process, leadership's role in fostering equity and inclusion, and the legal frameworks guiding service delivery. Together, they provide a solid foundation for improving student outcomes, ensuring compliance, and strengthening collaboration among all stakeholders.

SOURCE 1:

Aspden, K., Baxter, S. M., Clendon, S., & McLaughlin, T. W. (2022). Identification and referral for early intervention services in New Zealand: A look at teachers' perspectives – past and present. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 41*(4), 294–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121419881640

This study, which was conducted in New Zealand, explored the relationship between teachers' beliefs, instructional practices, and the frequency of student referrals to the special education (SPED) process. Initially undertaken in 2003 and replicated in 2017, the research provided a comparative analysis of findings across the two time points, offering insight into how professional experience and targeted training influence referral patterns. Results indicated that teachers with specialized training and a deeper understanding of strategies to support struggling learners were more likely to implement effective interventions prior to initiating a SPED referral. In contrast, educators lacking such preparation were more inclined to refer students prematurely,

often those without a diagnosable learning disability, highlighting the critical role of teacher knowledge in promoting accurate identification and equitable access to support services.

SOURCE 2:

Bertrand, M., & Marsh, J. A. (2015). Teachers' sensemaking of data and implications for equity. *American Educational Research Journal, 52*(5), 861–893. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831215599251

This study sought to enhance teachers' capacity to interpret and apply student performance data by examining multiple factors influencing test scores. The analysis was organized around four models: instructional practices, student understanding, the nature of the assessment, and student characteristics. Following the data review, teachers were prompted to engage in reflective practice, considering both the effectiveness of their instruction and issues of equity within their classrooms. Model 4, which focused on student characteristics, yielded particularly significant findings. The results indicated that educators sometimes held preconceived assumptions upon encountering labels such as English Language Learner (ELL) or SPED, at times attributing lower expectations or reduced performance to these classifications. Such patterns underscore the importance of ongoing professional development and targeted instructional adjustments to ensure that the needs of ELL and SPED students are met with high expectations and equitable support.

SOURCE 3:

Bettini, E., Benedict, A., Thomas, R., Kimerling, J., Choi, N., & McLeskey, J. (2017). Cultivating a community of effective special education teachers: Local special education administrators' roles. *Remedial and Special Education, 38*(2), 111–126. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932516664790

This study examined the influence of having an administrator with a special education background on school culture, instructional practices, and student outcomes. Findings indicated that such leadership not only fosters students' academic growth and inclusion but also positively shapes teacher induction and mentoring practices. The presence of a supportive administrator was shown to be a critical factor in reshaping school culture and organizational dynamics, underscoring that leadership is central to driving meaningful, sustainable change.

SOURCE 4:

Dever, B. V., Raines, T. C., Dowdy, E., & Hostutler, C. (2016). Addressing disproportionality in special education using a universal screening approach. *The Journal of Negro Education, 85*(1), 59–71.

This research highlighted that teacher perceptions, rather than objective data analysis, often influenced referrals to special education. The study examined the disproportionate placement of students of color by comparing those identified as "at-risk" through standardized instruments with students currently receiving special education services in a nationally representative sample. The findings revealed significant discrepancies, suggesting that subjective judgments can contribute to inequities in identification. The authors emphasized that referral decisions should be grounded in data-driven practices to ensure fairness and accuracy in special education placement.

SOURCE 5:

Dovigo, F. (2020). Through the eyes of inclusion: An evaluation of video analysis as a reflective tool for student teachers within special education. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(1), 110–126. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1693996

This study examined the practical realities of inclusion for students with special education needs, revealing that while many teachers express support for the concept, they often lack the knowledge, resources, and structured guidance necessary for effective implementation. The findings underscored that inclusion cannot be approached as a one-size-fits-all model; rather, schools must evaluate multiple contextual factors, including the learning environment, to determine the most appropriate placement and supports. While inclusion can yield significant academic benefits for some students, it presents greater challenges for those with pronounced behavioral needs. Consequently, the IPS process must account for the ways in which behavioral concerns intersect with academic achievement and design supports that address both dimensions in a coordinated manner.

SOURCE 6:

Fletcher, T. L., Kim, P. H., Gottfried, M. A., & Le, V.-N. (2024). Teachers' special education referrals for younger children: Does it vary by school type? *The Journal of Special Education.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669241270012

This study investigated multiple factors influencing student referrals for special education, with particular attention to differences between magnet schools and traditional schools. One notable finding was the impact of age differences among kindergarten students, where larger age gaps were correlated with increased academic and behavioral referrals. Analysis of referral data revealed that magnet schools generally had lower referral rates compared to their traditional counterparts, a difference attributed to magnet schools' emphasis on aligning instruction with students' interests and incorporating parent input into the learning process. These findings offer valuable insights for refining the IPS process, particularly in promoting instructional approaches and family engagement strategies that may reduce unnecessary referrals.

SOURCE 7:

Howe, K. R., & Boelé, A. E. (2018). *The ethics of special education*. Teachers College Press.

This book offers a wealth of information through case studies designed to address common questions from parents and teachers regarding special education. These real-life examples provide detailed accounts of specific situations, offering both insight into the challenges encountered and practical illustrations of how they were resolved. The lessons drawn from these cases can inform and refine the special education process, helping to prevent similar issues from arising and ensuring more effective and equitable outcomes for students.

SOURCE 8:

Kangas, S. E. N. (2018). Why working apart doesn't work at all: Special education and English learner teacher collaborations. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 54*(1), 31–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451218762469

This article underscores the critical importance of collaboration among special education teachers, general education teachers, and English language teachers. While multiple educators may work with the same student, the study found that these professionals often operated independently rather than collaboratively, limiting the overall effectiveness of their efforts. The strategies presented in the article demonstrate how intentional collaboration can better leverage each teacher's expertise. In particular, English language teachers were shown to play a key role by providing valuable student data and documenting the interventions already implemented. The findings reinforce that coordinated efforts among all staff members significantly enhance student outcomes.

SOURCE 9:

Kenny, N., McCoy, S., & Mihut, G. (2020). Special education reforms in Ireland: Changing

systems, changing schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,*

ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1821447

This article explored the evolution of Ireland's Special Education system, particularly in

response to legal challenges brought by parents advocating for the educational rights of children

with severe disabilities. These legal actions served as a catalyst for systemic change, prompting

policy reforms in resource allocation and leading to the removal of the requirement for a formal

diagnosis to access supports. By eliminating this barrier, the system aimed to improve equity,

increase timely access to interventions, and reduce delays that often hindered student progress.

Examining how Ireland addressed these challenges offers valuable insights for other educational

systems, including how legal advocacy can influence policy, how resource allocation models can

be adapted to better meet diverse needs, and how systemic flexibility can enhance support for all

learners. Such comparative analysis underscores the importance of learning from global

approaches to inform the continuous improvement of special education processes locally.

SOURCE 10:

The Obama administration takes action to improve equity in special education. (2016).

Curriculum Review, *55*(8), 9–13. PaperClip Communications.

This article examined policy changes introduced during President Obama's administration,

specifically the U.S. Department of Education's implementation of a new regulation under the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The rule required states to closely analyze

racial and ethnic group data to identify potential disparities in the provision of special education

services. When significant disproportionality was detected, the policy mandated that additional funding be allocated to districts to directly support affected students. These funds could be utilized in a variety of ways, including increasing adult instructional support, providing targeted professional development, and supplying essential instructional tools and materials. By addressing both systemic inequities and practical classroom needs, this initiative aimed to enhance educational outcomes for students while simultaneously supporting educators who work with high-need populations.

SOURCE 11:

O'Connor, E. A., Yasik, A. E., & Horner, S. L. (2016). Teachers' knowledge of special education

laws: What do they know? *Insights into Learning Disabilities, 13*(1), 7–18.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1103671.pdf

This study surveyed 58 kindergartens through eighth-grade teachers from the New York City metropolitan area to assess their knowledge of key federal education laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Participants responded to a series of True/False questions, as well as open-ended prompts, regarding their understanding of these laws, their application in daily practice, and the nature of any formal training they had received. Findings revealed notable gaps in legal knowledge, with some teachers admitting, "I never knew…" in reference to certain legal requirements, an alarming indicator given the direct implications for student rights and educational equity. The study underscored the necessity of targeted professional development to ensure educators are well-versed in special education law, enabling them to recognize signs of student need, navigate procedural requirements, and advocate effectively for both students and their families.

