



Bridgewater-Raritan Regional School District Special Services Department Review

Educational Services Commission of New Jersey

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Educational Services Commission of New Jersey

Founded in 1977 as the Middlesex County Educational Services Commission, the Educational Services Commission of New Jersey (ESCNJ) provides Shared Educational and Business Services to meet the needs of the thirty member school districts and to school districts throughout NJ.

- Services including, but are not limited to:
 - Special Education Instructional Programs
 - Professional Development
 - Nonpublic School Services
 - Transportation
 - Cooperative Purchasing Program
 - Collaborative Educational Services (e.g., Department Reviews, FBAs, Collaborative special education classes, Paraprofessional services, Professional Development, etc.)
- The primary mission of ESCNJ is to provide high quality, shared programs





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Scope of Special Services Department Review

March – August 2022

- Record Review/Examination of a sample of 130 student records representing the following: Initial Classification, Re-Evaluation, Transition (ages 5, 14, & 16), ESLs
- Placement/LRE Data Review: In-district self-contained class programs & special class programs
- Document/Report Review: School Report Card/State Performance Data
- Special Class Program Observations of 11 BRRSD classes: Teacher interview, curricula, and instructional materials review
- Central Office & Building Level Administrator Interviews
- Child Study Team Interviews
- Special Education Teacher Survey
- Parent Survey
- Student Survey





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Special Class Program Observations

- ❑ Eleven (11) classrooms observed across the elementary, intermediate, middle, and high schools.
- ❑ Classroom types included self-contained, pull-out resource, and in-class resource.
- ❑ Classroom teachers were interviewed following the observation to gather additional information.





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

BRRSD Faculty/Administrators Survey & Interviews - Special Education Teachers

- ❑ Special education students are included in special activities, trips, assemblies, special area subjects, etc. They are included with general education students for content areas when deemed appropriate
- ❑ The district is responsive to the needs of the teachers in the BD classrooms
- ❑ Teachers systematically work on transitioning students from self-contained to ICR settings where and when appropriate
- ❑ Will benefit from for increased collaboration between special education and general education teachers
- ❑ Need for additional planning time for developing effective, individualized programs
- ❑ Need for adequate professional development to remain up-to-date in the field





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Commendations

- ❑ Teachers well-prepared for lessons & created a safe environment where students are comfortable sharing
- ❑ Teachers demonstrate knowledge of individual student needs and provide individualized support
- ❑ Effective use of instructional technology to promote student participation and learning
- ❑ Collaboration between special education teachers and related services providers
- ❑ Use of multisensory programs such as Orton-Gillingham and Math in Focus
- ❑ Inclusion Opportunities & Community-based Instruction





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BRRSD Faculty/Administrators Survey & Interviews - Child Study Team

- Advocate for student needs, assisting in the development of district programs to meet the identified student needs
- BRRSD offers a wide variety of programs and services
- Special education students are accepted in the community and are provided services in the Least Restrictive Environment
- Transition planning and process is well established and working for transitions across all grade levels and to post-secondary
- Need to improve communication and consistent practices between school buildings across all levels
- Lack of training and Professional Development opportunities in the district
- Examine ways to enhance Mental Health supports for students
- Explore programs to bridge the gap between general education and special education





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BRRSD Faculty/Administrators Survey & Interviews - District Administration

- Special education faculty & staff are adept at meeting students where they are
- Special education students are considered part of the school community
- Special education students are included through various programs such as PE Partners, Peer-Mentor system, ICR cycle program/classes, and Buddy Ball
- Increase targeted and ongoing Professional development on special education topics including co-teaching, UDL, behavior management, etc.
- Turnover of special education supervisors has posed many challenges to consistent program implementation
- Lack of consistency across schools in processes and implementation of programs





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BRRSD Faculty/Administrators Survey & Interviews - Building Administration

