



Shifting from Reaction to Prevention: Leadership Strategies to Reduce Special Education Disputes

Dr. Kristin Orton, Director of Special Education
Tia Ellis, Special Services Supervisor



Introductions

Kristin Orton

Director of Special Education



Tia Ellis

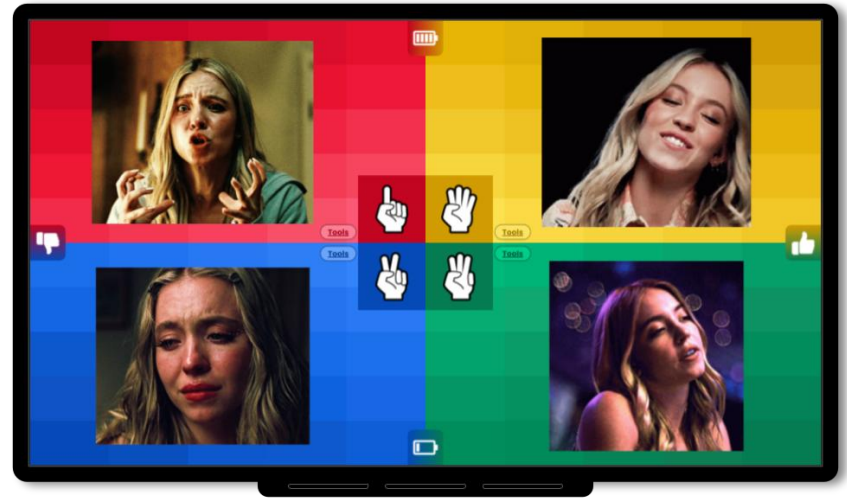
Special Services Supervisor



GIFs

Warm Welcome!

Someone please pick a [GIF Mood Meter](#) for a quick check-in.





**Engage.
Educate.
Empower.**

**Your
Future.
Our Focus.**

**Be the place
where every
student is
known, valued
and challenged
to succeed.**

**Inspire
Dreams,
Build
Integrity,
Instill Hope**

**Preparing
our students
for the
future.**

**Inspire students
to be empowered,
life-long learners,
and equipped for
global success
through strong
and supportive
partnerships.**

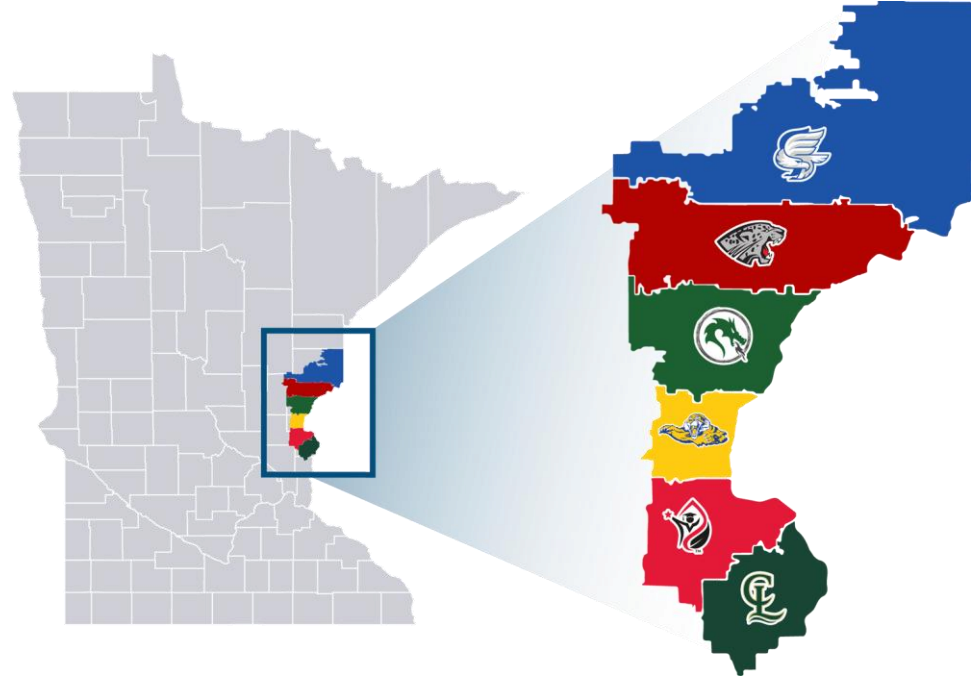


**Maximizing outcomes
through partnership.**

Where is SCRED?