SOURCE 12:

Raben, K., Brogan, J., Dunham, M., & Bloomdahl, S. C. (2019). Response to intervention (RTI) and changes in special education categorization. *Exceptionality Education International, 29*(2), 59–65.

This study examined the relationship between the number of students referred for SPED services and the proportion of those students who had first participated in the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. Researchers analyzed both the benefits and limitations of RTI, noting that its use correlated with a reduction in SPED referrals. Teachers implementing RTI sought to close learning gaps through targeted interventions, using the process as a critical preliminary step before initiating a SPED referral. Historically, when RTI was not a requirement for referral, the number of students sent for SPED evaluation was significantly higher. The findings reinforced the value of requiring documented intervention, typically over a minimum six-week period, prior to referral. Such a practice not only supports data-informed decision-making but also enables educators to identify which instructional strategies are effective, thereby ensuring that SPED referrals are both appropriate and necessary.

SOURCE 13:

Roberts, M. B., & Guerra, F. R. (2017). Principals' perceptions of their knowledge in special education. *Current Issues in Education*, *20*(1). https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/1567

This research paper surveyed 84 principals in South Texas, the majority of whom served in schools with predominantly Hispanic student populations. The study sought to examine principals' perceptions of their legal, foundational, and contextual knowledge of special education in order to determine whether they possessed the necessary expertise to effectively

implement and supervise SPED programs. Findings indicated a clear distinction between principals who were well-versed in the SPED process and those who were not. Principals with strong knowledge and experience actively contributed to meetings with parents, offering valuable insights and guidance. In contrast, principals lacking familiarity with the process tended to remain passive during such discussions, deferring to the SPED team to lead the conversation. These results underscore the importance of targeted professional development to equip school leaders with the knowledge and confidence needed to engage meaningfully in the SPED process.

SOURCE 14:

Voulgarides, C. (2024). Equity, parental/caregiver "power," and disability policy in the U.S.

context. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 28*(4), 326–343.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1937345

This research paper examined the differences between parents or caregivers who possess a strong understanding of the special education system and those who do not. The study explored how educators' assumptions, biases, and personal beliefs shaped their perceptions of what constituted "good parenting" or "effective parent participation." Findings indicated that when both parents and educators understood the IPS process, collaboration improved, ultimately benefiting the student. Parents with a clear understanding of the process were more likely to actively advocate for their child, whereas those lacking this knowledge tended to engage less in decision-making. The research also emphasized that educators must exercise due diligence in clearly communicating each step of the process, ensuring all team members, including parents, are informed and prepared to support the student effectively.

SOURCE 15:

Wohl, J. W. (2022). A better IDEA: Utilizing the Department of Education's rulemaking

authority to reform the special education process. *Administrative Law Review, 74*(3),

622–650.

This book provided a concise history of special education and its evolution over time. It traced

the past exclusion of students with disabilities, clarified common special education acronyms,

and outlined the procedural steps within the special education process. The text also detailed key

legal mandates and parents' rights under major SPED laws. In its conclusion, the book

incorporated parent perspectives, emphasizing that the SPED process can be complex and, for

those unfamiliar with it, potentially overwhelming. This complexity places families at a

disadvantage, underscoring the need for ongoing efforts to make the process more transparent

and accessible. The work also highlighted how the SPED process has evolved to address

emerging challenges and to better serve diverse student populations.

In reviewing this collection of literature, a consistent theme emerges: effective special

education practices require a foundation of collaboration, clear communication, data-driven

decision-making, and informed leadership. The sources collectively highlight that systemic

change is most successful when educators, administrators, parents, and policymakers share a

unified vision and work toward equitable access for all students. They also reveal that while

laws, frameworks, and tools such as the IPS process provide structure, the true impact depends

on the knowledge, commitment, and cultural responsiveness of those implementing them.

Together, these works underscore the ongoing need for professional development, stakeholder

engagement, and adaptive practices to ensure that special education systems remain both

inclusive and responsive to evolving student needs.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

Following an in-depth review of the relevant literature and staff concerns, the leadership team revised the IPS process to address the identified needs more effectively. This section provides a detailed timeline of the implementation of the revised IPS plan. It outlines the resources allocated, the stakeholders involved, along with their respective roles, and the outcomes achieved. Additionally, it describes the methodologies, tools, and processes employed to support the successful delivery of the project. This section further details the planning strategies adopted to define objectives, allocate resources efficiently, and establish implementation timelines. It also examines the techniques used to guide the execution, monitoring, and control of project activities. By employing structured approaches grounded in established project management best practices, such as defining clear goals, setting measurable milestones, engaging stakeholders, and continuously monitoring progress, the project team was able to maintain focus and alignment throughout the IPS development process (Wohl, 2022). These practices helped mitigate common risks, including miscommunication among team members, inconsistent data collection, and delays in implementation. Optimal performance was achieved by ensuring that resources were used efficiently, timelines were met, and decision-making remained data-driven. Ultimately, the intended outcomes were to create a consistent, equitable, and sustainable IPS framework that could be applied district-wide, fostering early identification of student needs, timely interventions, and a shared culture of accountability and collaboration. In this way, disciplined project management transformed a complex initiative into a structured pathway for lasting educational impact.

Intended plan and actual plan

At the beginning of the school year, staff concerns were raised regarding the effectiveness of the IPS process. The leadership team recognized the need for revision and adjustments to ensure the process was fully functional. A key area for improvement was the streamlining of documentation procedures, enabling teachers to input all relevant data and concerns into a single and accessible document.

The staff identified the previous IPS document as incomplete and insufficient. The document contained minimal information and failed to comprehensively showcase students' strengths, weaknesses, data collection, and other critical concerns. Significant time was dedicated to working with the core IPS team, which included the special education teacher, principal, behavior specialist, counselor, reading specialist, and speech pathologist. Each member contributed perspectives and insights based on their experiences with the prior IPS process. To effectively revise the IPS document and associated procedures, multiple phases of development and implementation were established.

Process of project phases and timeline

<u>Phase 1</u>: **Individual Problem Solving document finalized**

<u>Due date</u>: August 21

The IPS Google Document Master Copy served as the foundational element for the entire referral process and required thorough review and approval prior to dissemination to staff. Following initial revisions informed by collaborative feedback from teachers and specialists, the document was finalized and uploaded to a centralized Google Drive folder to ensure accessibility and maintain version control. Before distribution, the Principal and Behavior Specialist conducted a comprehensive review to verify that the form aligned with school policies,

effectively addressed both behavioral and academic intervention requirements, and retained a user-friendly format. The rollout was strategically planned to coincide with the district's buyback days, professional development sessions held at the beginning of the school year, providing an opportunity for all staff to be introduced to the updated IPS process, receive training, and engage in clarifying discussions within a supportive and collaborative setting.

Phase 2: Presentation to the staff

Due date: August 23

A presentation on the IPS process was shown to the staff for clarity, consistency, and confidence in using the new system. During the presentation, staff were guided to the precise location of the IPS form within the organized Google Drive structure, which was systematically categorized by grade level and individual teacher folders to enhance accessibility.

The presentation guided staff through each component of the form, providing step-by-step instructions on how to complete it accurately and thoroughly. It covered important areas, including identifying student strengths and concerns, inputting relevant academic and behavioral data, documenting previously attempted interventions, and tracking progress over time. Examples were provided to model high-quality entries, and newly added features, such as drop-down menus and designated teacher input sections, were highlighted to simplify the process and reduce ambiguity.

Phase 3: IPS training

Due date: September 11

A more detailed PowerPoint presentation and interactive training session were conducted to provide staff with comprehensive instruction on how to access and use the IPS forms effectively. The training went beyond a simple overview by breaking down each section of the

form, explaining its purpose, and demonstrating how to complete it accurately using real-world examples.

Teachers then participated in a hands-on practice activity, working through a case study to simulate the IPS referral process. This practical application enabled staff to become more comfortable with the system, ask clarifying questions, and deepen their understanding of how to apply the process effectively.

Working collaboratively within their grade-level teams, teachers navigated the shared Google Drive folders to locate the appropriate documents and practiced entering data directly into the IPS forms. This collaborative approach fostered peer support and consistency in how information was recorded while reinforcing the expectation that all staff members take an active role in student support planning. The training session not only built teacher confidence but also laid the foundation for the consistent and equitable use of the IPS process schoolwide (Kangas, 2018). This intentional investment in professional learning ensured that the IPS framework would be applied with fidelity, maximizing its effectiveness in supporting student success across the school.

