Americas Region leads continuous improvement efforts aimed at advancing special education

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DoDEA Americas regional and district leaders gathered recently for a Special Education Summit at the regional headquarters in Peachtree City, Georgia, to examine various components of special education services and discuss program advancements for Americas Region schools.

Recent staffing updates to the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic Districts, where newly appointed supervisory special education instructional systems specialists (SSPED ISS) now oversee special education across the region, prompted leaders to organize the summit and begin systemically cultivating special education.

“Our mission is to improve structures, systems, and processes that directly impact special education services and provide high impact/high quality instruction to our students with disabilities,” said Darla Williamitis, SSPED ISS for the Southeast District. “We're collaborating to ensure a DoDEA Americas approach to special education that includes setting expectations, cycles of continuous improvement, allocation of supports/services, and enhancing ties with community partners,” Williamitis added.
The team made significant accomplishments throughout the week aimed at two focus areas for special education: systemic approach for school requests for support and enhanced support determinations informed by monitoring, audits, and data analysis.

“We are working towards allocating resources to schools based on the level of need,” said Mary Beth Malone, SSPED ISS for the Mid-Atlantic District. “To fully understand school needs, we refined foundational aspects of our special education program, including review of policy implementation, administrative oversight, and operational expectations,” said Malone.

Dr. Judy Minor, Americas Region Director for Student Excellence, expressed excitement about the new additions to the districts and the impacts the summit will have on the future of special education in the Americas Region.

“These new Supervisory Special Education ISSs are enthusiastic about this important, focused work,” said Minor. “Our commitment to continuous improvement necessitates action—we owe it to our military-connected students and their families to refine regional, district, community, and school processes necessary to advance our special education program,” Minor shared.

Efforts to constantly enhance special needs education is part of DoDEA Director Tom Brady’s Blueprint for Continuous Improvement. The Blueprint represents DoDEA’s commitment to being a learning organization. According to the Blueprint, “Continuous improvement is a research-based, ongoing process intended to increase overall effectiveness and make a positive and measurable impact on all stakeholders, primarily students, by focusing on and implementing three essential elements: learning and sharing, examining and planning, and acting and evaluating.”

The near-, mid-, and long-term goals developed to increase program efficiency by the SSPED ISS team in collaboration with region, district and school leadership will support our special education teachers to maximize
learning opportunities for their students, according to Minor.

“We have a talented team who are wholly invested in our special education program, and I am absolutely thrilled about what they accomplished this week and the direction of the program—and I anticipate our stakeholders will be, too."

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