- Work closely with Special Services Department, and feel it is a partnership
- Proud of the continuum of services offered
- The special education team goes above and beyond
- Services focus on students and how they can best be supported, strong individualized approach
- The school culture is such that special education students are included and have access to curriculum, specials, and opportunities to socialize
- The expectation is that all students succeed
- Would like general education teachers to be more proactive in providing accommodations
- Constant change in supervisory leadership is a big challenge for providing consistent programming
- The proposed Unified sports programs offer opportunities for inclusive activities





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Commendations

- Robust inclusion opportunities for students with an IEP
 - Peer buddies, buddy ball and Special Olympics, Cycle Partners, PE Partners
 - Full Continuum of Services
- Support for teachers from building-level and special services administrators
- Strong advocates for students
- BRRSD offers a wide range of programs and services to meet individual student needs
- Established process for transition across all levels
- Life skills and CBI programs





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Recommendations

- Targeted, focused, and sustained Professional Development needed
- Uniformity in procedures across buildings and grade levels
- Increased communication and coordination across different sections of Special Services department
- Continue to implement programs to improve inclusive mindset across the district
- Retention of supervisory staff





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Student Record Review

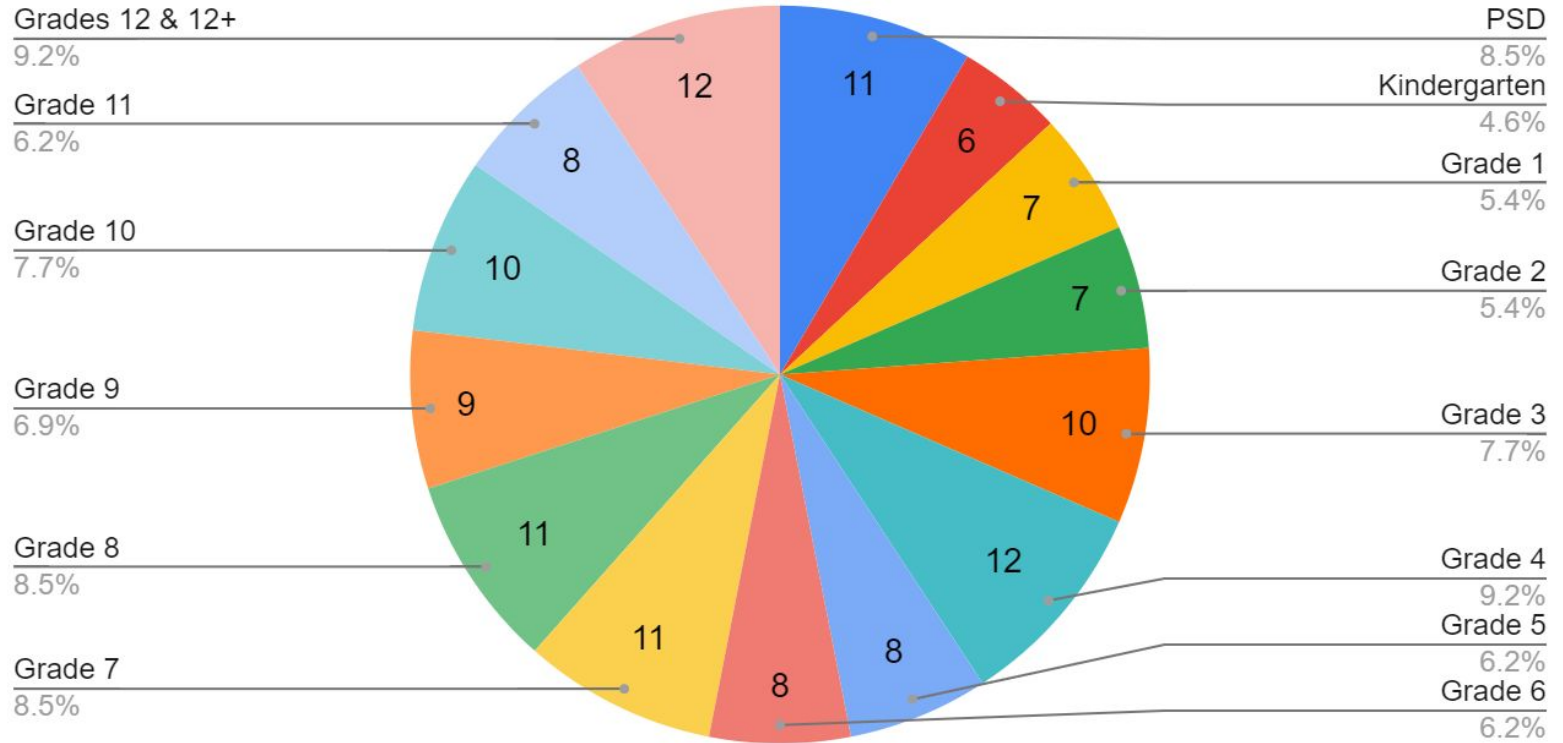
- ❑ Sample of 130 classified student records reviewed (ESERS & ESLs)
- ❑ Sample distributed across
 - ❑ Grade levels
 - ❑ Meeting type
 - ❑ Category