Phase 4: Implementing the IPS process

Due date: October 2

The first official IPS meeting was conducted in collaboration with the general education teacher. Prior to the meeting, the teacher was reminded to complete the IPS referral form, making sure that all relevant academic, behavioral, and observational data were submitted in advance.

During the meeting, the IPS team, comprising the general education teacher, specialists, and a member of the leadership team, reviewed the completed form, discussed the provided data, and collaboratively determined the next steps necessary to support both the teacher's

instructional efforts and the student's learning needs. The team also evaluated whether sufficient data had been collected to warrant a referral for special education evaluation or whether additional interventions at the Tier 2 or Tier 3 level were needed. This approach enforced accountability, promoted collaborative problem-solving, and reinforced the school's commitment to early intervention and equitable access to support services (Howe & Boelé, 2018). As a result, staff were better equipped to engage with the IPS process consistently and confidently, fostering a more unified and responsive system of student support.

Phase 5: Teacher input

Due date: December 4

During this phase, the Special Education teacher met with a group of key stakeholders, including general education teachers, intervention specialists, and support staff, to gather feedback on the effectiveness, clarity, and usability of the IPS process. Many stakeholders reported experiencing minimal to no difficulties with the IPS process, indicating that the system was generally accessible and user-friendly in its current form. Several teachers shared the need for a review of how to access the required forms. They expressed clarity regarding the team's expectations throughout the referral process.

A few staff members contributed valuable suggestions for improving the IPS form. In response to their feedback, a new section titled 'Health Concerns' was added to document any relevant medical or health-related information that might impact a student's learning. Additionally, a drop-down menu was incorporated to help staff easily identify the current stage of the referral process, thereby increasing clarity and improving communication among team members.

Phase 6: **Leadership team input**

Due date: December 12

A follow-up meeting was conducted with the leadership team to gather feedback on the revised IPS process. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, with team members emphasizing that the updated IPS form was notably more user-friendly and efficient than its previous iterations. They appreciated the streamlined format, which allowed them to input information more easily and focus on meaningful discussions during team meetings. Any questions or concerns raised during implementation were promptly addressed, ensuring that the process remained smooth and consistent. As a direct result of these improvements, students were receiving timely, targeted support and services that were better aligned with their academic and behavioral needs. This feedback validated the effectiveness of the revisions and underscored the importance of ongoing collaboration and refinement in maintaining a responsive support system.

Resources

The implementation of the revised IPS process was accomplished without the need for additional financial resources. This project relied solely on resources already available through the district, including the use of Google Drive for document sharing and storage, as well as staff collaboration time. Although no direct financial funding was required, the initiative's success depended on a significant investment of time and effort from school personnel. Teachers, specialists, and administrators contributed countless hours to refining the IPS process, participating in meetings, reviewing data, revising forms, and providing ongoing feedback. This dedication reflects that meaningful school improvement can be achieved through thoughtful planning, professional collaboration, and shared leadership, without incurring additional financial costs.

To expand this project, the following steps include gathering feedback and insights from other schools within the Salem-Keizer School District. Collaboration across schools would be highly beneficial and effective, as it would allow each school to share insights on different practices, encountered challenges, and the adjustments they implemented to improve the IPS process (Kangas, 2018). Since the IPS documents are stored on Google Drive, the process can be easily shared and accessed district-wide, promoting consistency and efficiency across all schools.

Next, PD classes could be offered to each school's leadership team. This initiative would be a valuable opportunity to standardize and promote the IPS process across all schools within the Salem-Keizer district (Howe & Boelé, 2018). When successful, this would promote equity and streamline student support. It would also help all staff members to be aligned in their approach to identifying and supporting students with potential disabilities. Implementing this initiative would require allocating resources at the district level for planning and execution; however, the resulting impact would be substantial and transformative for all schools involved.

Stakeholders and roles

As noted in Chapter One, the stakeholders involved in the project include teachers, principals, support staff, students, and their families. The following outlines their respective roles in the initiative.

Teachers: Teachers were asked to complete the IPS form prior to the meeting. If the form was incomplete or incorrectly filled out, the teacher was asked to revise it before returning to the meeting. While most teachers came prepared, those needing assistance could request support from the Special Education teacher, who would then schedule a meeting to help complete the form. Such requests were infrequent, as the majority of teachers were well-prepared for them.

Principal: The principal had two roles of responsibility. The first role was to approve the IPS form and the process, while the other role was to oversee the IPS meeting. The collaboration between the principal and the team was invaluable, and valuable insights were shared that may have been overlooked. Principals could also provide documents from other IPS processes, and as a team, relevant sections were added to the IPS document. In meetings, the leadership team reviewed all the information, and the principal listened attentively, providing feedback as needed.

Support staff: The support staff were part of the meetings and contributed by providing data and insight into the students. Accommodations, tools, and support that were currently offered were shared. Suggestions on what the next steps could be were provided. It is essential, as their insight has shown, to understand how students react to small groups and interventions.

Students and families: The IPS process was intended to provide support to students and families, regardless of whether they qualify for SPED or not. Parents would not always ask questions during meetings, but the team would be ready with options and additional support for the students. At meetings, Special Education teachers would often have information regarding summer school or after-school tutoring, as these were the most common questions asked (Kenny et al, 2020). The majority of the time, parents and families were very grateful for the new information shared and the support recommended.

Throughout the school year, the IPS process was implemented. There was an increase in the number of referrals. However, there was also an increase in teacher collaboration between the different teachers and support staff. Here are the outcomes of the IPS process.

Outcomes:

The goal of the IPS process was to provide teachers with a pathway for Tier 3 interventions for students who needed them. Based on the data collected from the General Education teacher, the math and reading intervention teachers, and the support staff, it was found that the IPS documents were completed accurately and completely. With the documents completed, six weeks of intervention data, and collaboration between teachers, the following steps would be either to move forward with the SPED referral process or to determine whether the Tier 2 interventions had been effective for the students (Kangas, 2018). It was a success as teachers shared that the IPS process was simple to follow and complete. They understood the various areas of concern that needed to be taken note of. The school had successfully referred and accepted 21 students. That is about double the number who got referred last year, in 2023-2024. The concern of over-identifying would not be an issue, as the teachers needed to provide their six weeks of intervention data for it to be concluded that the student required Tier 3 support. Several teachers had taken the initiative to complete the IPS form and began collaborating with the math and reading specialists.

Successes and challenges

Initially, there was optimism that the IPS process would operate smoothly and that all referred students would promptly receive appropriate special education (SPED) services. However, as implementation progressed, several challenges emerged that required ongoing adjustments. Scheduled meetings with various grade-level teams provided valuable opportunities to review the IPS process and make timely modifications based on staff feedback. Teachers frequently sought clarification regarding expectations for IPS meetings and what they should anticipate in terms of structure and outcomes. Over time, as IPS meetings became more

consistent and routine, the process gradually evolved into a more efficient and responsive system.

During a recent meeting, I sought feedback from a general education teacher regarding her experience with the revised IPS process. She expressed that she found the process to be significantly more streamlined and user-friendly. During our discussion, she also offered a suggestion for further improvement: the addition of a drop-down menu within the IPS document to indicate the current phase of the process. This recommendation aimed to improve clarity and communication among team members. The recommendation was well-received and was implemented into the IPS document immediately, reflecting the process's adaptability and the value of practitioner input in ongoing system refinement.

Additionally, I sought input from the Speech-Language Pathologist, who had experience with both the original and revised IPS processes. She recommended gathering more comprehensive feedback from classroom teachers to better assess the effectiveness of the updated system. In response to this suggestion, I initiated plans to distribute a Google Forms survey to staff in order to collect their insights, experiences, and recommendations regarding the IPS process. This step was intended to ensure that the process remains responsive to staff needs and continues to evolve through ongoing, data-informed refinement.

The modifications I implemented in the project primarily pertained to my approach and facilitation of the IPS meetings. Initially, I held high expectations that teachers would arrive prepared, having completed the IPS forms and gathered relevant student data to share. During the initial meetings, this expectation was met mainly, enabling the team to progress efficiently through the agenda and collaboratively determine appropriate next steps for both teachers and students.

However, one meeting did not go as planned. A teacher arrived unprepared. She did not know where to locate the forms, and her documentation was incomplete. I was frustrated and confused about why she had not reached out for assistance beforehand. This situation reminded me of how the meetings had been conducted in previous years. Midway through the meeting, I voiced my frustration and suggested rescheduling, emphasizing the expectation that all information should be ready prior to the meeting. I did not communicate this most constructively, and afterward, I consulted with the principal to reflect on whether I had overstepped my role.

