

Walker Consulting
at
The Walker Trieschman Institute

Evaluation of Special Education Settings and Services in
The Fall River Public Schools

Final Report
July 31, 2019

Submitted by

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Executive Summary

The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services in the Fall River Public Schools engaged Walker Consulting to conduct a review of the District's settings and services for students with disabilities in its schools and specialized programs. The goals of the review were to evaluate the current status of services and programs, identify those that should be recognized as effective and efficient and those that pose concerns, and contribute to the planning for improvements over the immediate, short-term, and long-term timeframes.

The review and this report have been organized by Focus Areas: **A) Academic Curriculum and Instruction, B) Inclusive Settings and Services, C) Specialized Services and Programs, D) Organizational Support, E) Structures, Processes, Policies, and Procedures, F) Student Outcomes.**

Over time, the District has been pursuing improvements in **academic curriculum and instruction**, however, it currently lacks clear and comprehensive curriculum policy and practice. Many schools and, in some instances, individual teachers appear to select and implement curricula and instruction based on the needs of the students and resources in the school and classroom. The lack of consistency in teaching impacts the effectiveness of the academic curriculum and may result in a lack of content continuity for students across the city. Without consistent curricula, it is difficult to measure whether students are making effective progress. Furthermore, as staff changes over time, a lack of consistently implemented curricula can leave teachers unprepared and students failing to meet standards. The degree to which special education students can access the curricula varies by school, teacher, and specific special education placement. Some teachers in alternative settings expressed difficulty in ensuring that their students would meet districtwide benchmarks because the curricula in their setting are being taught in a different order from that in other schools. The quality and effectiveness of both general and special teaching, as well as each school's interpretation and implementation of the academic curriculum, appear to play a significant role in curriculum access for students with disabilities. As a result, the quality of academic instruction for students with disabilities varies significantly across schools and special education settings.

The quality and effectiveness of **inclusive settings and services** vary greatly from school to school and from classroom to classroom. Student success in these settings appears largely dependent on the specific skills of individual teachers and on the level of constructive partnership between the general education and special education teachers. We observed some inclusive classes that were truly exemplary learning environments for all student, and others that failed to provide the opportunity for students with disabilities to progress and reach adequate proficiency.

With some notable exceptions, poor quality and a lack of effectiveness were found in a significant number Fall River's highly **specialized settings and services**, especially those for students with Autism and Emotional Impairment. The staffing structures, staff expertise, clarity of purpose, and specificity of approaches differ markedly from school to school and setting to setting, and often fall short of current standards for specialized programs.



There is a general lack of awareness and understanding of the various types of **organizational support** that are critical for improving quality and effectiveness in special education settings and services across the continuum and array. As a result, efforts to improve inputs, outputs, and student outcomes are isolated, ineffective, and hampered by a lack of clear goals and ineffective program-level leadership and school management-level leadership.

Although special education is the most highly regulated area of public education at both the state and Federal levels, the District lacks adequate, appropriate, clearly formulated and well communicated **policies, procedures, structures and processes** to ensure compliance, effectiveness and efficiency in special education and related services. While most staff and administrators are deeply committed to and work very hard on behalf of their students, their efforts often fail to provide a meaningful benefit to students, and their students fail to make significant progress. The formulation and documentation of special education policies, procedures, structures, and processes appear to be incomplete. What has been formulated is not appropriately communicated and is inconsistently implemented.

The District does not evaluate the **outcomes for students with disabilities** in the academic and social-emotional-behavioral domains in ways that are valid, authentic, and useful. This failure is made more critical by the lack of definition and consistency in academic and social-emotional curriculum and instruction, and approaches to social-emotional-behavioral interventions, supports, and services. Without clear and consistent approaches and robust measures of progress and proficiency, it is very difficult to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of instruction and services and the actual outcomes for students.

Effective **social-emotional learning (SEL)** is widely recognized as critical to the overall growth and development of all students. This program evaluation focuses specifically on special education services and settings for students with disabilities, and not on the curriculum and instruction for all students. In the process of implementing the evaluation, collecting and analyzing data from interviews, observations, and document submissions, however, the Consultants came to find areas of significant concern in the social-emotional learning curriculum and instruction provided by the District. The **Addendum** to this report offers perspectives and recommendations on these issues in the interest in supporting efforts of the District in this area.



Introduction

Purpose of the Evaluation

The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services in the Fall River Public Schools engaged Walker Consulting to conduct a review of the District's services for students with disabilities in its schools and specialized programs. The goals of the review were to evaluate the current status of services and programs, identify those that should be recognized as effective and efficient and those that pose concerns, and contribute to the planning for improvements over the immediate, short-term, and long-term timeframes.

Walker Consulting

The mission of Walker Inc. is to transform the lives of children and youth who are facing complex social-emotional-behavioral, and academic learning challenges by partnering with these children and youth, their families and communities to nurture hope, build strengths, and develop lifelong skills. The Walker Trieschman Institute is committed to improving outcomes for children and adolescents with disabilities by supporting the effectiveness and efficiency of services and settings in schools and other child-serving organizations. Walker Consulting offers a portfolio of services that includes development of organizations, services and settings, leadership and management, and staff capability. Walker Consultants have conducted evaluations of services and programs in school settings in a wide variety of communities across the country. In the present evaluation, the Consultants planned the content, structure, and process collaboratively with the District, carried out data collection and analysis, and developed this report.



Methodology

The initial project planning and development for this evaluation took place in January and February 2019, and consisted of planning meetings among Walker Consultants, and phone conversations and ongoing email communications with the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services and the Director of Special Education. In a collaborative process, the District and the Consultants identified the focus areas of the program evaluation, collected important documents, and scheduled the visits, interviews, and observations. The timeframe for the data collection, data analysis and writing extended from March through June 2019.

Walker Consulting developed and utilized standard formats for this evaluation, including data and document requests, interview guides and observation frameworks. The evaluation activities consisted of collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data obtained through document review and analysis; interviews with more than three dozen staff, administrators, and parents; visits to all 16 schools, and observations of nearly 100 classes and other activities in those schools. Five Walker Consultants spent a total of 25 days in the schools in April and May 2019.

Documents included both local materials and District profile data available on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Structured observations spanned every level, pre-K to High School, and included general education, inclusion, and substantially separate settings. Among the interviewees were central office and school administrators, general and special education teachers, counselors and other support professionals, and representatives of parents of students with disabilities.

The Director of Special Education and his staff developed and disseminated via email two surveys asking teachers their perspectives regarding special education services and supports. One survey, which received 229 responses, was sent to general education teachers and special educators who work across a variety of inclusion settings. The other survey was sent to special educators who work in substantially separate settings. This survey received 78 responses. Both surveys asked teachers to describe the strengths and areas of challenge in their particular setting and asked various questions about the level of support they have received in the area of special education, including professional development in the writing of IEPs, the running of team meetings, and the adequacy and effectiveness of special education staffing. Data from the surveys were analyzed and incorporated into the findings for the various focus areas.

The results of this program evaluation are organized around the areas of focus. Each substantive section includes the Consultants' perspectives, their findings, and their recommendations relating to these focus areas.



