



# Osceola School District ESE Enhancements and Updates for 2025-2026



*for teachers and staff*

## **Q** Why are these changes being made?

**A** The changes to our ESE program mark a significant shift from our past practices— a shift towards greater inclusion that many school districts in Central Florida and across the nation made many years ago. The state target is to have no more than 12.7% of students with disabilities in a separate class setting. As of January 2025, Osceola’s percentage was at 21.4%. It is critical that changes be made to place students in academic settings that best meet their individual needs while providing the least restrictive environment possible.

To ensure that we are making the best decisions for our students, the district brought in an external consultant to take a close look at our ESE program. Based on research-driven best practices, they provided recommendations designed to improve ESE student outcomes and to best support our students’ individual needs and goals.

These recommendations were carefully reviewed and refined in collaboration with the district’s school-based ESE Advisory Group, which included representatives from the Osceola Classroom Teachers Association, and the ESE Parent Advisory Group.

## **Q** How many additional teachers and support staff (VE teachers, paras, ESE specialists) will schools receive?

**A** It depends. Each school’s ESE population was carefully reviewed, and preliminary allocations have been made based on the student population projected for 2025-2026. As each school goes through the inclusive scheduling process used to create the master schedule, additional personnel will be considered as needed.

## **Q** How will concerns about increased paperwork, IEP observations, and data collection be addressed?

**A** Data collection based on IEP goals and observations primarily resides with the Exceptional Student Education teacher, who is a case manager for the students with IEPs. We have a library of data collection tools to track intervention data.

## **Q** What professional development will be provided?

**A** Job responsibilities for teachers and paraprofessionals are not changing. Professional learning is targeted to the needs of the teachers and paraprofessionals. Opportunities for professional learning will be offered during the workday and/or outside of the regular workday, including summer opportunities. Any professional learning outside the workday will be compensated according to the contract.

## **Q** Which students are transitioning to general education classes and which students are not?

**A** A student’s IEP goals and the documented evidence of progress, or lack thereof, will contribute to the placement decision made by the IEP team. Students with disabilities must be served in the regular education environment unless the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular environment with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Some students may remain in a separate class setting with an ESE teacher and additional support as needed. Additional support may include speech/language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and/or behavior intervention. Some students may transition from a separate class setting to a general education setting with a designated ESE teacher and possibly a paraprofessional providing additional supports as needed, as well as speech/language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, behavior intervention in a push-in and/or pull-out support model.

**Q** **Do the changes mean that ESE parents can no longer apply for choice to a school?**

**A** No. A parent of a student with a disability can request choice to another school, just as a parent or a student without a disability. Choice approvals are based on the capacity at the school and the ability of the school to fully implement the IEP. A separate class setting will not be created at a choice school for an IEP to be implemented at the requested location. In addition, siblings of students with disabilities moving to a hub site will have an option to stay at their current school or choice to the hub school if the parent chooses.

**Q** **How will students' time in/out of class for IEP services be structured in the new general education setting? What type of support (academic, behavioral) will kids receive, and by whom?**

**A** All students will have a general education schedule unless they are remaining in the separate class setting full-time. The IEP team would determine which times would be appropriate for a student to be removed from that setting to receive therapy, social skills support, or academic intervention. The goal is to have students remain for any whole group time so that they receive appropriate grade-level instruction and are removed during the small group time. The structure of the schedule is determined by the school administrator, classroom teacher, and ESE teacher through the inclusive scheduling process and based on the percentage of time with non-disabled peers on the IEP.

**Q** **Who will provide check-ins with ESE students affected by the changes to ensure that they are successfully acclimating to their school environment and feel supported?**

**A** As students are transitioned to a different setting, the district ESE team will be providing additional support to hub sites as new students are onboarded to new school communities. School-based counselors, resource compliance specialists, school administrators, and school leadership teams will frequently visit the classrooms of students transitioning to the general education setting or are new to the school due to movement to a hub site, particularly during the first two to three weeks of school. This will allow school teams to problem-solve if the transition is not met successfully. If intervention efforts at the school continue to see limited or no progress, the district ESE program specialists can provide coaching to teachers and guidance on individual student needs.