This discussion prompted me to reflect critically on my facilitation approach and recognize the need to assume greater responsibility in supporting teachers' success. I acknowledged that proactive measures, such as sending reminder emails or offering assistance to staff struggling with form completion, could have mitigated the challenges encountered. Additionally, I developed a deeper understanding of the importance of empathy, appreciating that teachers may face stress or uncertainty that impacts their preparation. The following day, I apologized to the teacher and sought her forgiveness, which was graciously extended. This interaction marked a turning point in my facilitation style during subsequent IPS meetings. For instance, in a recent session with two teachers, one returning from maternity leave and the other a first-year educator, we collaboratively reviewed and completed the necessary documentation. The meeting provided ample opportunity for discussion, and I made certain to communicate my ongoing availability for support. Both teachers expressed gratitude for this more supportive and collaborative approach.

Just last week, a teacher approached me seeking assistance with the IPS form. Together, we worked through the process step by step, and she expressed sincere gratitude for the support provided. She confidently assured me that she would be able to complete the forms

independently in the future. This interaction represented a significant success, particularly given that this same teacher had previously arrived unprepared and had been hesitant to request help. This experience underscores the importance of ongoing support and collaboration in fostering teacher confidence and improving the overall effectiveness of the IPS process.

Analyze challenges at the system level

While the implementation of the IPS process ultimately led to more equitable and consistent support for students, several challenges emerged at the system level, highlighting the need for deeper infrastructure and training improvements. One of the most significant barriers was the lack of standardized training across grade levels and departments. Without a uniform onboarding process or professional development module specific to the IPS framework, many educators entered the process with varying levels of understanding, which led to inconsistencies in how referrals were initiated and documented.

Another systemic issue involved process clarity and form usability. Initially, the IPS documentation lacked user-friendly features, such as defined sections for student health concerns or clear indicators of a student's progress through the referral process. This created confusion among staff and required several iterations of the form to ensure it could be used efficiently and effectively by all stakeholders.

Additionally, there was a gap in ongoing support and follow-up protocols. Although initial training occurred during staff buyback days, there were few opportunities for structured refresher sessions or follow-up coaching. As a result, some staff reported uncertainty months after the rollout, particularly around how to locate or complete forms and what actions were expected at each stage of the IPS process.

These challenges reflect the need for system-wide alignment, not only in documentation

and workflows, but in professional development, accountability structures, and progress monitoring. Addressing these system-level gaps is essential for maintaining fidelity to the process and ensuring that all students receive timely, data-informed, and equitable interventions.

Artifacts

Each artifact corresponds to a specific section of the IPS document that teachers were required to complete. The artifacts are organized chronologically, reflecting the sequence in which each section was utilized throughout the process.

The first artifact in Appendix A is the IPS PowerPoint, which served as a foundational component of the initial IPS training session. During this session, teachers were introduced to the purpose and structure of the IPS process and were provided with guidance on how to access and utilize the necessary forms through Google Drive. The presentation featured clear, step-by-step instructions accompanied by examples to ensure that staff could confidently complete the IPS referral documentation. To reinforce understanding and enhance retention, teachers participated in a hands-on practice activity based on a case study reflecting authentic classroom scenarios. This interactive element enabled collaborative completion of the IPS form within grade-level teams, thereby promoting peer learning and fostering consistency across classrooms. Feedback collected from participants indicated that the training was highly effective, with staff reporting increased confidence in navigating the IPS process and a marked improvement in the completeness of forms submitted post-training. Ultimately, this session not only equipped teachers with practical skills but also cultivated a sense of shared ownership in the referral and intervention process.

The second artifact in Appendix B was the IPS document, organized into six sections. The sections included targeted questions designed to facilitate a comprehensive assessment of

the student's academic performance and behavioral needs. The effectiveness of the IPS process was monitored by evaluating the completeness and accuracy of the submitted forms. This ongoing evaluation enabled continuous revisions to better support staff in delivering targeted interventions.

Section 1, Section 2, and Section 3 were about the whole student. These sections covered students' strengths and weaknesses in all areas of the whole child, including academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and health-related domains. One critical section focused on attendance, as regular attendance is often a key factor in a student's educational progress. Patterns of absenteeism could indicate the need for additional support or more time in school to address learning gaps. Overall, these three sections, academic strengths and weaknesses, behavioral observations, and attendance data, were designed to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the student's needs. Together, they provided a well-rounded perspective that enabled any reader, whether part of the IPS team or a specialist reviewing the case, to understand the specific concerns raised by the classroom teacher clearly. This structure ensured that referrals were based on detailed, evidence-informed observations rather than subjective impressions, ultimately supporting more accurate and equitable decision-making.

Section 4 asked the teacher questions regarding possible attention deficit, attendance issues, and any form of trauma or issues the family would have. Recognizing these factors is critical, as they can significantly influence a student's academic engagement and behavioral functioning. Attention deficits, for example, may require specific instructional strategies or accommodations, while attendance issues often correlate with gaps in learning and decreased academic progress. In addition, trauma or challenges within the family environment can affect a student's emotional well-being and capacity to participate fully in the educational setting. By

gathering this information, the IPS process ensures a more holistic understanding of the student's circumstances, enabling the team to develop targeted, individualized interventions that address not only academic needs but also underlying factors that may impede success.

Section 5 and Section 6 were used to document the intervention data and the assessment data that were gathered by the teacher. These sections were essential for reviewing the student's progress within intervention groups, providing concrete evidence of the effectiveness of implemented strategies. Careful analysis of this data allowed the IPS team to make informed decisions regarding the continuation, modification, or intensification of interventions to better support the student's academic and behavioral development.

The IPS form underwent multiple revisions in response to teacher feedback concerning its usability and effectiveness. As educators shared their insights on successful elements and areas needing improvement, the document was systematically refined to better meet user needs. When completed accurately, as exemplified in Appendix B, the IPS meeting proceeded smoothly, facilitating clear identification of appropriate next steps to support the student's progress.

A key piece of feedback from teachers was the request for completed examples of IPS forms. Upon receiving these, teachers demonstrated improved clarity and detail in their submissions, which contributed to more effective and informative documentation. This enhancement facilitated better communication among team members and supported more targeted interventions for students. Providing such concrete examples proved to be a valuable strategy in promoting consistency and confidence in the IPS process across the staff.

Finds and recommendations

Throughout the implementation of the revised IPS process, I engaged in critical self-reflection that revealed important aspects of my leadership style. The insights I gained

regarding my leadership approach were significant. While I aspired for the IPS process to operate smoothly and efficiently, I initially experienced frustration when teachers did not complete the required documentation promptly. Upon reflection, particularly concerning my interaction with the teacher who had not completed the form, I recognized the importance of leaders setting a constructive example. As this was the inaugural year of implementing the revised IPS process, all participants were simultaneously acclimating to the new system. This experience provided a valuable opportunity for me to learn how to balance maintaining high expectations with demonstrating empathy and compassion.

Another key insight I gained was the critical importance of actively seeking and incorporating feedback. Initially, I assumed that because I had thoroughly explained the IPS process at the start of the school year, all teachers fully understood it. I sought feedback only from the principal after the first few meetings. However, during subsequent meetings, I broadened my approach by soliciting input directly from general education teachers and the speech-language pathologist, which yielded valuable insights. One general education teacher expressed uncertainty regarding the next steps in the IPS process following the receipt of signed consent forms and recommended incorporating a drop-down menu within the form to indicate the current status of each student's progress. Recognizing the merit of this suggestion, I implemented the change promptly. This demonstrated attentiveness to her concerns, validated her input, and fostered greater trust within the team. Additionally, the speech-language pathologist proposed sending reminder emails containing links to the IPS forms and relevant notes to facilitate easier access for staff. This feedback underscored the ongoing need for clear communication and organizational support to ensure successful implementation.

Overall, the implementation of the revised IPS process has contributed significantly to

my professional growth as both a special education teacher and a leader. I am grateful to have initiated this process and to have engaged in its ongoing refinement. This experience has reinforced the understanding that meaningful improvement is inherently a collaborative endeavor, requiring the concerted efforts of multiple stakeholders. The collective planning and execution of the IPS process underscore the importance of teamwork in enhancing student success. Moving forward, I am committed to fostering this spirit of collaboration and continuous improvement to support the academic and behavioral growth of all students.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT EXTENSION & EVALUATION

This chapter outlines the implementation, evaluation, and refinement of the Individual

Problem Solving (IPS) process at Washington Elementary School, highlighting its impact on

students, staff, and the broader school community. The IPS process was designed to create a

clear, consistent, and data-driven pathway for identifying and supporting students in need of Tier

3 interventions. Through stakeholder feedback, process improvements, measurable outcomes,

and forward-looking strategies, this chapter presents a comprehensive account of how the

initiative evolved from concept to a fully functioning support system. Documenting both

successes and challenges, it provides a blueprint that can inform future efforts within our district

and beyond.