Focus of the Evaluation

In collaboration with Walker Consulting, the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services and the Director of Special Education identified the target areas for the program evaluation:

1. Quality and effectiveness of academic curriculum and instruction
2. Quality and effectiveness of inclusive settings and services
3. Quality and effectiveness of specialized services and programs
4. Adequacy and appropriateness of organizational support
5. Adequacy and appropriateness of structures, processes, policies, and procedures
6. Student outcomes



The Report

The report is organized by Focus Areas:

- A. Academic Curriculum and Instruction
- B. Inclusive Settings and Services
- C. Specialized Services and Programs
- D. Organizational Support
- E. Structures, Processes, Policies, and Procedures
- F. Student Outcomes

The reporting on each of the Focus Areas is organized as follows:

- The Consultants' Perspectives
- The Consultants' Findings (In terms of both Commendations and Concerns)
- The Consultants' Recommendations (arranged In three timeframes – Immediate, Short-Term, and Long-Term)



A. Academic Curriculum and Instruction

Consultants' Perspectives

Over time, the District has been pursuing improvements in teaching and learning, however, it currently lacks clear and comprehensive curriculum policy and practice. Many schools and, in some instances, individual teachers appear to select and implement curricula and instruction based on the needs of the students and resources in the school and classroom. The lack of consistency in teaching impacts the effectiveness of the academic curriculum and may result in a lack of content continuity for students across the city. Without consistent curricula, it is difficult to measure whether students are making effective progress. Furthermore, as staff changes over time, a lack of consistently-implemented curricula can leave teachers unprepared and students failing to meet standards. The degree to which special education students can access the curricula varies by school, teacher, and specific special education placement. Some teachers in alternative settings expressed difficulty in ensuring that their students would meet districtwide benchmarks because the curricula in their setting are being taught in a different order from that in other schools. The quality and effectiveness of both general and special teaching, as well as each school's interpretation and implementation of the academic curriculum, appear to play a significant role in curriculum access for students with disabilities. As a result, the quality of academic instruction for students with disabilities varies significantly across schools and special education settings.

Findings

Commendations - Curriculum

In a fourth-grade inclusion setting, students with disabilities were provided full access to the academic curriculum of their general education. The Special Educator reported that the General Educator does all curricular modifications and the Special Educator checks/reviews the modifications, stating, "She (the General Education Teacher) of course, always does it correctly."

During an observation of a fifth-grade inclusion classroom, a Special Educator worked with a small group of students. The students were presented the same content as their general education peers, with minor "in the moment" modifications (changing card numbers, etc.).

In an observed fifth grade "pull out" session, students worked on skills that would allow them to better access general curriculum. Similarly, during an RTI personalized learning block led by an obviously and enthusiastic Special Educator, a small group of general education and special education students strengthened their phonics skills, to allow them to more fully access the second-grade curriculum.

In one second grade math inclusion class, students with disabilities were provided full access to the curriculum. They worked in a small group with a Special Educator who broke down the material to ensure that students understood the content.



Similarly, in a fourth-grade inclusion setting, students with disabilities not only accessed fully the curriculum, but were provided support and strategies enabling them to complete a more difficult math problem than their general education peers.

In a third-grade inclusion setting, students with disabilities were fully integrated into the various subject area classrooms and engaged in the same curriculum as their general education peers.

In an eighth-grade language-based classroom, the Special Educator's thorough curricular planning and organization made the curriculum accessible to all students in the room.

In a ninth-grade inclusion math class, students accessed Algebra 1 curriculum as they reviewed for an upcoming assessment.

Concerns - Curriculum

In the teacher surveys, additional curriculum support for students served in inclusion settings – specifically clear entry points to the expected frameworks - was repeatedly noted as a challenge for inclusion teachers.

In the surveys, many teachers in substantially separate settings expressed a desire for enhanced curricula to help meet the social-emotional and academic needs of their students.

Though students were provided the opportunity to work on Lexia in one substantially separate language-based K-2 class, the teacher's lack of behavioral support skills resulted in limited access to the curriculum and little demonstrable learning.

Likewise, in one inclusion setting at a middle school, while the Curriculum Frameworks were being followed, some teachers' ineffective social-emotional-behavioral approaches hindered their ability to provide meaningful access to the curriculum.

The varying ages and functional academic levels of students grouped in the substantially separate social-emotional-behavioral program presented significant challenges for teachers and other staff. This coupled with a lack of content-area expertise was reported to be significant obstacles in providing students with access to the general curriculum. Further, staff reported that the breadth of content-area knowledge required in teaching a multi-grade substantially separate program class make it extremely difficult to plan for and effectively implement the general curriculum.

The students in one Middle school social-emotional-behavioral substantially separate program were not provided access to the seventh-grade curriculum in two content areas. In math, students were presented with an activity - filling out an NCAA bracket - that lacked a clear link to any curriculum framework. In art, students were given the same project as their seventh grade general education peers - portrait drawing - but without appropriate accommodations/modification, were unable to be engage in the activity productively.

In a tenth-grade science class, a general educator showed the Hollywood film “Outbreak,” without providing any connection to the grade-level frameworks or the curriculum. In one substantially separate high school level ELA class, the seemingly caring and supportive Special Educator read from To Kill a Mockingbird aloud to one student, using the appropriate content without ever engaging the student actively, and in so doing, denied meaningful access to the curriculum.

Commendations - Instruction

In one observation, a second-grade special educator showed strong instructional planning and instructional ability during a personalized learning session. She clearly knew the content and spiraled instruction to ensure that all students gained access to the curriculum (she reviewed the letter sound, reviewed sounds plus the word, then read sentences). Similarly, in an observed pull-out special education service session at the same school, the teacher’s lesson was well planned and executed.

In the various inclusion settings of one elementary school, special educators were observed working either individually with a specific student or with small groups of students. In two observed math classes in this school, students were fully engaged in the math workshop mode and were able to access the grade level curriculum.

In two observed second and fourth-grade inclusion settings, special educators and general educators were observed effectively co-teaching. Special educators clearly knew the curriculum as shown through their ability to seamlessly “jump in” to the content when appropriate.

The instructional planning of the special educator and general educators in one third grade observation was clearly strong. The math workshop model was effectively run with the special educator and general educator leading two small groups and a paraprofessional circulating the room answering questions of students who were working independently. The special educator who worked with a small group within the general education math class was able to unscramble all confusion and gave appropriate and helpful strategies. For example, she asked students to “say it in your head, hand and out loud” Students learned a clear process and routine to the math problem and could repeat it back to the teacher.

Strong planning was evident in one observed elementary leveled social-emotional sub-separate classroom. The teacher effectively implemented the writer’s workshop model. The special educator and a paraprofessional both lead small groups, while the other students worked on Lexia. Students were mostly engaged throughout the lesson and the teacher appropriately handled off-task behavior with a calm and kind approach.

Some of the elementary inclusion classes were observed to be effectively run, with the special educators supporting small groups of students within the general education classroom.

In a grade 2 inclusion setting, the special educator worked directly with a group of four students, breaking down the assignment into manageable steps.



In a grade 4 inclusion classroom, the special educator, impressively, showed the confidence of a math teacher while running her small group. She unscrambled student confusion providing effective guidance and strategies which lead to student mastery.

Strong instructional practices were observed, in a language-based 8th grade ELA class. Strong instructional planning was evident through the teacher's use of a clear and content-rich PowerPoint presentation used to introduce and review content. The strong instructional practice resulted in students being actively engaged in learning for the entire observation.

Though the instructional practices observed in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting were primarily traditional, students were engaged in their classes. Many paraprofessionals worked seamlessly with special educators to provide wrap-around instruction for all students. The instructional planning and practices at Stone were also observed to be generally strong.

In a seventh grade English class in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting, the teacher had full command of the room as she helped students complete a reflection activity on a bullying presentation that occurred earlier in the week.

In a 7th and 8th grade ELA class in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting, the teacher projected and reviewed an editing activity where students worked together to edit a document. The teacher was able to answer student questions and clarify and breakdown the activity so both students understood the expectations of the assignment.

Though she used a traditional teacher-centered approach of lecturing, the observed 12th-grade social studies teacher in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting held student attention and was clearly comfortable with the historical content. She asked engaging questions of which the students actively responded.

In a grade 9 social studies class in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting, the teacher spent time working 1:1 with students to aid in the construction of an open response. The teacher and paraprofessional worked together to provide individualized attention to each student.

In a grade 3 and 4 science class in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting, the teacher created a hands-on experiment which resulted in full engagement by the students.