SCRED has been nicknamed the "I-35 district" because our member districts dot the main highway heading north from the Twin Cities.

Heading north from Minneapolis, you'll reach Chisago Lakes, North Branch, Rush City, Pine City, Hinckley-Finlayson, and East Central.



Our goals today:

1. Identify proactive leadership strategies that reduce special education disputes
2. Apply practice approaches to strengthen family communication, staff capacity, and systemic supports
3. Develop a plan to address concerns early and prevent escalation

Leadership Strategy: Developing Emotional Intelligence in Our Teams

- Team Structures & Practices
- Emotional Intelligence
- Growth Mindset
- Modeling Curiosity & Courage

Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings,

OR SQUANDER AN UNREASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME TRYING TO MANAGE INEFFECTIVE AND UNPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOR.

When in RED

Being a little in the red helps us rise to a challenge or stand up for something important (ex. advocating).

Mood Movers



- Take slow, deep breaths
- Go for a walk or pace
- Tell yourself: "I'm having a tough time, but my day can still be good"
- Listen to music you love
- If someone else made you feel this way, try to think about how they might be feeling too

When in BLUE

It's a good time to work by yourself, check work, think deeply, or try to understand how someone else is feeling.

Mood Movers



- Talk with a friend
- Use positive self-talk and try to find something good about what's happening
- Have a healthy snack
- If someone else made you feel this way, try to think about how they might be feeling too



When in YELLOW

It's a good time to get stuff done, start something new, or think of creative ideas!

Mood Movers



- Take slow, deep breaths
- Listen to calm music
- Take a walk to burn some energy
- Find a quiet place where you can work by yourself

When in GREEN

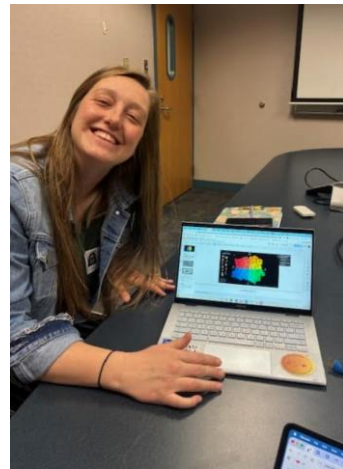
It's a good time to work with others, give or receive feedback, or think about and reflect on how you're doing.

Mood Movers



- Hype yourself up with a self-talk pep talk
- Stand up and move around to get your energy up
- Take a walk to feel more energized
- Listen to happy, upbeat music

**Consider:
Is there one
existing team
or structure
that you could
utilize this
tool/strategy
with?**



Leadership Strategy: Proactive Communication



How does the St. Croix River Education District partner with my child's school district?

The St. Croix River Education District (SCRED) was formed in 1991. In Minnesota, "Education Districts" help nearby schools share teachers and specialists so they can use resources wisely. SCRED supports six school districts and the TRIO Wolf Creek online charter school.



CHISAGO LAKES



EAST CENTRAL



HINCKLEY-FINLAYSON



NORTH BRANCH



PINE CITY



RUSH CITY



TRIO WOLF CREEK

Our member districts directly hire their special education teachers, speech/language pathologists, and paraprofessionals. SCRED staff that may work in your child's district include:

- School Psychologists
- School Social Workers
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- Academic specialists
- Behavior specialists
- Early Childhood specialists
- Teachers for students with visual impairments, physical impairments, traumatic brain injuries, and students who are deaf/hard of hearing
- Specialists in less common disabilities (e.g., developmental disabilities)
- Educational Audiologists
- Teachers of adapted P.E. (DAPE) – P.E. designed for students with disabilities
- Teachers for English learners
- Supervisors (Administrators)
- Director of Special Education

Some SCRED staff work every day in one school (e.g., School Psychologists) while others travel between schools and support multiple districts (e.g., Occupational Therapists, specialists). **In most cases, your child's special education teacher is your first point of contact.** They may connect you with an educator who works for SCRED, or a SCRED staff member might be a member on your child's team.