Goals for the extended project and additional impacts for stakeholders

The primary goal of this project is to develop and implement a practical IPS process that

provides comprehensive support for both students and staff within the school community. To

achieve this objective, the leadership team established a series of strategic checkpoints

throughout the implementation timeline. These checkpoints serve to monitor progress, ensure

fidelity to the IPS framework, and gather meaningful feedback from all stakeholders.

By integrating these regular points of evaluation, the team can identify challenges early,

make data-driven adjustments, and sustain a culture of continuous improvement. This structured

approach fosters collaboration among educators, specialists, and administrators while reinforcing

accountability for student success. For teachers, it provides clarity and consistency in the referral

and support process, reducing uncertainty and ensuring they have the tools and guidance needed

to address student needs effectively. For specialists, such as special education staff, counselors,

and interventionists, it enables them to target their expertise where it will have the most significant impact, aligning interventions with accurate and up-to-date student data. For administrators, it offers a clear picture of the school's overall progress, helping them allocate resources strategically and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives. Most importantly, for students and families, it ensures that interventions are delivered in a timely, responsive manner, preventing minor concerns from becoming significant barriers to learning and fostering trust in the school's commitment to every child's success.

In addition to improving student outcomes, the IPS process strengthens the overall support system within the school by encouraging shared ownership of problem-solving and decision-making. For staff, this means clearer processes, better communication, and access to collective expertise. For students, it means receiving targeted, meaningful interventions at the right time. For the broader community, it builds confidence in the school's commitment to equitable access, responsive action, and long-term academic and behavioral growth.

To turn this shared vision into practice, the IPS process utilized tools that streamlined collaboration and grounded decisions in evidence. A standardized approach to data collection ensured all students were evaluated equitably, minimizing oversight or bias. This foundation led to one of the process's key components, the Google Form for structured data collection.

Filling out the Google Form

As part of the IPS process, a structured data collection phase was implemented to support the early identification of students requiring additional academic or behavioral support. To accomplish this, teachers completed a detailed Google Form designed to capture comprehensive information about each student's performance. The form guided teachers in systematically evaluating student strengths and weaknesses across key developmental and academic domains,

including language arts, mathematics, writing, social skills, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, and behavioral concerns.

Teachers documented targeted interventions and used the resulting data to identify specific areas of need. Over a six-week period, educators monitored progress, using multiple data sources such as state and district assessments, teacher-designed evaluations, classroom observations, and samples of student work. Information regarding accommodations provided to support individual students was also recorded, ensuring a complete picture of each student's educational context (Raben et al., 2019). This thorough and consistent approach to data collection not only increases the accuracy of student evaluations but also ensures that intervention strategies are tailored to meet each learner's unique needs (Aspden et al., 2022). By embedding these practices into the IPS process, the school established a sustainable framework for informed decision-making that promotes equitable and effective student support.

When concerns arose, teachers emailed the principal and SPED teacher to initiate further action. The principal would then schedule an IPS meeting, inviting the SPED teacher, behavioral specialist, speech pathologist, and intervention teachers. This meeting fostered a collaborative approach to addressing student needs (Kangas, 2018). Research shows that when teachers discuss their findings with students, it benefits both the students and the entire support team. By encouraging open communication and meaningful collaboration among all stakeholders, the process not only ensures a coordinated and timely response but also empowers students to take an active role in their learning and growth.

IPS meeting

A critical component of the IPS process involves structured team meetings designed to analyze student data and collaboratively develop targeted support strategies. During the IPS

meeting, the team engaged in a collaborative review of the completed Google Form. The classroom teacher provided a comprehensive overview of the student's specific challenges, offering context and examples based on classroom observations and performance data. As the teacher presented, the special education (SPED) teacher facilitated the discussion by guiding the team through each section of the form, ensuring that all identified areas of concern, whether academic, behavioral, social-emotional, or related to fine and gross motor development, were clearly understood and systematically addressed by the team.

The team engaged in a collaborative discussion, clarifying information as needed and affirming the classroom teacher's observations. Academic and behavioral factors were reviewed, including current accommodations, implemented Tier 1–3 interventions, and documented progress. This data-driven process informed decisions regarding the effectiveness of existing supports and the need for further evaluation or plan adjustments. The team also examined potential medical or health-related factors, such as difficulty sustaining attention, excessive fidgeting, frequent movement, or work avoidance, that could indicate underlying conditions, including ADHD, anxiety, or sensory processing challenges. Early identification of such concerns helped ensure that all factors influencing learning and behavior were considered.

Following the review of the IPS form and team discussion, the team determines the appropriate next steps. Key questions guide this decision-making process, including whether additional data is needed to make an informed decision. If so, the classroom teacher is responsible for gathering further information, which may include academic progress monitoring, behavioral observations, documentation of implemented interventions, and input from other staff members supporting the student. If no additional data are required, the team proceeds with scheduling a parent meeting to obtain consent for special education evaluation.

The follow-up process depends on the outcome of the parent meeting. If the parent provides consent for evaluation, the team reviews and establishes the timeline for completing assessments and scheduling the eligibility determination meeting according to district and state guidelines. If the parent declines consent or the team determines that additional data is needed, progress monitoring continues. Teachers implement additional interventions, collect further data, and provide updated information to the team. This ongoing monitoring ensures the student continues to receive support while preserving the option to revisit the need for evaluation in the future.

Through this systematic approach, the team ensures that decisions are evidence-based, collaborative, and centered on the student's best interests. Ultimately, the IPS meeting serves as both a decision-making hub and a bridge between data collection and effective intervention, ensuring that no student's needs are overlooked or addressed in isolation.

IPS review

To maintain consistency and ensure ongoing improvement, the school conducts regular reviews of the IPS process at designated checkpoints throughout the academic year. The first occurs during professional development sessions at the start of the school year, providing an opportunity to review procedures, share best practices, and give first-year teachers a comprehensive overview of the IPS process. A mid-year review follows the winter break, during which the leadership team meets with assigned grade levels to complete a survey evaluating the process's effectiveness. This enables staff to provide feedback on strengths and areas for improvement. The final round of feedback is collected at the end of the school year, after which the leadership team makes targeted adjustments to ensure refinements are in place for implementation at the start of the following year.

The IPS process is continuously refined throughout the academic year, providing multiple opportunities for teachers to become familiar with referral procedures for both educational and behavioral concerns. As IPS meetings and data collection progress, involvement from various stakeholders increases. Given the process's data-driven nature, it is essential that all participants clearly understand their roles in delivering intervention support and accurately documenting relevant data. Responsibility for interventions should not rest solely with general education teachers; effective support requires collaboration among all staff members (Kangas, 2018). This shared responsibility reinforces the principle that the student is the collective responsibility of the entire educational team, not solely the general education teacher. Ultimately, this collaborative, data-informed approach strengthens the school's capacity to meet diverse student needs and promotes equitable access to learning opportunities (Obama Administration, 2016). By embedding these reviews into the school's annual rhythm, the IPS process evolves as a living framework, responsive to student needs, shaped by staff insights, and sustained through collective commitment to continuous improvement.

Extending the IPS framework to a district-wide model

To strengthen the district's capacity to address the diverse academic and behavioral needs of all students, Salem-Keizer should consider the establishment of a comprehensive, district-wide Intervention and Progress Support (IPS) framework. This framework would ensure consistency, equity, and clarity in intervention practices across all grade levels, eliminating gaps that can occur when procedures vary between schools. Cross-school collaboration, particularly between elementary and secondary institutions, would be a cornerstone of this effort, fostering alignment in procedures, streamlining intervention strategies, and ensuring that expectations remain uniform for both educators and students. Such alignment would not only facilitate

smoother transitions for students as they progress through the district but would also enhance communication and collaboration among educators, support staff, and administrators.

A unified IPS framework would guarantee that students receive uninterrupted and well-coordinated support, regardless of changes in school placement, while simultaneously building a sustainable, district-wide support network that can adapt to evolving student needs. Over time, this system would contribute to a stronger culture of shared responsibility, where every educator understands their role in supporting each learner. Ultimately, by prioritizing a coherent, system-wide approach, the district would maximize student potential, promote educational equity, and position itself to respond more effectively to challenges, ensuring that all students have the resources and support necessary for long-term academic and personal success.