In grade K-2 science class in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting, the teacher, after a report of challenging behavior in PE, adjusted her planning and the class was broken into two small groups. Each group (one with the paraprofessional and one with the special educator) read and answered comprehension questions for a scholastic news article. The small groups allowed for full attention to be given to each student.

Concerns - Instruction

In a Language-Based class, appropriate instructional planning was not evident. During the observation, two students cut and stapled together a four-page book and the teacher read the book to the students. One student worked through an assessment given by the paraprofessional and three additional students were asked to complete a Lexia session. The students on the computers spent most of their time off task with little redirection by the adults in the room resulting in little evidence of student learning.



A lack of classroom management and instructional planning served as obstacles to instruction in multiple settings in one middle school. For example, in one seventh-grade inclusion math class, both the special educator and general educator spent approximately 70% of the observation either trying to manage off-task behavior or ignoring off-task behavior--both approaches resulted in very little student learning as students remained off task/disengaged.

In an ASD class, the teacher lacked a clear instructional plan. The teacher spent most of the class - approximately 85% of the time - talking publicly to an individual student about a behavioral infraction that occurred earlier in the day. The students seemed to be unclear about the teacher's expectations, resulting in the observed lack of engagement and weak work production.

Though staff members mentioned hands-on project-based learning approaches in one specialized program, the observed classes consisted only of teacher-directed instruction. The traditional instructional approach is noteworthy based in part on the statement by the Principal that students have been unsuccessful in traditional district schools and need to learn "how to be students." The instructional planning and instructional skill varied from class to class.

In an inclusion 10-12 math class, the special educator reviewed worksheets with students as the general education substitute watched. The substitute, who did not have a math instructional background was substituting for the math teacher who was out on extended paternity leave. The principal reported that district substitutes are not used.

In a 10-12 inclusion science classroom, little instructional planning evident. The teacher played the Hollywood movie "Outbreak" and rather unsuccessfully (due to classroom behavior and lack of curriculum alignment), attempted to link the movie to curriculum content. The special educator sat in the back of the room, not interacting with the students and failed to even attempt to re-engage the two students asleep in the back of the room.

In one specialized program, a general education Algebra 1 teacher was able to effectively instruct students, however, the special educator was unfamiliar with the math content. The special educator at one point asked the math teacher to explain to him "slope intercept." The general educator responded saying that he would have to "write it down" because the students were playing a review game and the students should already know that content. This lack of content expertise made it difficult for the special educator to instruct students.



Recommendations for Academic Curriculum and Instruction

Immediate

- Define “access to the core curriculum for students with disabilities,” following guidance provided by the Federation for Children with Special Needs, in alignment with the principles of Universal Design for Learning:
 - Adjustments to content
 - Different ways of teaching
 - Different ways for students to show what they have learned
- Provide professional development, on-going support (coaching), and professional supervision in the adopted curricula and approaches to instruction, providing specific training in ways to provide access for students with disabilities

Short-Term

- Create opportunities for role-specific (e.g., inclusion elementary, sub-separate language based, etc.) learning communities so teachers can collaborate and learn from one another (per mentoring).
- Provide technical assistance for school and district leaders in implementing the adopted approaches.
- Review or create curriculum maps for the district, including entry points and scaffolding for students with disabilities, and provide regular coaching and mentoring for special education teachers and for their general education partners in integrated settings.
- Investigate alternative ELA and Math curricula and approaches to instruction, guided by the principles of Universal Designs for Learning, that are rigorous and adhere to the Learning Frameworks for all students who are unable to access the core curriculum.

Long-Term

- Establish the criteria for the selection of academic curricula and approaches to instruction in all areas of teaching and learning, including all special education settings and integrated general education settings.
- Analyze the various academic curricula and instructional approaches and adopt those that meet the criteria that have been established.
- Implement structures and processes for the on-going monitoring and adjustment of curricula and instructional approaches.



B. Inclusive Settings and Services

Consultants' Perspectives

The quality and effectiveness of inclusive settings and services vary greatly from school to school and from classroom to classroom. Student success in these settings appears largely dependent on the specific skills of individual teachers and on the level of constructive partnership between the general education and special education teachers. We observed some inclusive classes that were truly exemplary learning environments for all student, and others that failed to provide the opportunity for students with disabilities to progress and reach adequate proficiency.

Findings

Commendations

In a fourth-grade class, the special education-trained teacher was using a combination of whole group presentation, turn and talk, and “Walk to Learn” approaches, with groups of students assembled on the basis of proficiency data. The preparation of materials and visual aids was impressive. She used her assertive voice and presence to engage the students in on-going discussion and mutual questioning. All students paid attention, responded, discussed and demonstrated their learning. She led them to participate in paying attention to each other, pondering solutions and sharing their thinking with peers, and answering specific questions that she and many students posed. The classroom was filled with positive, constructive talk and the teacher intervened calmly, quietly, and with great success when individuals and groups needed behavioral redirection.

In a large, exciting, inclusive classroom of twenty-five 3rd graders during the last period of the day, a general education teacher led an ELA lesson with a very diverse group of learners. The climate was positive, safe, and confirming for all students, and focused clearly on learning. She had prepared most of the postings in the room and materials for activities to support a close alignment with the Frameworks and coordination between individual work and group discussion. The teacher was calm, confident, and positive in her command of the group analysis of the text. Virtually all student were on task and engaged in the assigned tasks. They seemed focused, not distracted and judging from their questions and comments, they seemed to be listening attentively to their teacher and their peers. By their eagerness to answer questions, they appeared comfortable with her expectations.

In a first-grade classroom, a special educator pushed in to support a literacy block. The general education teacher had established the content of the centers and the special educator and paraprofessional both effectively ran one. Students cycled through all the centers, but the students with IEPs started at the centers where there was support.

In another inclusion classroom, a warm, collaborative relationship was observed between the general educator and special educator. The special educator offered extra examples and visuals as the general educator spoke.



In a fourth-grade class math class that utilized the math workshop model, the special educator exhibited the confidence of a math teacher as she taught her small group of students with disabilities. She was able to help unscramble student confusion and instruct her students in such an effective way that they were able to complete more problems than other groups in the class. The group became so confident during the lesson that they audibly cheered when the teacher said she was going to present them with more difficult problems.

In a third-grade inclusion class, the special educator appeared to be regarded, by general education and special education students, as a true co-teacher in the classroom. All students responded to the special educator's direction as she reviewed expectations to the whole class and worked in true partnership with the general educator. When instructing in the content area, she provided appropriate and helpful strategies based on student need.

A second/third grade inclusive ELL class was a wonderful example of excellent instruction with the teacher expecting, encouraging and requiring all students to grapple with the content. The teacher gave many messages of high expectations, both academic and behavioral, and provided targeted redirections without criticizing, along with a great deal of confirmation of effort and success.

An English class at the high school level appeared to be an example of an exemplary inclusive setting. The teacher held grade level expectations for all students and provided opportunities for large group, pairs and individual work. They employed two clear approaches to instruction in writing – “write-around” an engaging the whole class and “turn and talk” emphasizing collaborative work with partners. The class provided excellent examples of thorough instructional planning, genuine collaboration in planning and instruction, use of technology to support instruction, and effective engagement and support of a large and diverse class.

Concerns:

Many survey respondents remarked that effective co-teaching is impossible when special educators are asked to collaborate with multiple general education teachers across a variety of content areas.

The vast majority of survey respondents believe that there is not an adequate number of special education teachers to meet the needs of students supported in inclusion settings. Respondents remarked that specific subject disciplines received no support (i.e. Social Studies, Science, Specials) resulting in students being unable to access the curriculum in these subject areas.

Many survey respondents expressed concern that a large number of students with disabilities may be placed in a class – at times over 50% of classes are students with disabilities. Others mentioned the inability of general education teachers to meet the needs of a large number of students with disabilities in classes where the special education co-teachers are temporarily reassigned for coverage, or in classes where special educators are not assigned (i.e. Science, Social Studies, Specials).