Support for All Learners and the Community

SCRED's support for your child's district extends beyond the special education department. SCRED staff partner with teachers and principals to look at how students are doing across grades and schools, and make plans to improve learning. SCRED staff also help the district to identify students who need additional support and to give those students extra help early on so they can succeed before needing more intensive services.

SCRED staff also operate Adult Basic Education programs, Community Education programs for adults with disabilities, a summer school for Gifted & Talented students, early childhood family programs, and many other programs that benefit the community.

Learn more!

Visit our website to learn more, to view SCRED staff who work in your district, or if you're interested in joining our Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) for parents/guardians.



Dear Rush City families,

We are excited to highlight Rush City's partnership with the **St. Croix River Education District (SCRED)**. SCRED partners with six local districts—Rush City, North Branch, Chisago Lakes, Pine City, Hinckley-Finlayson, and East Central—as well as TRIO Wolf Creek Distance Learning Charter School.

Who We Are

SCRED is made up of a team of educators and specialists who support your child's school. Our focus is on **maximizing outcomes through partnership**—helping every learner grow and thrive.

To learn more about the services SCRED provides, take a look at the attached handout: *"How does SCRED partner with my child's school district?"*

Additional Support

Should concerns continue, we want to hear from you. Please reach out to your Special Services Supervisor—your district's special education administrator. If you've already done that, the **Director of Special Education** can also step in to help resolve any concerns or conflicts.

How to Connect

- Visit our website www.scred.k12.mn.us to learn more about SCRED.
- Scan the QR code to see the specific SCRED staff who serve Rush City.