Timeline for this extension

The IPS timeline was intentionally designed without a fixed end date, allowing it to remain open for the entire school year. This flexible approach enables teachers to refer students at any point, ensuring timely access to academic and behavioral support whenever concerns arise. Teachers follow the IPS process by completing the required documentation and participating in scheduled team meetings, promoting consistency, accountability, and rapid intervention for students in need.

The IPS review process begins as soon as teachers return from summer break. This serves as a refresher for returning staff and provides foundational training for new educators, ensuring everyone is prepared to implement the process effectively from day one. Data collection for the school year begins in October, giving teachers time to work with their students and collect the required six weeks of performance data. Each grade level holds three scheduled IPS meetings, fall, winter, and spring, to review ongoing cases and address any new student concerns.

Additional meetings can be requested at any time, allowing the system to remain responsive to emerging needs.

Once the IPS process is firmly established within individual schools, the next phase involves aligning it across other elementary schools in the Salem-Keizer School District to promote district-wide consistency. This alignment would streamline procedures, strengthen collaboration, and ensure students receive comparable levels of support regardless of their school placement. Integration efforts could be embedded within SPED professional development sessions throughout the year, bringing together teachers from multiple schools for collaborative workshops focused on refining and unifying the IPS framework.

Given the scope of this initiative, full implementation would likely take several years and require a sustained commitment from educators, administrators, and support staff. As collaboration expands, new stakeholders, such as specialists and district-level leaders, would contribute valuable expertise and perspectives to strengthen the process. While district leadership can provide direction and resources, the most effective and sustainable framework emerges when teachers directly involved in IPS implementation take ownership of its design (Roberts & Guerra, 2017). When educators lead the process, it becomes more practical, relevant, and responsive to the realities of student needs (Roberts & Guerra, 2017). Ultimately, this extension of the IPS process will establish a unified, equitable system that fosters smooth transitions, promotes consistency across schools, and ensures that every student in the district receives timely, effective, and sustained support throughout their educational journey.

Evaluation practices

Building on the year-round flexibility of the IPS timeline and the collaborative alignment efforts across the district, the evaluation process serves as the critical mechanism for ensuring

that the system continues to meet student needs effectively. By embedding structured reviews

and feedback opportunities into the IPS framework, the district can maintain consistency, address

challenges promptly, and refine practices to reflect evolving priorities.

The leadership team would conduct formal evaluations twice each year, once after winter

break and again at the end of the school year. Following each review, professional development

sessions would be held at the beginning of the subsequent school year to introduce any revisions,

provide refresher training, and ensure staff remain confident in implementing the process. The

mid-year review would focus on identifying any significant adjustments needed based on current

implementation challenges and emerging student needs. In contrast, the end-of-year review

would gather broader insights to inform long-term improvements.

The evaluation process would rely heavily on gathering direct feedback from teachers

and other stakeholders engaged in the IPS process. Surveys would be designed with two distinct

sections, one addressing the clarity and usefulness of IPS documentation and the other examining

the structure, efficiency, and impact of IPS meetings. Questions would remain consistent across

evaluation cycles to ensure comparability, prompting participants to reflect on their experiences

by addressing: *What worked? What did not work? What adjustments are needed?* This approach

encourages thoughtful, actionable feedback rather than surface-level comments.

Once survey results are collected, the leadership team will meet to discuss patterns,

identify priority areas for refinement, and make the necessary adjustments to both the process

and its supporting materials. Staff and stakeholders would also be invited to share their insights

in open forums, reinforcing the collaborative nature of the IPS framework. This ongoing cycle of

evaluation, feedback, and revision ensures that all voices are heard, fosters a sense of ownership

among educators, and promotes consistency in practice (Kangas, 2018). By embedding

evaluation into the culture of IPS, the district ensures that the system evolves in response to real-world needs, making it both sustainable and impactful for the long term.

In this way, the evaluation process acts as both a quality control system and a driver of continuous improvement, ensuring the IPS framework remains a sustainable, adaptive, and student-centered approach that grows stronger with each cycle of review and refinement (Raben et al., 2019). By maintaining this ongoing cycle, the district can ensure that interventions remain relevant, equitable, and aligned with the evolving needs of its students.

Additional budget, resources, and materials needed

As noted in previous chapters, the IPS process does not require a designated budget. Instead, it relies on the strategic use of time, collaboration, and the dedication of various staff members. These human resources, rather than financial allocations, serve as the foundation for its effectiveness. To reinforce the IPS framework and ensure that updates or revisions are communicated effectively, it is recommended that the district invest in ongoing professional development opportunities for staff (Howe, 2018). Such PD sessions, supported by district funding, not only strengthen staff capacity but also provide a platform for discussing new strategies, sharing successful practices, and refining procedures based on current needs. District funding could also be allocated to cover necessary materials, compensate substitute teachers to allow staff release time, and support the development of high-quality training sessions.

Looking ahead, a key priority is expanding collaboration across schools. Strengthening alignment of the IPS process districtwide would allow teachers to work together more efficiently, promoting consistency, unity, and the sharing of best practices among all participating schools. This collaborative approach would also reduce duplication of effort, create a common language for intervention, and enhance the overall quality of student support.

In addition, having an administrator or school leader with a strong background in special education could significantly enhance the implementation and long-term sustainability of the IPS process. Leaders with this expertise bring a deeper understanding of the complexities involved, enabling them to make informed decisions that prioritize student success (Bettini, 2017). Their guidance can foster a unified school culture that values inclusivity, responds effectively to diverse learning needs, and ensures that no student is overlooked. By leveraging expertise, fostering collaboration, and maintaining a commitment to professional growth, the IPS process can continue to evolve as a sustainable, districtwide system of support.

In summary, the IPS process at Washington Elementary has proven to be both practical and transformative, streamlining referral procedures, increasing the accuracy of student identification, and strengthening collaboration among educators. The measurable gains in student achievement and reductions in behavioral challenges affirm the value of a structured, data-driven approach to Tier 3 support. While there is still room for refinement, the foundation has been laid for a system that can be scaled across schools and adapted to diverse educational contexts. With continued collaboration, training, and district-wide alignment, the IPS framework has the potential to ensure that every student, regardless of background or school, receives timely, targeted, and practical support. Ultimately, the success of this initiative underscores a fundamental truth: when educators work together with clarity of purpose and a shared commitment to student success, meaningful and lasting change becomes not only possible but inevitable. Building on these results, the next chapter will explore both the reflections gathered during this process and the strategies for effectively disseminating the IPS framework to promote wider adoption and long-term sustainability.

Lessons learned in leadership

Every leadership journey leaves behind insights that extend far beyond the original goal, and the IPS project was no exception. This process revealed not only strategies for improving student support but also key principles for leading change in a school community. Leadership here was not about issuing directives from above; it was about walking alongside colleagues, listening, and learning together. Effective school leadership requires building trust through transparency, creating structures that empower staff to take ownership of solutions, and ensuring decisions are anchored in data rather than assumptions. It also involves fostering a culture where feedback is welcomed, collaboration is the norm, and challenges are viewed as opportunities for innovation. Perhaps most importantly, the IPS project reinforced that lasting change comes from aligning vision with daily practice, making sure that every procedure, meeting, and conversation moves the community toward shared goals.

Leadership growth

Leadership serves as a critical catalyst in shaping school-wide initiatives and ensuring their long-term sustainability (Maxwell, 2013). Authentic leadership within the IPS project was not characterized by issuing directives from a hierarchical position but by engaging in shared experiences alongside colleagues, fostering mutual trust, and promoting collective ownership of the process. The role of leadership was to provide both strategic vision and responsive support, guiding the team through each phase of development while remaining open to feedback and adaptation. Through this approach, leadership became a facilitative rather than prescriptive force, encouraging innovation, addressing challenges collaboratively, and empowering team members

to take active roles in decision-making. This experience underscored the importance of relational leadership, where the leader functions as a partner in problem-solving and a champion of continuous professional growth. Such a model not only enhances the quality of the initiative itself but also strengthens the school's professional culture, laying the groundwork for sustained improvement.