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

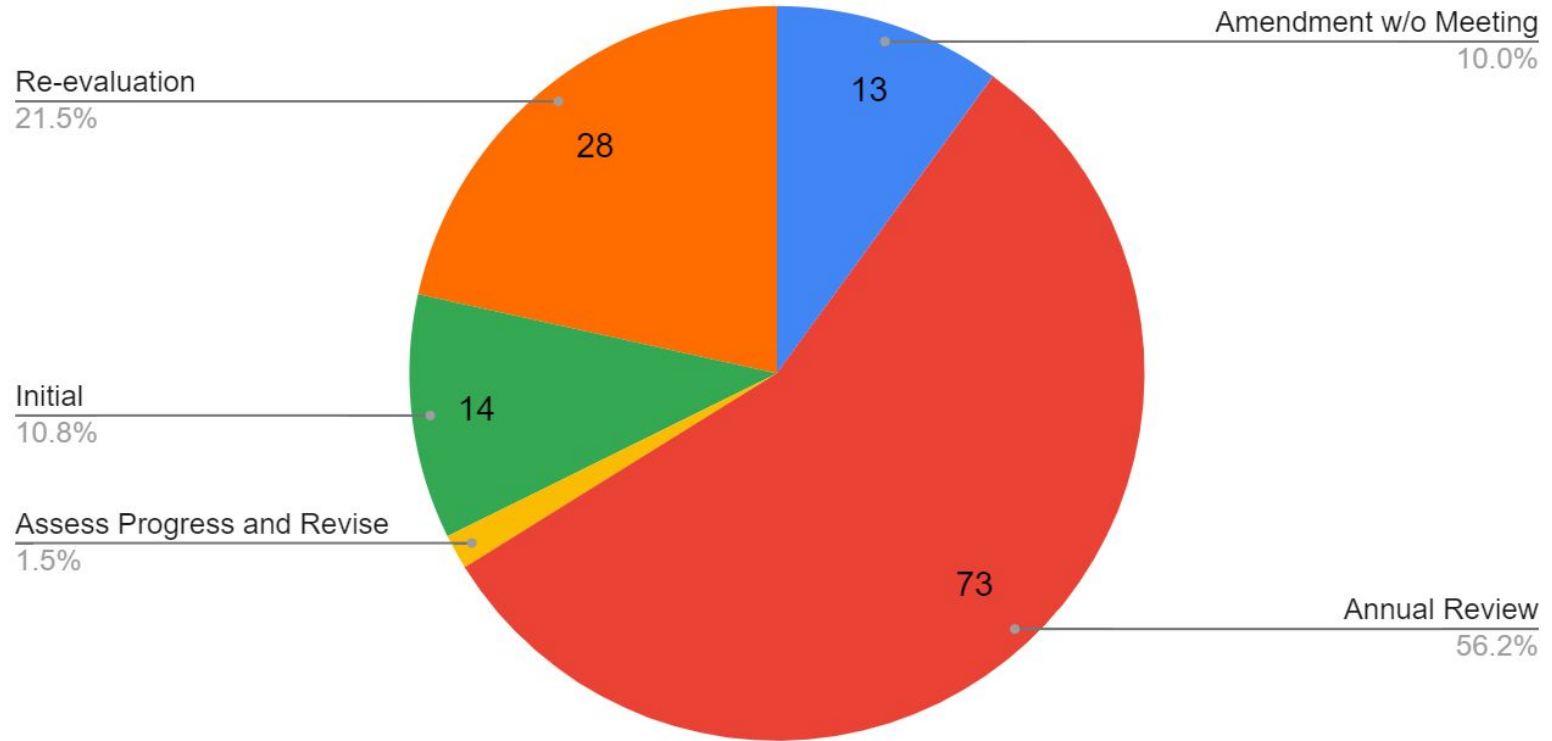
Distribution by Grade





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

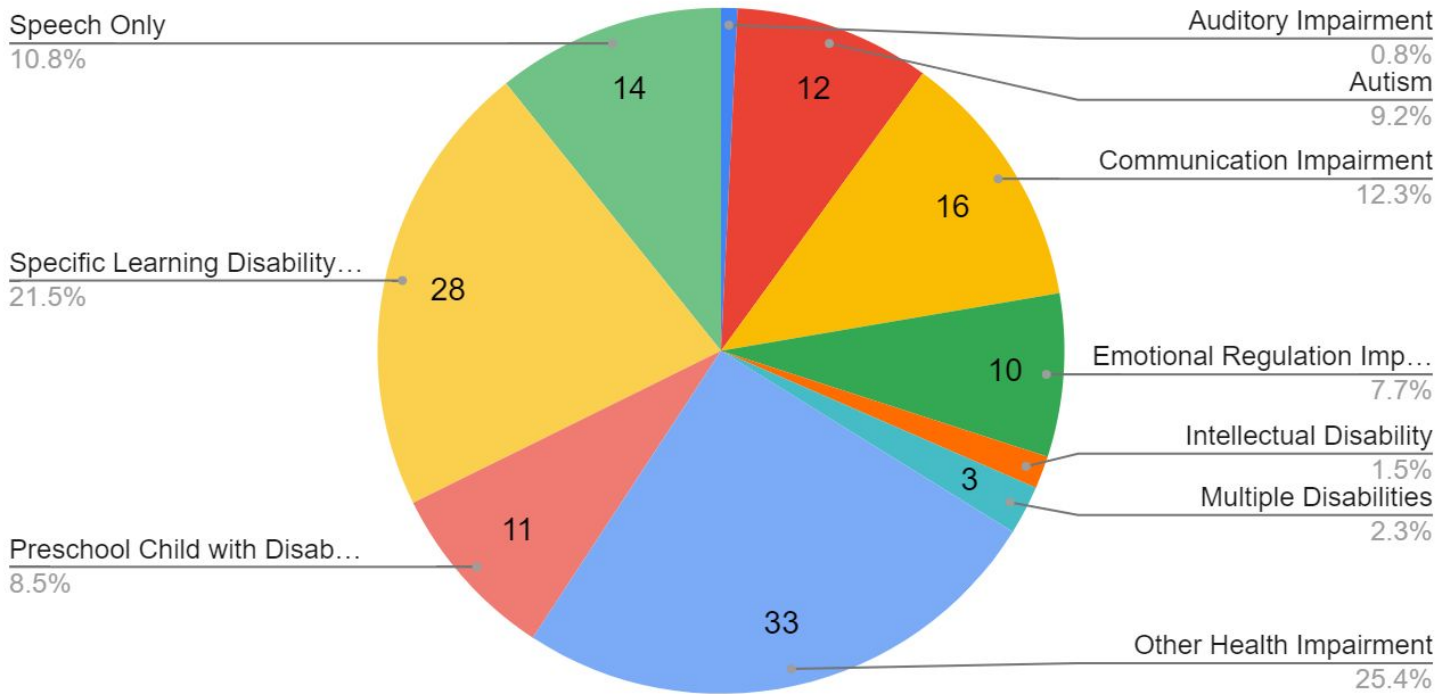
Distribution by Meeting Type





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Distribution by Category





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Student Record Review - Commendations