**Q** **Will there be a Reduction in Force as a result of these changes?**

**A** No. ESE teachers and paras will not lose their job as a result of adjustments to our continuum of services. If allocations at an individual school are reduced, the school administrator and Human Resources will work with the employees to identify options at other schools.

**Q** **Will there be training for staff on working with student behaviors?**

**A** Yes. There will be opportunities for the remainder of the year and during the summer for staff to receive professional learning. Through the inclusive scheduling process, additional supports will be available for general education teachers to implement a student's IEP and to provide the necessary supports for students to effectively participate in the general education classroom. District ESE staff will be providing training in March and April for schools designated as hub sites for separate classes.

**Q** **Are there any additional certification requirements for teachers as a result of these changes?**

**A** No. Regular education teachers will not have to be certified in ESE.

**Q** **Could there be students with medical needs in the same class as students with behaviors?**

**A** Yes. Students are placed in classrooms based upon their IEP service needs. There is a possibility that students with medical needs may be placed in any classroom setting, depending on the level of services required.

**Q** **Will 1:1 special needs assistants be going with the students to which they are assigned?**

**A** Yes. The allocation for a 1:1 assistant is attached to a student. This allocation will move to the student's school of enrollment.

**Q** **Who will make decisions regarding educational placement?**

**A** Like all other decisions surrounding the IEP, the IEP team is tasked with this decision based on data and documentation.

**Q** **What will happen to teachers who are on temporary certifications in separate class settings?**

**A** Teachers should work with their administrator and HR to address these concerns, as each person's situation may differ. However, if the temporary certification is in ESE they would be able to continue in most ESE teaching positions.

**Q** **What personnel resources will be put in place to help students who will be transitioning into the general education setting?**

**A** This will be determined based on established needs supported by data and should be outlined in the IEP. However, in elementary and K-8 schools, additional paraprofessional support was staffed based upon the number of total ESE students, as our younger grade levels often have the most difficulty transitioning. Supports will also be reviewed during the school's inclusive scheduling session.

**Q** **How will hubs impact high school post-high school Transition?**

**A** Each high school will have a component of transition programming that allows for the opportunity for continuum of supports and affords our students with the opportunity to network as they grow within the program, which could lead to different career pathways.

**Q** **When students are transitioned from the separate class setting, a VE teacher helps with reading and math. Who helps in Social Studies, Science, and specials?**

**A** The need for support will be determined based on the student's IEP and data on research-based interventions collected. Schools will be allocated staff who will be utilized to meet those needs.

**Q** **How will teachers report/track behavior concerns that create learning loss?**

**A** Schools will track and monitor behaviors aligned with the district's MTSS processes. If additional support is needed from the ESE Department, requests for student-specific support can be submitted through Incident IQ with principal approval.

**Q** **What is the plan for students who elope from general education classes when extra personnel are not in the classroom?**

**A** It is the same plan for any student. All schools will have safety plans for any student who has a predisposition for elopement.

**Q** **Will there be a limit to the number of ESE students in a classroom?**

**A** Yes. The best practice identified by the Florida Inclusion Network is to keep no more than 1/3 of the classroom as students with disabilities. This would not include students receiving speech-only services, as they do not need additional supports. SDOC is committed to holding firm to the 1/3 limit.

**Q** **How will testing with accommodations be handled in the regular classroom to maintain fidelity with common assessments as opposed to state and district testing?**

**A** Testing accommodations are identified on the student's IEP to delineate between classroom or state assessments and should be part of the collaborative planning process between the support facilitation teacher, the partner general education teacher, and the school's testing coordinator if necessary.

**Q** **Will adherence to class size still be maintained when these changes are implemented?**

**A** Yes. We will continue to meet the requirements of the class-size mandate.