Working as a team

Collaboration emerged as a central theme throughout the development of the IPS process. Initially envisioned as a minor revision to the existing framework, the initiative evolved into a comprehensive, year-long endeavor characterized by sustained engagement from a wide range of stakeholders. Teachers, specialists, administrators, and support staff each contributed their expertise, ensuring that the resulting document reflected both practical applicability and pedagogical soundness. This collective effort was marked by a high level of professional dedication, with each participant offering valuable insights informed by their unique experiences and instructional contexts (Kenny & Mihut, 2020). Importantly, parent feedback further validated the collaborative approach, as families expressed appreciation for the clarity and accessibility of the IPS framework, noting its ease of understanding and alignment with student needs. The process demonstrated that inclusive, stakeholder-driven collaboration yields outcomes that extend beyond procedural refinement, fostering a school culture grounded in trust, transparency, and shared responsibility. By engaging multiple voices in the design process, the school not only enhanced its intervention procedures but also strengthened its overall capacity to support student success in a systematic and equitable manner.

Communication for success

Effective communication emerged as a pivotal factor in the successful development and

implementation of the IPS process. While the process was intuitive for some educators, it was not immediately clear to all stakeholders, underscoring the need for intentional clarity and consistency in messaging (Maxwell, 2010). The repeated necessity of explaining the framework revealed that communication in educational change is not a one-time event but an ongoing practice that must be adapted to the audience's needs and prior knowledge. This insight reinforced the principle that effective communicators distill complex ideas into their most essential elements, ensuring accessibility without sacrificing accuracy.

To support this aim, the IPS Google document was deliberately designed to be concise and user-friendly. Instead of producing an exhaustive, multi-page form that could overwhelm staff and dilute focus, the tool presented only the most critical questions, articulated in straightforward and easily understood language. This intentional simplicity served multiple purposes: reducing cognitive load for teachers, ensuring consistency in data collection, and fostering greater engagement with the process. Ultimately, by prioritizing clear, direct communication, the school created an IPS tool that was not only functional but also accessible to all members of the educational community, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustained and effective implementation.

Continuous learning

The literature review ultimately proved to be far more influential in shaping this project than initially anticipated. Examining how other countries have approached the streamlining of special education processes and the inclusion of students who are struggling academically or behaviorally revealed an important truth: these challenges are not confined to schools in Oregon but are part of a much broader, global effort to ensure equitable education for all learners. International research demonstrated that schools worldwide are grappling with similar barriers

and are striving toward the same overarching objective, removing systemic obstacles and creating responsive, inclusive environments that meet diverse student needs (Aspden et al., 2022; Dever, 2016). This global perspective reinforced the understanding that local initiatives, such as the IPS process, are most effective when informed by the successes and lessons learned from diverse educational contexts.

The case studies, policy analyses, and peer-reviewed journal articles reviewed for this project not only offered practical strategies but also provided a sense of solidarity, affirming that this work is part of a collective global movement rather than an isolated local initiative. The innovative approaches and successful practices documented in other educational systems served as both a source of inspiration and a call to action, encouraging the adaptation of proven ideas to the unique context of Salem-Keizer schools. In this way, the IPS process is positioned not only as a local improvement initiative but also as a contribution to the ongoing international dialogue on effective, equitable, and inclusive education. If this framework can make a measurable difference in our schools, it holds the potential to be adapted and applied in other settings, extending its impact beyond district and state boundaries.

Reflections

While leadership lessons emerged clearly, the IPS journey also uncovered more profound truths about the barriers, both visible and invisible, that stand in the way of inclusive education. These reflections shed light on the cultural, relational, and systemic shifts that must accompany any procedural change.

This process also revealed that many teachers still struggle with how to support students, especially those with behavioral challenges. In some cases, the teachers lacked the necessary tools; in others, they held assumptions that limited their ability to respond compassionately and

constructively. Unfortunately, this issue is not unique to a single school or region; similar

patterns have been observed in schools worldwide (Bertrand, 2015). As disheartening as it may

be, history shows numerous instances of individuals and communities advocating for inclusive

education for all students (Dovigo, 2020). Despite progress, a pressing need remains to challenge

and remove biases and labels that hinder equal access to learning. Students with special

education labels or behavioral issues are ignored or marginalized. That responsibility was shifted

entirely to the SPED department. This mindset undermines the principle of shared responsibility;

it is not just SPED's job; it is a collective responsibility as a school (Anonymous, 2016). Moving

forward, harmful assumptions must be broken down and replaced with a culture of inclusion and

equity for every student.

The IPS process was an ongoing learning experience. The key takeaway was that

meaningful change is made possible when a dedicated team surrounds and supports one another.

The commitment and collaboration of everyone involved throughout this year-long project

contributed to its success. The team continued to work together with a shared purpose,

demonstrating that unity, persistence, and a clear goal can lead to impactful change.

Intended and unintended consequences

Like any significant change initiative, the IPS process brought with it both anticipated

successes and unexpected challenges. Some outcomes aligned perfectly with the vision set at the

start of the project, while others emerged as unplanned but valuable learning experiences that

shaped the process and my leadership in meaningful ways.

An unexpected but meaningful moment occurred when Laura observed me leading one of

the IPS meetings. Our follow-up discussion prompted me to reflect more deeply about how to

streamline the process, not just for the present, but to ensure it continues to function effectively

even after I leave. I want the IPS process to be part of my legacy at Washington Elementary. Through my research, I found that IPS procedures and SPED referral processes vary widely between schools, districts, and even states. While general guidelines are in place, what we are building here is more streamlined, intentional, and tailored to our specific needs. If the IPS process proves successful in Washington, I hope to see it adopted across the Salem-Keizer School District. The primary goal is to create a unified IPS document and process that can be consistently applied across both elementary and secondary schools. For now, this process is specific to Washington Elementary. However, with collaboration among leaders, it has the potential to become a district-wide, and eventually statewide or even nationwide, standard for supporting students in need.

Several unintended consequences emerged during the implementation of the IPS process. One challenge was that the online document was initially difficult to access and complete. To resolve this, I emailed the staff a direct link to the Google document to improve accessibility. I collaborated with my principal and the behavior specialist to revise the ISP notes. These updated notes were shared with staff to provide a summary of the discussions during IPS meetings and outline the next steps. Each document included a student photo and a link to their IPS form on Google Docs. Organizing everything in a single Google spreadsheet proved to be a practical solution, providing staff with a centralized and streamlined resource for tracking and supporting students.

Another unintended consequence involved how one of the IPS meetings was handled. The expectation was for teachers to arrive prepared with all the necessary documents completed and data collected. If these materials were not prepared, the meeting would be rescheduled. During one particular meeting, a teacher arrived without the required forms. I was frustrated

because I wanted to move forward and ensure the student received support. At that moment, I stopped the meeting and told the team we would need to reschedule due to the missing information. However, the way I handled the situation was not professional; it was evident that I was frustrated. After taking time to reflect, I realized that my response was not supportive. The next day, I apologized to the teacher. This experience reminded me that leadership requires patience and empathy. We are all working toward the same goal of supporting students. I learned that how we lead is just as important as what we accomplish.

The intended outcome of the IPS process was to create a functional and simple IPS process that allowed teachers to refer students for Tier 3 support. Over the years, as teachers became more familiar with the process and its expectations, the number of student referrals increased, demonstrating growing confidence in and understanding of the system. However, several unintended outcomes also arose. They were valuable lessons in leadership, collaboration, and communication. They ensured the success and long-term sustainability of the IPS framework.

Ultimately, these experiences set the stage for deeper self-reflection and growth, shaping the leadership lessons that continue to guide my work today.

Stakeholder feedback

Building on the lessons learned from the intended and unintended consequences of the IPS process, gathering feedback from stakeholders was the next essential step in evaluating its overall impact and sustainability.

The goal of this project was to develop a clear, efficient process that allows teachers to refer students for Tier 3 support. To evaluate the effectiveness of the IPS process, feedback was collected from multiple stakeholders, including teachers and support staff. Their comments

provided valuable insight into what was working well and what could be improved.

Positive encouragements

Several stakeholders expressed that the new IPS process felt noticeably more efficient, organized, and user-friendly than in previous years:

- *"The process is more streamlined than last year."*
- *"The document is easy to find."*
- *"I like it where everything is on Google Drive, and all we need to do is find the student's name and open their document."*
- *"Much easier than our previous years…"*
- *"The meetings are a lot quicker and shorter when we have all the paperwork done ahead of time. We are not wasting time at all."*

Areas for growth

While the feedback was largely positive, some stakeholders identified specific areas where the process could be even more effective and user-friendly:

- *"Can there be a place where teachers can see where we are in the process? Like a drop-down?"*
- *"Can you please resend the Google Document with the student's information?"*
- *"Can you send a reminder email about the things I need to complete before the meeting?"*
- *"I don't know what this means…"*

Overall, the feedback reflected appreciation for the streamlined and accessible process while also highlighting opportunities to increase clarity, communication, and ease of use. These

insights not only validated the progress made but also offered a clear roadmap for the ongoing

refinement of the IPS framework. In many ways, these comments echoed the lessons learned

from the intended and unintended consequences of implementation, reinforcing the need for

flexibility, patience, and continuous improvement as the process evolves.