With appreciation,

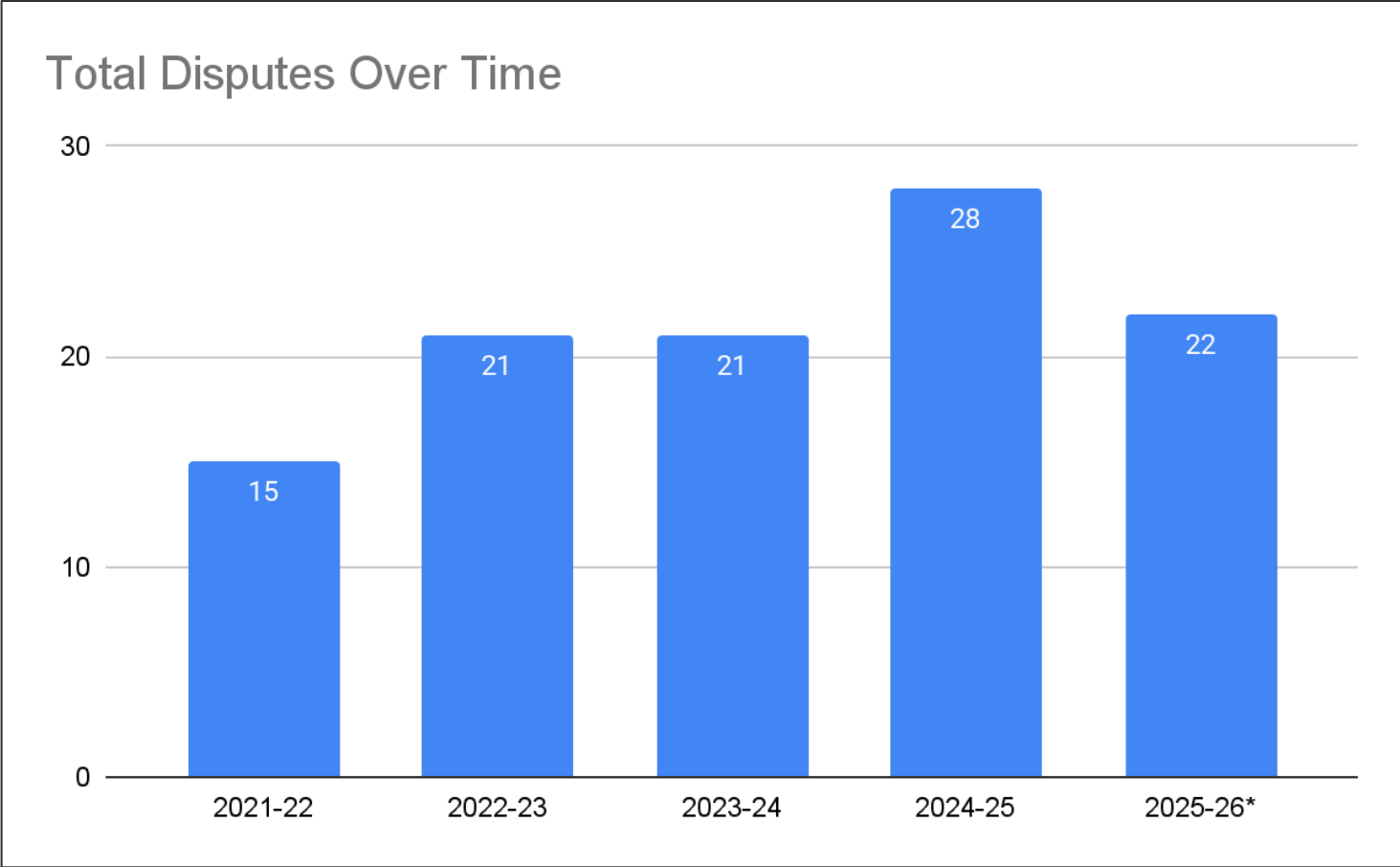
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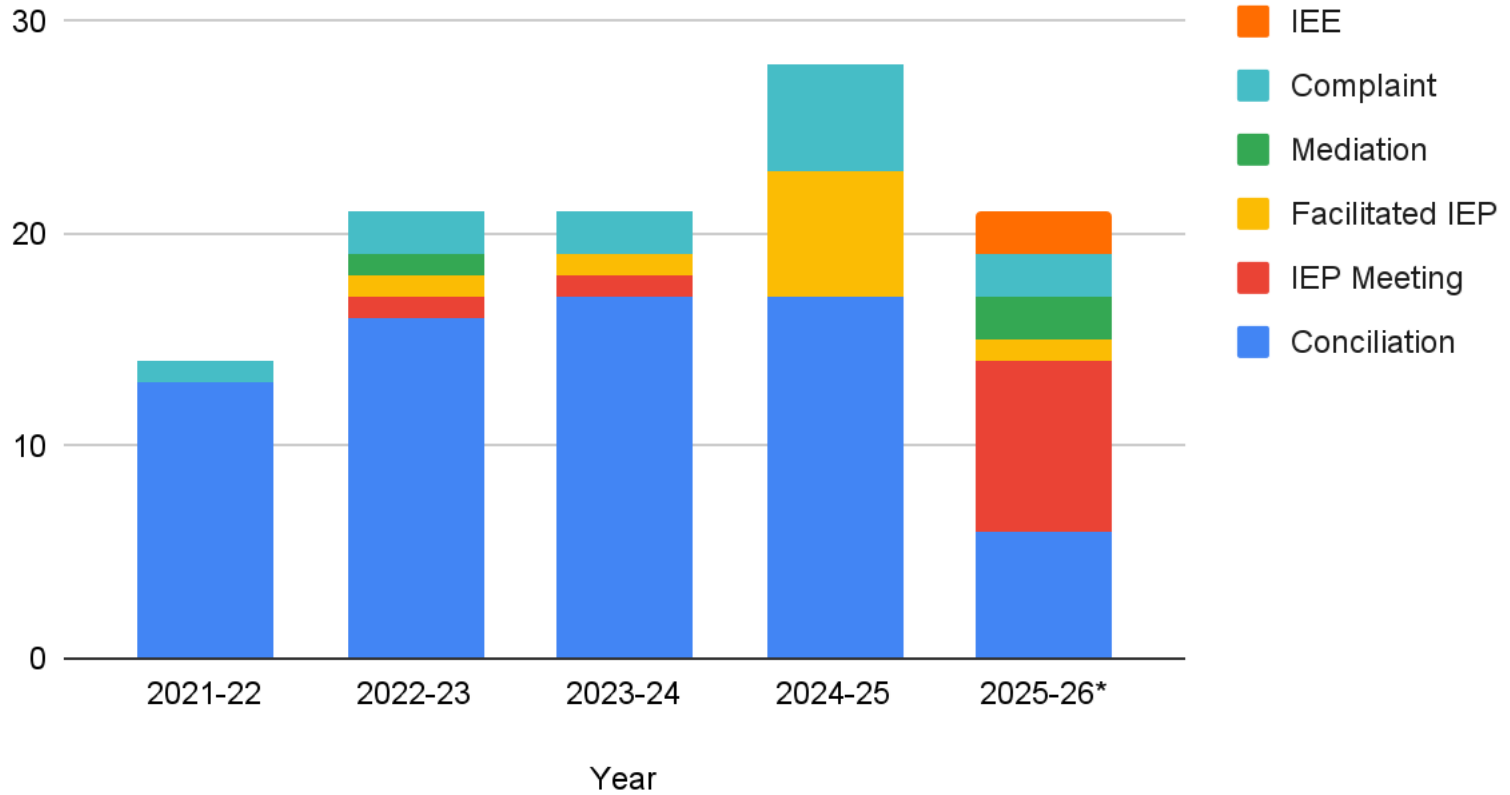