A second-grade special education teacher appeared tired and expressed her frustration with her students. The 22 students were divided into small groups at work tables. Her main expectation was for the students to comply with classroom rules and with her directions and redirections. Her



dominant messages to the students repeatedly included, “I need your attention,” “Voices off,” “Eyes on me,” “Why are you up out of your seats.” There was nothing engaging, rewarding, or inspirational in her messages to them or their experience in the activities.

In the inclusive settings of one middle school, some special educators were observed working with small groups of students to varying levels of effectiveness. Overall classroom management challenges, however, served as a barrier to special educator effectiveness.

In one specialized program, the level of engagement and effectiveness of the special education inclusion teachers varied significantly. While one inclusion teacher was observed working effectively with a small group of students, two others were observed not interacting with either general education students or students with disabilities, and playing no role in the instruction of the class.

It was observed and reported that, across many schools, there is a lack of time within the contract dedicated to the instructional co-planning by the special educator-general educator partners. This failure, coupled with a lack of content confidence/expertise among the special educators, results in many instances when special educators play a secondary support role in inclusion classrooms. The number of other responsibilities – including meetings, testing, etc. scheduled during the school day – was also reported as a hindrance to effective co-teaching.

In some schools, special educators seemed almost disengaged in the general education classes as they stood back serving as little than observers in the room. In other settings, special educators worked 1:1 with students with disabilities or with small groups, not leading or facilitating instruction, but only answering specific questions students may have. In those instances when general educators and special educators were more often observed truly collaborating in instruction, some reported that they had to do their co-planning outside of the contract hours.

The departmentalization of special education teachers varied from school to school. In some schools, special education inclusion teachers work within one content area across a grade. In others, the inclusion teachers are assigned to specific grades and provide instruction across a variety of curricular areas.

It was observed that most often when small group approaches; e.g., the workshop model, were used as a vehicle of curriculum implementation, special educators were more likely to be fully incorporated into the instructional fabric of the general education class.

Recommendations for Inclusive Settings and Services

Immediate

- Identify and analyze the existing inclusive settings and services that are effective and efficient, describe the critical features contributing to their effectiveness, and celebrate/share these approaches with both special education and general education staff.
- Identify and analyze the existing inclusive settings and services that are less effective, describe the opportunities and challenges of these programs, and develop plans for the restructuring of these programs and partnerships.

Short-Term

- Provide critical organizational support for the implementation of the adopted approaches.
 - Professional development, on-going support, and professional supervision provided by expert consultant/trainers, including for example Landmark in the areas of Specific Learning Disabilities, Language-Based Learning Disabilities, and Dyslexia.
 - Teams and team time for planning and problem solving for special educators, general educators, related and support staff, and paraprofessionals
 - Appropriate school and class scheduling
 - Expert consultation to staff
 - Resources regarding best practices

Long-Term

- Clearly describe the various approaches in inclusive settings and the services provided to students with disabilities. These approaches may include, for example:
 - Co-teaching by a general education teacher and a special education teacher
 - Teaching by a dual-certified general/special education teacher
 - Teaching by a general education teacher with a special education paraprofessional
 - Teaching by a general education teacher with push-in special education and/or related services
- Establish the criteria for selecting the approaches to inclusive settings and services that will be used in the District. Suggested criteria include, for example:
 - Appropriateness for the needs of the students
 - Feasibility given staff resources
 - Basis in the principles of Universal Design
 - Incorporating differentiated instruction and services



C. Specialized Services and Programs

Consultants' Perspectives

With some notable exceptions, poor quality and a lack of effectiveness were found in a significant number of Fall River's highly specialized strands, especially those for students with Autism and Emotional Impairment. The staffing structures, staff expertise, clarity of purpose, and specificity of approaches differ markedly from school to school and setting to setting, and often fall short of current standards for specialized programs.

Findings

Commendations – Specialized Programs

A positive example of effective teaching and planning was observed in one middle school language-based classroom. The teacher taught a strongly organized and content-rich lesson. The teacher had clearly established strong behavioral routines and actively used data to inform instruction. Students in turn actively participated and engaged in the content.

Students in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting are supported by a caring Principal who knows every student by name and has built trusting relationships with students and staff alike. Each classroom had a low student-staff ratio. Specialized staff are fully integrated into the community and seemed to be well trained and effective. Further, the paraprofessionals within the school were observed to be generally effective and relatively well prepared for the work.

In one substantially separate elementary social-emotional-behavioral setting, one teacher was clearly well prepared for the ELA lesson. She used a power point presentation to present her information and worked with students on sentence construction. The paraprofessional worked with other students on a comprehension activity and, though he spent his time often redirecting behavior he was able to answer questions and break down information for students. In this one instance, the teacher and the paraprofessional appeared to have similar expectations and work in a seemingly strong partnership.

Concerns - Specialized Programs

The quality and skills of the staff in many of the specialized strands seems inadequate. There is a lack of continuity of approaches across the strand type and within stand schools. Structures, processes, and language used in communicating with students, and instructional and support frameworks are not universal, even within a given strand in one school, and certainly not across schools and levels within strands.



From several interviews, it became clear that many teachers believe that, once a student is placed in a specialized strand at any school, it is often difficult to reintegrate them into the general education settings. A significant number of special education teachers and support staff assert that the enrollments are growing in totally separate and substantially separate settings and that the District could and should do better providing more inclusive opportunities for these students. Many expressed the opinion that one reason for this shortcoming is that the staff in the more inclusive settings lack confidence and, in fact, do not have the skills needed to support the youth in the inclusive settings. They cited the need for more targeted, transformational professional development in this area.

Many teachers working in substantially separate settings who responded to the teacher survey that the paraprofessionals working within the programs need more and better professional development in both academic curriculum and instruction and social-emotional-behavioral interventions, supports and services.

In one middle school substantially separate social-emotional-behavioral classroom, students were presented with a lesson that was not aligned with content frameworks or grade level expectations. This teacher, who seemed to have strong positive relationships with students, reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of planning across too many curricular areas, stating that he needs more training and support in the curriculum content.

In an elementary substantially separate social-emotional-behavioral classroom during “quiet time,” little instructional planning was evident. For some of this time, the teacher worked 1:1 with a student answering a math question. Otherwise, she was observed eating her lunch, chatting with the paraprofessional, and reminding students who were not following the expectations of quiet time to return to a quiet activity. The behavioral expectations for the students were not consistently communicated, clarified, or enforced. The teacher, for example, said to a student who was not meeting behavioral expectations, “That is a level drop.” She then did not follow through with the threat once the student complained. During this same period, a paraprofessional repeatedly reprimanded two students for off-task behaviors, and ignored other students exhibiting the same behaviors.

One elementary teacher in a social-emotional-behavioral class raised the concern that, due to the three different grades of students within the class, it was difficult to plan and teach lessons that met the instructional needs of all students. The teacher stated that he modified the curriculum for each student, but was only able to participate in the third-grade weekly curriculum meeting.

In one middle school class for students with ASD, the staff held to inconsistent behavior expectations and taught using approaches that lacked academic rigor. The teacher in this classroom, presented as constantly exasperated and exhibited little in the way of instructional planning.

In another middle school, a community-based classroom had two staff who were observed completely disengaged with the students. Even upon the entrance of the Principal, the teachers did not engage with the students.



Concerns - Social-Emotional-Behavioral (SEB) Interventions, Supports, and Services

Based on observational data, the consistency of implementation and efficacy of social-emotional-behavioral interventions, supports, and services vary based on school and setting. In some schools, clear and high behavioral expectations appeared to be consistently held. In some schools, class rules were regularly posted and common language were utilized when responding to social-emotional-behavioral challenges. In other schools, behavioral expectations were not posted and language varied from class to class. Some schools across the district have implemented the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) framework to promote social-emotional-behavioral competencies. Social-emotional curriculum and instruction, however, was not evident in other schools.