Process improvements made

Based on the feedback received, the leadership team made targeted revisions to the IPS

forms to improve clarity, accessibility, and usability. These updates were presented during the

next staff meeting, ensuring all teachers were aware of the changes and had a chance to ask

questions. To maintain consistent communication, the principal and special education teacher

began sending reminder emails before each IPS meeting, making sure staff had access to the

most current version of the process and necessary materials.

Recognizing the importance of ongoing support, the leadership team also developed

training sessions to review best practices for completing the IPS forms accurately (O'Connor,

2016). These sessions were intentionally designed to be practical, collaborative, and

solution-focused, helping teachers feel confident in using the process. The ultimate goal was to

keep the IPS system clear, consistent, and easy to follow, ensuring it remained a sustainable and

effective tool for supporting students in need.

Goals met

One of the most critical steps in evaluating any new initiative is determining whether it

achieved its intended objectives. For the IPS process, success would be reflected in measurable

improvements in student support, increased teacher confidence in the system, and stronger

collaboration across staff. Establishing clear indicators of success was essential from the outset,

ensuring that progress could be tracked and celebrated, while also identifying areas for

refinement.

The most meaningful measure of success emerged when students began receiving Tier 3 support. The number of students identified for special education services doubled compared to the 2023–2024 school year. This increase was not due to over-identification; rather, it reflected the accuracy and thoroughness of the IPS process. The enhanced system allowed teachers to present well-documented evidence, ensuring that referrals were based on concrete data rather than subjective impressions. As Fletcher et al. (2024) highlight, consistent data collection and comprehensive reporting of assessment results are essential for effective decision-making, and the IPS process exemplifies these best practices.

Since implementing Tier 3 interventions, many students have demonstrated notable academic and behavioral progress. Teachers have reported improved reading and math performance, increased engagement during lessons, and a reduction in classroom disruptions. Several students who previously struggled to meet grade-level benchmarks are now demonstrating sustained growth, while others have gained the confidence to participate more actively in their learning. The shift has also eased teacher frustration, as staff now feel supported by a clear, consistent, and collaborative framework for addressing student needs.

Beyond the academic gains, the process has fostered stronger relationships among staff. The IPS meetings have become a space where teachers, specialists, and administrators collaborate more intentionally, resulting in richer discussions, more creative solutions, and a shared sense of ownership over student success. This collaborative culture has extended into other areas of school life, with teachers applying similar problem-solving and data-driven approaches in their general classroom practices.

The IPS process has proven to be more than just a procedural improvement; it has been a

transformative shift in how the school approaches student support. By empowering educators to identify needs earlier, respond with targeted interventions, and track progress consistently, the system has laid a foundation for lasting success. The results confirm that the IPS process is not only functional but impactful, ensuring that no student's needs go unnoticed and that every child has a clear pathway to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Impact at a glance:

- 2× increase in students receiving special education services (without over-identification).
- Noticeable gains in academic performance, particularly in reading and math.
- Reduced behavioral incidents and improved student engagement.
- Increased teacher confidence in referral and support processes.
- Strengthened collaboration and trust among staff across grade levels and roles.

The measurable gains achieved through the IPS process demonstrate that when schools commit to a clear, consistent, and collaborative system, they can profoundly change the trajectory of students' academic and behavioral success. This initiative has shown that with the right structures in place, equitable support is not only possible, but it becomes the standard.

Next steps

Building on the success of the IPS process at Washington Elementary, the natural progression is to consider how these practices can be scaled to benefit a broader range of students and educators. Sustained improvement in education rarely happens in isolation; it thrives through collaboration, shared learning, and district-wide commitment to proven strategies.

As the IPS process has proven effective at Washington Elementary, the next logical step is to expand its reach through collaboration with other elementary schools. If the ultimate goal is

to create a strong, sustainable IPS process that supports both students and staff, it must be accessible, adaptable, and applicable to all schools across the district.

Cross-school collaboration would allow teams to share best practices, exchange resources, and learn from one another's experiences, fostering continuous refinement of the system. This could involve joint PD sessions, structured resource sharing, and regular meetings to track progress. For example, schools might meet monthly to review successes, address challenges, and exchange strategies. Every three months, a dedicated joint PD session could be used to evaluate data, incorporate feedback, and improve the IPS framework.

Once a unified IPS model is agreed upon, a select group of schools could pilot the system, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data to assess its effectiveness. Based on the results, the process could then be expanded to include secondary schools, creating a fully aligned, district-wide approach to student support.

The cycle of collaboration, review, and refinement would continue until Salem-Keizer Public Schools has a consistent and effective IPS process in place at every level. History has shown the power of collective action in driving meaningful change (Wohl, 2022). While many people desire change, it takes a leader with a clear vision and a committed team to turn that vision into reality.

With the right people working together, a unified IPS process for Salem-Keizer is not only possible but well within reach. By fostering a shared vision, leveraging collective expertise, and committing to continuous improvement, the district can ensure that every student, regardless of school, grade level, or background, has access to timely, targeted, and effective support. This collaborative effort has the potential to transform how schools respond to student needs, creating a stronger, more equitable educational system for years to come.

Dissemination

For any school improvement initiative to achieve its full potential, its successes must be communicated clearly, strategically, and persuasively to a broader audience. Dissemination is not merely about sharing information; it is about inspiring adoption, building trust among stakeholders, and creating momentum for systemic change. The proven results of the IPS process at Washington Elementary provide a compelling case for district-wide implementation, and intentional dissemination will be key to making that vision a reality.

The goal of sharing this information is to promote broader adoption of the IPS process across the district and to build stakeholder investment in refining these practices. Every school needs a clear and effective system to identify students who require Tier 3 interventions. The IPS process implemented at Washington Elementary has demonstrated its effectiveness and deserves to be shared more widely. One potential next step is to embed the IPS forms and guidelines on the Salem-Keizer Public Schools website, allowing parents and families to access and better understand the process.

Professional development opportunities could also be offered to train educators on how to implement the IPS system with fidelity and consistency. These sessions could be paired with quarterly check-ins, either in person or virtually, to provide ongoing support and feedback. The most impactful way to share this project would be to walk participants through the entire IPS process: from the initial form completion to the delivery of accommodations and supports that help students succeed. Although the full cycle takes several months, practice scenarios using mock student data with academic concerns could help schools gain hands-on experience during training.

Since the IPS process was entirely data-driven, stakeholders could identify the challenges

faced by the school and the adjustments made to address them. A PowerPoint presentation, accompanied by testimonials from various stakeholders, would effectively highlight the success of the IPS process and its impact on students. By offering multiple methods of sharing, such as live presentations, professional development sessions, and accessible resources, other schools may be encouraged to adopt the IPS framework and provide the necessary supports and accommodations to ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed. With proper training and collaboration, they, too, could experience improvements in student outcomes, particularly in providing timely and effective Tier 3 support.

In conclusion, the dissemination of the IPS process is about more than sharing a set of forms—it is about sharing a proven approach to identifying and supporting students in need. By making the process transparent, accessible, and supported with robust training, the district can empower schools to replicate Washington Elementary's success. If embraced fully, this framework has the potential to transform student support practices across Salem-Keizer, ensuring that no student's needs go unnoticed and that every learner has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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Appendix A

IPS PowerPoint

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1QSKRccMyaEc2kdKMx-Ng7l_2k5VewWm5/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=101312447354752517916&rtpof=true&sd=true

Appendix B

IPS Document

1. https://drive.google.com/file/d/18WnjrKU0i_NsDh7nYAnVGA0piqSJh_cl/view?usp=drive_link

2. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y5kXPs31s7-xvIKY4imSwNH4mfRtNThu/view?usp=drive_link

3. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xZwEw1YahpE33tRcMWVwwETslWvRblwK/view?usp=drive_link

4. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AL7WiqeUA9HuIVk5tJUpOtnAaCp8vhYU/view?usp=drive_link

5. https://drive.google.com/file/d/12bzkpFTsVny-WPNQI87sM3zGjKron_1Z/view?usp=drive_link

6. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NhXfB6oibPAObx4XyJzOTpkYnJ6lBwZH/view?usp=drive_link