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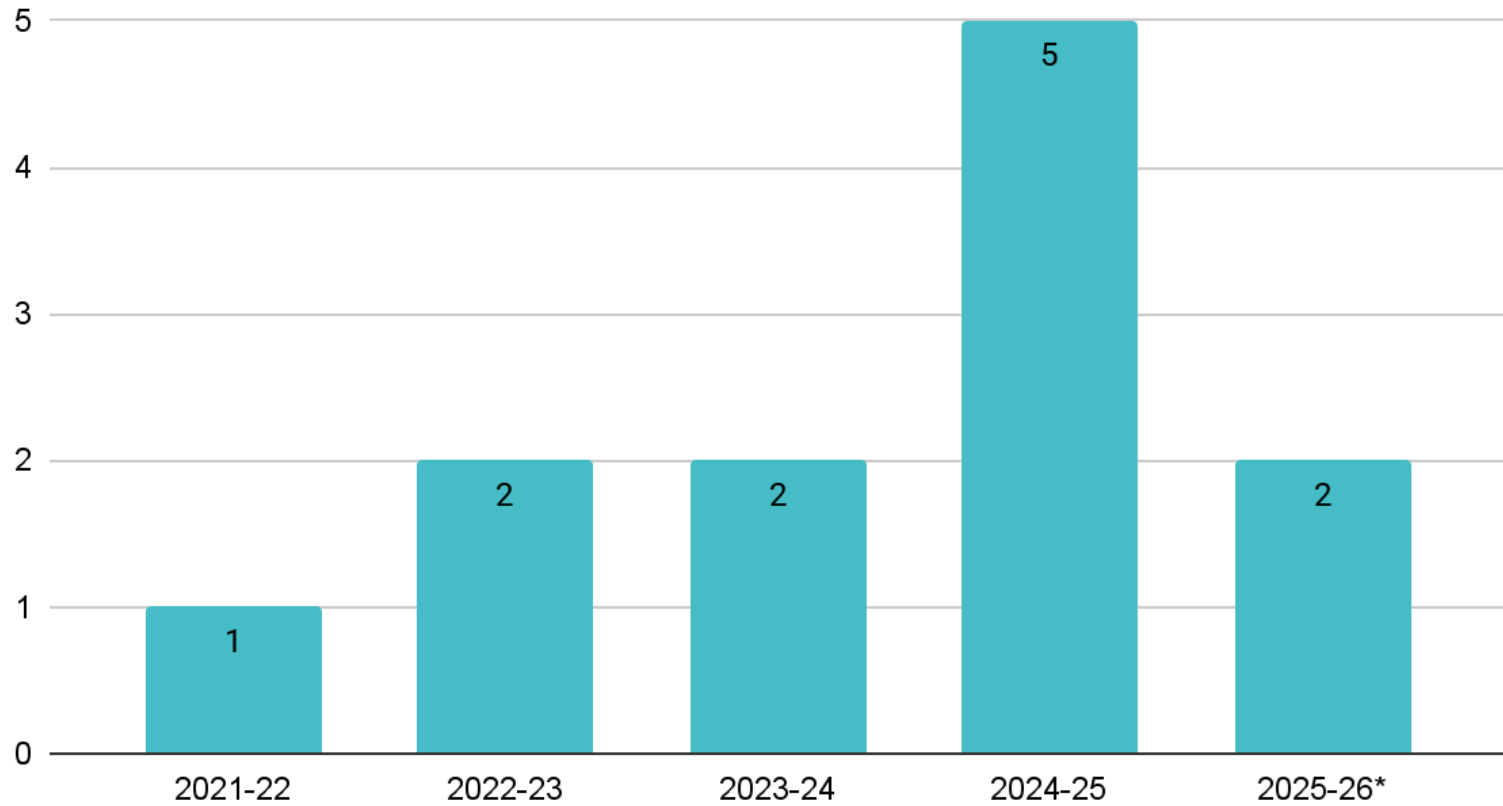
Leadership Strategy: Use Data