Across many substantially separate placements, specific token systems have been established, but the consistency and nature of this approach vary significantly. In one placement, for example, the token system chart is publicly displayed and a student loses all earned points as a result of a major infraction. In other settings, token systems are kept private and points are earned and are not taken away for future infractions.

The ability of teachers to respond to student behavioral challenges varies across the district, from placement to placement. While a significant number of teachers held consistent and high behavioral expectations for students, too many others were observed being exasperated, angry and unsupportive toward their students.

It was observed that, when students from substantially separate social-emotional-behavioral classes were integrated with peers in general education settings, the lack of consistency in behavioral expectations from one setting to the other resulted in students' not finding success in both academics and social-emotional learning.

Commendations - Trauma Sensitive Practices

Among the schools that were visited, one middle school stood out as a leader in designing programs with a trauma-sensitive approach. The administrator spoke of the importance of his staff's understanding trauma and its impact on academic and social-emotional learning of many students. It was evident that he has a vision for the school to become more trauma-sensitive, even while he recognized that his staff need targeted, transformational professional development in this area.

One elementary principal reported that she strives to create an environment that would be supportive of the growing number of students with disabilities enrolled at her school and to better understand how to meet the needs of students with histories as victims or witnesses of trauma. She spoke of a very diverse student population and the need to recruit professionals for her school that reflect this population. She stated that the staff has shifted in her years in the district, that the shift has been for the better, and that most staff are open to learning new ways to meet the needs of the student with trauma.



In most rooms at one elementary, a "peace chair" and a small area for calming down was noted as a way to meet the emotional needs of students.

Some elementary schools had environments that fostered trauma-sensitive programming. Two elementary schools seem to be at the forefront in discussing the importance of trauma-sensitive programs and illustrated aspects of the approach in their school climate. Educators in various classroom settings at both these schools interacted with children in a positive manner and utilized a calm tone of voice when the group or an individual got off "baseline." Teachers took great pride in making the physical environment very welcoming and it was clear that it was a student-first approach.

Concerns - Trauma Sensitive Practices

As is true in other areas, trauma-sensitive programming exists in only some classrooms and schools.

At one middle school, it was clear that certain educators had a better understanding than others about how to create a classroom environment that is trauma-sensitive. Though some teachers proactively pursued a trauma-sensitive approach, other teachers struggled with this approach, and the most professionals demonstrated minimal competency in this area.

Recommendations for Specialized Services and Programs

Immediate

- Identify and analyze the existing specialized programs that are effective and efficient, and describe the critical features contributing to their effectiveness.
- Identify and analyze the existing programs that are less effective, describe the opportunities and challenges of these programs, and develop plans for the restructuring of these programs. Examples of these programs include:
 - The high school substantially separate emotional impairment setting
This program should be redefined and restructured. A continuation of the elementary middle school strands into the high school would be appropriate, but specific features absent from the current program should be developed:
 - ✓ Differentiation of programming to address the different populations of high school students with significant social-emotional-behavioral challenges
 - ✓ New programming to provide occupational awareness, exploration, and preparation for many of these students
 - ✓ More comprehensive and intensive social-emotional-behavioral programming
 - ✓ More robust academic interventions, supports and services
 - Alternative High School
This program should be redefined and restructured as a non-special education alternative high school with occupational awareness, exploration and preparation programming, and strong social-emotional-behavioral services.
 - Community-Based High School Strand
This program should be redesigned as two programs:
 - ✓ One that should be a school-based strand for students with moderate Cognitive Impairment and Multiple Disabilities for whom a school day in a school facility would be appropriate. This program should offer specialized occupational awareness, exploration and preparation.
 - ✓ The other should be a community-based setting for students with severe Cognitive Impairment and Multiple Disabilities. This program should offer community oriented, functional skill development and life preparation.

- Language-Based Learning Disability Strands
This program should be re-established as a highly specialized strand for students who have language-based learning disabilities, including dyslexia, providing intensive specialized instruction by specially trained teachers and related service providers.

Short-Term

- Establish a functional, rather than a categorical approach to the programmatic grouping of students with significant disabilities for the purposes of providing academic and social-emotional instruction and services. Guidelines for the groupings should include, for example:
 - Consideration of their primary and secondary disabilities
 - Emphasis on functional opportunities and challenges
 - Utilization of data from formal and informal academic and behavioral assessments in planning and placement
- Address issues of organizational support specific to specialized programs, including for example,
 - Develop clear and complete program descriptions for all specialized programs
 - Establish, monitor and adjust clear entry and exit criteria and processes for the specialized program for each functional category
 - Establish consistent approaches to student instruction and services, and for professional development across specialized programs within each functional category to support programmatic consistency and more effective transitions from grade to grade and level to level
 - Identify and pursue more structured opportunities provided to students to integrate with non-disabled peers, and monitor and evaluate the data regularly.
- Analyze the various SEB interventions, supports, and services, adopt those that meet the established criteria, and implement structures and processes for the on-going monitoring and adjustment of SEB approaches. We recommend, for example:
 - Trauma Sensitive Practices
 - Cognitive Behavioral Approaches
 - Solution-Focused Approaches
 - Engaging Families as Partners in Planning and Problem Solving.
- Provide professional development, on-going support, and professional supervision in the adopted approaches to intervention, support, and service.
- Provide technical assistance for school and district leaders in implementing the adopted approaches.
- For specialized programs for students with Emotional Impairment or Autism, we recommend Safety Care or Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) as alternatives to Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) for physical crisis prevention, de-escalation, management, debriefing, and documentation.

- Analyze current challenges and develop plans to address these challenges over time:
 - The staffing-student ratios in specialized strands, taking into consideration both the number of students and student needs.
 - Explicit, consistent expectations, on-boarding and on-going professional development, supervision, and support for paraprofessionals in all settings (e.g., inclusion, sub separate autism, sub separate social-emotional)
 - Assignment of paraprofessionals as this relates to the needs of students and the effectiveness of the paraprofessionals
 - Protocols relating to paraprofessional absence to provide for adequate coverage, perhaps hiring specific substitute paraprofessionals to float among the district.
 - Paraprofessional training opportunities that directly relate to their position (e.g., social-emotional specialized setting vs. inclusion)
 - The level of specialized staff employed by the district and the utilization of external providers.
 - For services required by IEPs, monitoring caseloads closely to ensure that staff can adequately meet student needs.
 - Tailoring professional development offerings to better prepare teachers in supporting the social-emotional needs of students.
 - Providing specialized training in the area of teaching students affected by trauma.
 - Incorporating social-emotional learning professional development into the onboarding of new teachers.
 - Developing learning communities for each strand and provide time for educators to meet and collaborate.
 - Reviewing job posting procedures and utilizing earlier timelines to help attract quality candidates.

Long-Term

- Clearly describe the continuum of settings, and array of services to be provided for students with significant disabilities. The continuum of settings should include:
 - Full-time integration in general education
 - Full-time placement in general education with push-in/pull-out for special education
 - Partial integration in general education and in a special education class or strand
 - Full-time placement in a special education class
 - Placement in a specialized strand
 - Placement in a specialized public school
 - Placement in a specialized collaborative school
 - Placement in a specialized private day school
 - Placement in a specialized residential school

The array of services available for students with disabilities should include all related and support services for student success and should be available to all students as needed, regardless of their placement in the continuum.

- Establish the criteria for selecting social-emotional-behavioral approaches to interventions, supports, and services that will be used universally and consistently across the schools.