- Initials were completed within 90-days despite the many challenges posed by the COVID pandemic
- Planning meetings were scheduled within 20-days of receiving a referral
- Annual reviews were completed in a timely manner despite challenges posed by the COVID pandemic and virtual meetings
- The Child Study Team completes thorough reports and evaluations
- Goals are consistently aligned with needs identified in the IEP
- LRE statements tend to be very well written
- Compensatory services are outlined in most IEPs if needed
- Counselors generally attend Middle School IEP meetings which is key to successful transition planning for the High School
- SMART goals and objectives in IEPs for student in special class programs





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Student Record Review - Compliance Notes (Systemic):

(The compliance citations are deemed de minimis due to COVID and the remote nature of last school year impacting typical school and office operations.)

- ❑ Evidence of evaluation reports and meeting notices being mailed to parents not documented consistently
- ❑ Meeting signature page not documented consistently
- ❑ Parental consent to implement IEP was missing in several files





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Student Record Review – Recommendations

- Implement uniform record keeping and filing processes to keep student files up to date
- Continue provision of appropriate Professional Development for improving best practices. Recommended topics:
 - Best practices in IEP development
 - Accommodation vs. Modification
 - Writing objective and data-based PLAAFP statements
 - Developing SMART Goals & Objectives
 - Appropriate Mastery Criteria for Goals & Objectives
 - Differentiation of Instruction in the General Education Setting
 - Overview of Assessment Tools to inform Goal Development and Progress Monitoring
 - Data Collection Methods and Uses in the Classroom (e.g., academic and behavioral)





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Special Services Relevant Document Review

- ❑ Department of Special Services should be commended for the demonstrated completion of all necessary requirements from NJDOE Monitoring and Targeted Reviews
- ❑ A thorough system in place to continuously monitor special education enrollment, placements, workflow and timely completion of mandated tasks
- ❑ Given the additional challenges presented by the Pandemic over the past two years, it is commendable to note the maintenance and monitoring of the needs of students and program requirements for Special Education and Related Services was a priority





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Special Services Relevant Document Review

- ❑ The District is also commended for meeting Student with Disabilities accountability targets for English Language Arts and Math, Student Growth Standards as indicated in NJ School Performance Report 2018 – 2019. *(Please note that the 2018-2019 statewide testing data was the most recent data available in March 2022 during the Special Services Department review)*
- ❑ District's classification rate (students with disabilities) is similar to NJ Average classification rate (17%)
- ❑ District is commended for meeting NJDOE requirements to serve student's in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for grades K-12





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Special Services Relevant Document Review

- ❑ High parent referral rates may be related to 1) the need for a consistent best practice and data-driven MTSS supports and services for academic, social-emotional needs, and 2) students struggling as a result of remote/hybrid learning during the pandemic
- ❑ District-wide strategies and targeted instructional, and social-emotional interventions should be considered and implemented with fidelity prior to referral to the Child Study Team
- ❑ This is necessary to rule out the effects of pandemic instructional gaps and obtain valid and reliable data with regard to the existence of a disability that impacts learning and requires special education services





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Parent Survey

14% response rate (158 responses out of 1,1145 recipients)

Commendations

- Parents feel valued as members of the IEP team
- Teachers and CST members are available
- Timely response from special services administrators, when contacted
- Special education students are accepted member of school community





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Parent Survey - Recommendations