Total Disputes by Types



Total Complaints Over Time



Data Analysis: Themes in Violations

1. Failure to Implement IEPs as Written
 - Not providing services, supports, or accommodations as listed on the IEP
2. Delayed or Insufficient IEP Review in Response to Student Needs
 - Not convening the IEP team
 - Not providing sufficient data
3. Procedural Safeguards and Notification Errors

Leadership Strategy: Communicating Role of Sped Leaders

- Prevention:
 - joining IEP team meetings
 - phone calls with families
 - consultation with teachers and administrators
 - building and strengthening building and district processes
 - Host SEAC meetings and gather parent and teacher input
- Facilitate conciliation process and facilitated IEP meetings
- Leadership with IEP paperwork, as needed by the teams
- Communication with legal, as needed

Leadership Strategy: Teacher & Team Development

- Unique Learners Conference
 - ULC Presentations
- Expanding Our Onboarding Plan
 - [At a Glance](#)
- Other Linked Team Structures to Support
 - Department Meetings
 - SST Meetings
 - Increasing Collaboration with District Mentors



Communication Resources for Case Managers:

- [Meet Your Case Manager Letter Template](#)
- [Positive Note Template](#)
- Communication Logs
- Communication Preference Email/Google Form - [example google form](#)
- Knowing How to Access Translation Services/Supports

Leadership Strategy: Accessible Resources

- [Case Manager Resources](#)
- [IEP TV](#)
- [Meeting Preparation Checklists & Agenda Templates](#)
- Continued Review and Practice



Leadership Strategy: Future Strategic Planning for Family Partnership

- Re-imagining how to structure SEAC to **build connection and community** for our families.
- Parent Mentorship Program
- Empathy Interviews



Networking & Reflection: Building Collective Efficacy

- What is one question you have or something you are curious about?
- What is one challenge you are currently facing in our district/building at this time?
- What is one way you have supported or approached this? Proactively or Reactively?
- What is one takeaway/resource you have from our time together?

STAY CONNECTED with your SCREDsters