- Establish structures and processes, policies and procedures for SEB interventions, supports, and services. These may include, for example
 - Service Teams at the direct service level
 - School Management Groups at the management level
 - District Leadership Committee at the leadership/policy level
 - Skilled facilitation of the Teams, Groups, and Committee
 - Expert consultation at each level
 - Specific approaches and guidelines for planning and problem-solving at each level
 - Interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration
 - Guidelines for the implementation, monitoring, and adjusting of approaches
 - Specialized facilities for supporting calming, problem solving, de-escalation, and physical restraint when necessary

- Analyze and develop plans to address a myriad of staffing challenges including:
 - The staffing-student ratios relating to SEB interventions, supports, and services, taking into consideration both the number of students and student needs.
 - Explicit, consistent expectations, professional development, supervision, and support for paraprofessionals in all settings (e.g., inclusion, sub separate autism, sub separate social-emotional)
 - Protocols relating to paraprofessional absence to provide for adequate coverage, perhaps hiring specific substitute paraprofessionals to float among the schools.
 - The level of specialized staff employed by the district and the utilization of external providers.
 - For services required by IEPs, monitoring caseloads closely to ensure that staff can adequately meet student needs.
 - Tailoring professional development offerings to better prepare teachers in supporting the social-emotional needs of students.
 - Providing specialized training in the area of teaching students affected by trauma.
 - Incorporating professional development in social-emotional learning into the onboarding of new teachers.

D. Organizational Support

Consultants' Perspectives

There is a general lack of awareness and understanding of the various types of organizational support that are critical for improving quality and effectiveness in special education settings and services across the continuum and array. As a result, efforts to improve inputs, outputs, and student outcomes are isolated, ineffective, and hampered by a lack of clear goals and ineffective program leadership and management leadership.

Findings

Paraprofessional Support

In the answers to interview questions and in comments made during classroom observations, one recurring area of concern was the number and role of paraprofessionals in classrooms and how they are utilized.

It was apparent that in the majority of the strands where students had medical issues, staffing was perceived as adequate and supportive. Many students with significant medical needs had 1:1 support always having a paraprofessional or certified nursing assistants with them. In these instances, the classroom environment was much more settled, and the delivery of the curriculum seemed clearer to students.

While approximately half of the teacher survey respondents working within substantially separate settings stated that they believe their classroom is adequately staffed, those who do not feel that the classes are adequately staffed, however, generally commented on the need for better training for paraprofessionals versus the number of educators in the classroom.

Observations in classrooms and the results of the teacher survey indicate that the assignment and role of paraprofessionals in inclusion settings varies across the district. Special educators generally feel that paraprofessional support is beneficial to meeting the needs of students. Many teachers also asserted, however, that if paraprofessionals were provided with targeted, transformational professional development – in the areas of curriculum, social-emotional-behavioral support, classroom management, and differentiation of instruction, for example – those paraprofessionals would be an even more valuable factor in the success of students with disabilities.

Many staff report that paraprofessionals were not receiving consistent job-specific training even when placed in specialized programs. Some paraprofessionals were highly effective, wherein others were quite ineffective. Across many specialized placements particularly, paraprofessionals seemed largely ineffective in de-escalating behavior. For example, in one instance, a 1:1 ASD push-in student's paraprofessional did little to calm him down. In a language-based class, a paraprofessional sat next to a student who came to class angry after an issue after PE, but in the 30 minutes made only scant contact with him. In one social-emotional placement, the paraprofessional seemed disengaged during



the observation yet the other paraprofessional actively attempted to calm student conflict and often attempted to do so by just speaking loudly without clear direction or expectation; e.g. “Come on guys!”.

The challenge of paraprofessionals’ “calling out” or being pulled to support other programs was noted throughout interviews as well as reported in the teacher survey. Most respondents asserted that this compromises student service delivery. Some teachers responded in the survey saying that they are unable to meet the needs of students as they fill the behavior support role usually filled by paraprofessionals. One Student Adjustment Counselor reported that when paraprofessionals are not present in their assigned classes, she is left to support most crises in the school and, as a result, cannot provide the individual and group counselling required by students’ IEPs.

At the high school level, it became clear that the schedule of paraprofessionals does not meet the needs of the full school day as they work on a different daily schedule.

Professional Staffing

In such a large school district with a large special education population, it is not surprising, but noteworthy that staffing varies not only from school to school, but also across similar specialized settings. Few staff members were able to describe clearly the staffing ratios. Many conveyed that each classroom is set with an ideal student - teacher ratio “on paper,” but that the ratios rarely take into consideration the unique and diverse needs of the actual individual students with disabilities.

During interviews, it became clear that many staff feel the Special Education Department is very responsive to conducting observations/evaluations of students in a classroom setting. They feel these are done in a timely fashion and reports are communicated to the team in a time efficient manner. The district has both their own employees and contracts with a small number of different companies for physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language, and BCBA to meet the increasing needs of initial evaluations, as well as services afforded through IEPs.

Many staff reported a concern that the potential increased enrollment in specialized strands. They feel there has been no discussion about increasing staffing. A common theme communicated in both interviews with staff and in conversations around observations was a feeling of being understaffed to meet the needs of students.

The large caseloads assigned to some specialized staff was raised as an area of challenge. One BCBA made mentioned that her caseload was very high at the beginning of the year due to her being the only BCBA for multiple schools. In November, however, the district hired a second BCBA. She stated that though her caseload is still very high compared to the ratio recommended at this time, there is work being done by the teacher’s union to create a caseload cap in the contract. She stated that the majority of her reports are written outside of contractual time and that this practice is commonplace among the other BCBA in the district.



Program Leadership and Management

In virtually all the specialized strands, there is no trained and skilled leadership/management for the programs. In two types of strands – Emotional Impairment and Autism – the significant and complex needs of the students require program features that are not being provided. These missing features include, for example, substantial knowledge, experience, and skills in particular disabilities and functional needs; specific guidance and direction for staff; supervision of interventions, supports, and services; coordination of scheduling and use of facilities; arrangements for staff coverage; and liaison with school administration.

Generally, teachers working within the substantially separate placements who responded to the teacher survey stated that they feel a lack of wraparound support by the special education department. Many remarked that they only have contact with the department when “something goes wrong” and desire a more proactive level of support.

Several teachers conveyed that decisions are already made prior to meetings about where a student should be placed and often this decision is based to a large extent on the number of available seats in the strand versus the actual student’s needs. During an interview with the Joint Labor Committee, a teacher stated that last year she was told in front of the parent that she should not be voicing her concerns as the decision was already made. This group of individuals mentioned that other experts, such as psychologists and BCBA’s, are having similar experiences concerning assignments of caseloads.

Time to Meet

After the numerous observations and interviews, it became evident that collaboration among professionals across the district varies based upon schools and type of employee.

Responses to both staff surveys reflect a lack of consistent planning time and opportunities for professional collaboration serve as significant obstacles in supporting students with disabilities. Survey respondents widely noted the need for more time to collaborate, additional teacher support and clear school/district expectations about co-teaching to ensure that co-teaching is meaningful and effective. For example, teachers mentioned TEAM meetings being scheduled during service delivery times or/and special educators being pulled for non-special education related duties like substituting in a general education class. More intensive and individualized scheduling of special education based not only by student numbers but overall class size degree of social-emotional challenges, etc. was also raised as a challenge the inclusion settings.

Across the district, inclusion special educators lamented about the lack of planning time provided within their schedule. They expressed feelings of “being rushed” and “unable to plan effectively with my general education partner.” Without time in the day, teachers often plan after/before school, but this is beyond contractual obligation and the degree to which the planning occurs varies from partnership to partnership. Further, special educators often have more than one general educator to plan which leaves little to no time to co-plan. True co-teaching was rarely observed in any setting.



Many sub-separate teachers spoke of the “extensive amount” of content they are required to deliver to students and the lack of time given to meet with the general educators or curriculum specialists. In some of the social-emotional sub-separate classrooms, students were observed not participating in similar content to their grade level peers. One may assume that without a similar content foundation, students who later integrate into general education settings will be less than successful.