- Increased parental involvement in the transition process
- Ongoing communication with parents on student progress
- Continue to improve Community-based instruction and Life Skills programs
- Increase parent training opportunities on topics of interest
 - Progress Reporting & Data-based Measures
 - Implementing ABA-based Interventions in the Home/Community Settings
 - Understanding Disabilities
 - Coping Skills
 - Sibling Support
 - Transition to Adulthood and Post-21 Options
 - Implementing IEP goals in the Home/Community Settings





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Student Survey Results

- Number of high school students surveyed – 446 (Response rate – 9%)
- 64% - satisfied with school program
- 49% - satisfied with the concern teachers show about student's progress in school (15% dissatisfied)
- 58% - satisfied with the progress made in school (15% dissatisfied)
- 61% - satisfied are with the technology available in school
- 76% - satisfied with counselors or case managers in school
- 63% - satisfied with personal safety in school
- 78% - satisfied with access to extra-curricular activities in school
- 48% - satisfied with the Community-based Instructional program in school (40% neutral)





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Key Takeaways

- ❑ Professional Development Recommendations:
 - ❑ Increase in-house and outside professional development opportunities targeting specific needs of faculty and staff.
 - ❑ Multisensory reading training for special education teachers targeted primarily at the elementary and intermediate levels is required.
 - ❑ Training to specifically target executive functioning for students.
 - ❑ Ongoing training and professional development on the MTSS process, especially for new team members, for consistent implementation and effectiveness.





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Key Takeaways

- ❑ Professional Development Recommendations:
 - ❑ More CST related programs (e.g., Developing Informative, Compliant, and Defensible IEPs, PLAAFP development, Accommodations and modifications, etc.)
 - ❑ General Education Professional Development
 - ❑ Instructional Differentiation and Implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports
 - ❑ Behavioral and Social/Emotional Learning Strategies
 - ❑ Trauma-informed Instructional Approaches
 - ❑ Basics of Special Education Process and Procedures
 - ❑ Inclusive Practices and Effective Co-Teaching Models





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Key Takeaways

- Recruitment and retention of faculty and staff is critical, specifically:
 - BCBA
 - Related Services providers
 - Paraprofessionals
 - Additional Supervisor of Student Services

- Continue to invest in and improve the Tiered System of Supports to ensure all students receive the support they need to be successful





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Key Takeaways

- ❑ Expand and enhance the BRRSD Unified Sports programs to afford meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in all aspects of their school's programs, (i.e., Basketball).
- ❑ Increase the availability of extracurricular opportunities for students with disabilities and the meaningful and natural supports needed for the students to access these activities.





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Key Takeaways

- ❑ While the SEPAG is currently functioning, the district should look to increase the advisory role of the committee and enhance the effectiveness.
- ❑ The SEPAG is to be an advisory, parent-led group consisting of “Parent Advisors” who bring insight, suggestions, and constructive recommendations for systemic change from a parent’s perspective.
- ❑ The structure and process of the SEPAG allows all stakeholders, especially parents, to collaborate and share information with school district leaders.
- ❑ Examine the level of parent involvement/participation across grade levels and implement programs to increase involvement where lacking.





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Key Takeaways

- ❑ What BRRSD is doing well:
 - ❑ Continuum of Special Class Programs & placement options
 - ❑ Inclusion of special education students (Partner Program, Buddy Ball, Peer-mentor)
 - ❑ Mental Health supports at the BRRMS & BRRHS
 - ❑ Teachers systematically work on transitioning students from self-contained to ICR setting where and when appropriate
 - ❑ Special education students integrated into each school and accepted in the school community





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

Key Takeaways

- ❑ What BRRSD is doing well:
 - ❑ Multisensory programs such as Orton-Gillingham and Math in Focus, however, the need for ongoing professional development in this area is key to implementation with fidelity across the district
 - ❑ Professional collaboration between multi-disciplinary team members to meet student needs
 - ❑ Teachers and students have access to appropriate and updated instructional technology





BRRSD Special Services Department Review

**Thank You for Your Time and
Attention**