Though there are clear limitations and challenges to scheduling enough time for teachers to collaborate, some schools have found ways to work cohesively. At some schools, a team approach was observed to be a strong part of the organizational culture. Paraprofessionals and teachers worked closely in the classroom to support all the children’s needs. Administrators, teachers, specialized staff and paraprofessionals all seemingly were “on the same page.” These schools, seem to provide a positive school climate for both the children and teachers as a result of this team approach. Though there are some instances of teachers who choose to go beyond their contractual expectations to plan with multiple teachers and develop a strong knowledge of a variety of content, without protected collaborative time, the district cannot guarantee that all teachers are preparing in this way.

Expert Consultation to Teams

Regarding expert consultation, many interviewed staff mentioned the responsiveness of the district when consultations are requested from any type of expert. They stated that even due to the limited number of experts, reports are done in time for initial evaluations and often contain valuable advice to the educators.

Many employees expressed a desire for more observational support and guidance towards direct classroom intervention versus just individual evaluations, stating this support would be beneficial to create a more supportive environment geared towards the students’ needs.

Professional Development

When asked in the teacher survey whether liaisons have received enough training to run an effective TEAM meeting the majority of educators responded that they have not. Only 25.9% of respondents in the substantially separate settings and 19.4% of inclusion setting special educators believe that they have received adequate professional development.,

Most special educators in the substantially separate teacher survey responded that they have had enough professional development in the area of writing IEPs (54.1%) while the majority of inclusion special educators responded that they have not received enough professional development in this area (59.7%).

Through observations, interviews and survey data analysis, it became clear that there is a greater need for training for paraprofessionals both initially upon hire and on-going. The preparation and quality of paraprofessionals across the district are wide-ranging. Further, in the teacher survey, the



need for clear job descriptions/expectations for inclusion paraprofessionals was proposed as a way to help better ensure that those applying for the job are aware of the varied expectations of the role.

Inadequate professional development, support, and supervision is an obstacle to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Largely ineffective approaches to behavioral management and support were frequently observed across the District.

Professional development was consistently discussed by all staff and the need for more training related to special education. Some of the more effective teachers within the specialized strand remarked that their learning has come from a self-motivation and direction, not from the district. Many stated a desire to be provided with job-specific transformative professional development.

The structure of monthly professional development trainings offered by the district was discussed during the interview process with the Joint Labor Committee, Special Education Supervisors, and with the BCBA group. It was apparent that the district has made strides to increase these opportunities for the Special Education department and allow choices of which training to attend to meet different individual needs. The need for more professional development related to specific learning disabilities in the district and support in establishing and implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum was discussed at great lengths when interviewing the Joint Labor Committee.

Teachers from different schools, that include different strands conveyed that much of the professional development offered at this time by the district is more geared towards supporting general education academic curriculum. These individuals discussed how they are not always knowledgeable about what curriculum is being followed in specialized strands like autism placements and as a result, as a result, they cannot always best support their students in the transition to other classrooms.

The district has offered training through Jessica Minahan, MEd, BCBA, yet, like many other approaches, her guidance is utilized in different schools in different ways to varying degrees. One Principal expressed a clear interest in learning how to better support his students and he relies heavily on Jessica's work to create a more supportive classroom culture. He discussed the need to better understand how to support students through a trauma-sensitive approach and the hope to offer more opportunities to educators at his school.

Recommendations for Organizational Support

Immediate

- Develop and implement plans for more adequate leadership and management in Special Education
 - Redevelop the role of Special Education Supervisor, establishing an adequate number of positions, and focusing each position on specializations, including for example:
 - ✓ Disability/functional need categorical specializations
 - ✓ Related Services
 - ✓ Occupational Awareness/Exploration/Preparation
 - Expand the number of Team Chairs to implement a restructuring of the role definition to include:
 - ✓ Responsibility for chairing all IEP meetings including annual reviews, 3-year re-evaluations, unscheduled re-evaluations, extended evaluations, etc.
 - ✓ Serving as a member of the school-based leadership team for closer collaboration with Principals and Assistant Principals
 - ✓ Liaison with other Student Services staff in the schools, including, for example, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers
 - Restructure the role and assignments of Clerks
 - ✓ Assign them to geographic clusters of schools
 - ✓ Relocate their offices and files to the schools
 - ✓ Clarify and support the importance of their role as resources and facilitators of communications
 - Establish positions of Strand Specialist for certain Specialized Strands
 - ✓ First priority: Specialists in strands for students with Emotional Impairment and Autism
 - ✓ Tailor the requirements for each Strand Specialist with regards to their education, training, experience, and expertise
 - ✓ Arrange direct supervision by the appropriate Disability/Functional Need Supervisor

Short-Term

- Define the critical features, at the school and district levels, necessary to improve program inputs and outputs, leading to improved student outcomes. These features typically include, for example:
 - Skilled leadership, management, and supervision
 - Teaming, and time for staff to meet
 - Skilled team facilitation
 - Expert consultation to the teams



- Engagement and support by school level managers and district level leaders/policy makers
- Targeted and transformational professional development
- On-going professional support
- Regular professional supervision
- Engagement of families as partners
- Appropriate scheduling
- Specialized facilities

Long-Term

- Establish regular meetings of a working group to analyze the current level of organizational support, and develop and implement plans for improvements in this support. This group should include, for example:
 - The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
 - The Director of Special Education (Group Facilitator)
 - A School Administrator from each level – elementary, middle, and high
 - Special Education Supervisor representatives
 - Staff representatives from each level
 - Parent leader representatives from each level
- Develop a district-wide structure and process for planning and problem solving, to assume the functions of current teams including, for example, pre-referral teams, student assistance teams, 504 evaluation teams, and others.
 - Three levels of planning and problem solving: direct-service, management, leadership, and policy
 - Student-centered focused on student progress and proficiency
 - Structured planning and problem solving
 - Team-based, with regular weekly meetings
 - Skilled facilitation
 - Expert consultation
 - Implementing tiered systems of support
 - Data-oriented
 - Inter-disciplinary



E. Policies, Procedures, Structures, and Processes

Consultants' Perspectives

Although special education is the most highly regulated area of public education at both the state and Federal levels, the District lacks adequate, appropriate, clearly formulated and well communicated structures, processes, policies, and procedures to ensure compliance, effectiveness and efficiency in special education and related services. While most staff and administrators are deeply committed to and work very hard on behalf of their students with disabilities, because of weaknesses in structures, processes, policies, and procedures, their efforts often fail to provide a meaningful benefit to students, and their students fail to make significant progress. The formulation and documentation of special education structures, processes, policies, and procedures appear to be incomplete. What has been formulated is not appropriately communicated and is inconsistently implemented.

Findings

Descriptions of Services and Programs

Documents provided by the District include a packet entitled "Fall River Public Schools Special Education Programs and Services." It includes a list of Central Office Special Education administrators and supervisors, an "Organizational Chart (for) Special Education and Students Services" and very brief descriptions of "Programs" including Inclusion, Partial Inclusion, Language-Based, Social-Emotional, Autism/PDD, Community Based, Medically Fragile, and Therapeutic Day (K-8). These descriptions provide a bit of information about settings, services, and staff for each program. The document also provides a brief description and listing of the Related Services provided by the District.

Entry/Exit Criteria:

Some entry and exit criteria may exist "on paper," The fidelity of student placement into specialized strands, however is varied and was questioned in formal and informal staff interviews. In the teacher survey, for example, a lack of clear entry and exit criteria that are consistently followed was specifically and repeatedly noted as a challenge within the sub separate placements.

One language-based strand teacher's perspective was that 8 of the 13 students were placed in the program based on clear language disabilities. It is her perspective that other students are placed in the class in response to disruptive behavior in less restrictive environments, ELL status or developmental delay.

In a social-emotional- behavioral setting, a teacher remarked that students enter their classrooms without adequate notice. This leaves the teachers unable to prepare adequately for the incoming student's needs and prepare the class for the arrival of someone new. Teachers expressed frustration that they are not consulted about the dynamics of the classes, and at times, not given information



about the student's learning profile beyond the current IEP. Available space in the setting instead of the specific needs of student was also noted to be a driver of student placement.

At in a substantially separate emotional impairment setting, it seems that, as a result of a lack of documented entry and exit criteria, the Principal carries a considerable and personal role in entry decisions and implementation. She visits sending schools and confers with sending Principals before students begin at Stone.

Across the district, staff were largely unable to explain clearly how student substantially separate placement decisions were made especially in the area of social-emotional-behavioral placements.

Recommendations for Policies, Procedures, Structures and Processes

Immediate

- Restructure Specialized Strands
 - Establish “Flexibility within Structure” as the organizational and operational model for strands
 - ✓ Clarify the internal structure of Specialized Strands (Structure)
 - ✓ Describe the range of options for the distribution and redistribution of resources (Flexibility)
 - Define or redefine all Specialized Strands as district-wide settings
 - ✓ All schools should host one or more Specialized Strands
 - Each elementary school would host one or more strands
 - Each middle school would host a selection of strands, not all strands
 - The high school would host all strands
 - ✓ Specialized Strands should extend across the grade levels from elementary through middle to high school settings
 - Prescribe the number and location of Specialized Strands annually based on the numbers of students in need of such settings
 - Establish sets of guidelines for the placement of students in the various strands and the various host sites

Short-Term

- Identify the structures, processes, policies, and procedures for each area of special education and related services. These should include, for example:
 - Staffing
 - Descriptions of interventions, supports, and services
 - Entry and exit criteria and processes
 - Student grouping
 - Teams and team practices
 - Schedules
 - Crisis prevention, intervention, management, debriefing, and documentation
 - Tiered systems of support
- Formulate specific guidelines for all processes and procedures, and compile these into digital Guidebooks.



Long-Term

- Provide professional development and support for school and district leaders and managers in developing and implementing critical structures, processes, policies, and procedures for the effective and efficient implementation of special education and related services
- Arrange for the Joint Union Management Committee to monitor, adjust, revise and update the guidelines at least yearly.



F. Student Outcomes

Consultants' Perspectives

The District does not evaluate the level of proficiency and progress of students with disabilities in the academic and social-emotional-behavioral domains in ways that are valid, authentic, and useful. This failure is made more critical by the lack of definition and consistency in academic and social-emotional curriculum and instruction, and approaches to social-emotional-behavioral interventions, supports, and services. Without clear and consistent approaches and robust measures of progress and proficiency, it is very difficult to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of instruction and services, and the actual outcomes for students.

Findings

Commendations – Academics

There are several schools and placements that rigorously assess students three times a year using DIBELS, DRA, or Fountas and Pinnell, as part of an established RTI program. Aggregated data regarding student progress is displayed in each classroom.

Some schools also benefit from English and Math coaches to support instruction and help teachers set and realize high expectations for some students with certain disabilities.

Concerns – Academics

The practices found in a small number of schools are not uniform across the District. In fact, it is difficult to find reliable measures regarding student outcomes that span all the schools and placements. At this point, MCAS provides the most readily available data to examine progress across grades 3, 6, and 10.

An analysis of 2018 English Language Arts MCAS scores, reveals that on a whole, the majority of students in Fall River score below state averages at the third, sixth, and tenth-grade levels. Although the scores of students with disabilities in Fall River approximate the scores of students with disabilities in Massachusetts for the English Language Arts MCAS at the third-grade level, the gap widens after elementary school. The scores for students with disabilities in Fall River fall below state averages for students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts at the third, sixth, and tenth grades, with marked discrepancy at tenth grade. Here, only 39% of students with disabilities in Fall River achieve a passing score within the Advanced or Proficient categories, as compared with 69% of their peers in Massachusetts with disabilities. This is most concerning as passing MCAS is a requirement for graduation. It should be noted that the scores for all students in Fall River on the English Language Arts MCAS also lag behind those of their typical peers across the state of Massachusetts, with only 75% achieving passing scores.

The results are even more concerning in Math. An analysis of the 2018 Math MCAS scores reveals that although all students in Fall River score lower than state averages for all students in



Massachusetts, the gap between students with disabilities in Fall and their typical peers or students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts widens dramatically after elementary school. At the third and sixth grades, the majority of students with disabilities in Fall River score within the 'Does Not Meet Expectations' range on the Math MCAS. At the tenth grade, where passing MCAS is a graduation requirement, only 8% of the students with disabilities in Fall River score either in the Advanced or Proficient categories to pass, with most scoring in the Warning/Failing range.

District measures from the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years demonstrate that generally, the graduation rate for all students in Fall River fell below the graduation rate for all students in Massachusetts. Similarly, the dropout rate for all students in Fall River is higher than the dropout rate for all students across Massachusetts.

The gap for students with disabilities as far as graduation appears alarming when one considers that during the 2017-2018 school year, only 39% of the students with disabilities graduated, according to data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Interestingly, the drop-out rate for students with disabilities in Fall River was lower than the drop-out rate for the general student population in Fall River. This seems to suggest that students with disabilities do not fail to graduate because they drop out before graduation. Rather, they do not graduate because they cannot pass graduation requirements. Much more needs to be done to help prepare the students with disabilities in Fall River for graduation.

Concerns - Social-Emotional-Behavioral

District measures from the 2016-2017 school year were indicative of an overall over-reliance on suspensions as disciplinary action for students with special needs. Fall River's rate of serious suspensions greater than 10 days for students with disabilities exceeded that of state averages for students with disabilities.

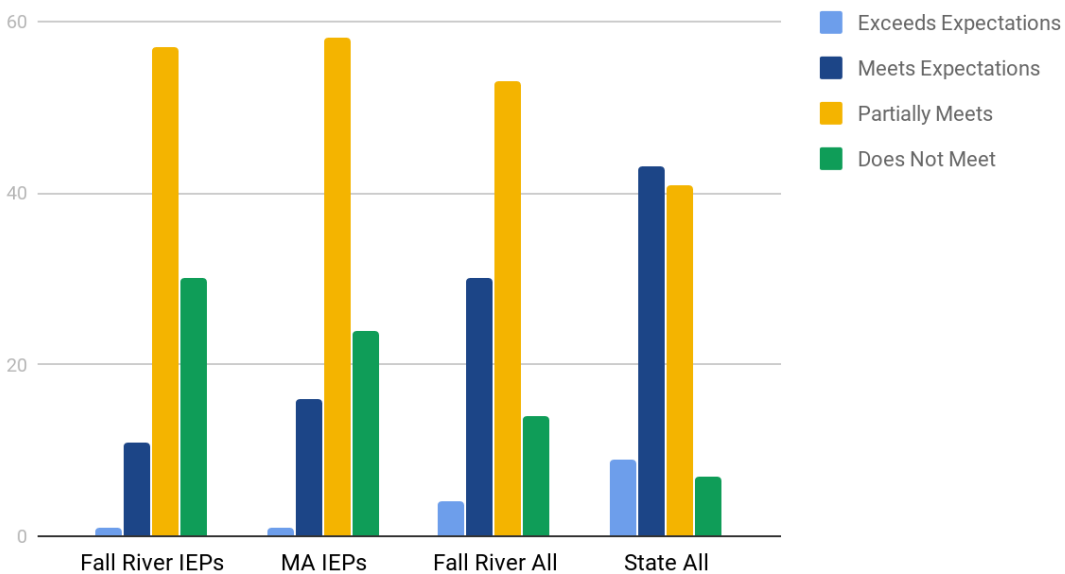
Furthermore, during the 2017-2018 school year, many more students with disabilities were disciplined and suspended in school and out of school than their typical peers in Fall River.

The following graphs display the comparisons between the results of 1) students with disabilities in Fall River as compared to 2) students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts, as well as 3) students in Fall River with and without disabilities, and 4) students across the state of Massachusetts with or without disabilities.

Academic

2018 Grade 3 English Language Arts MCAS Results

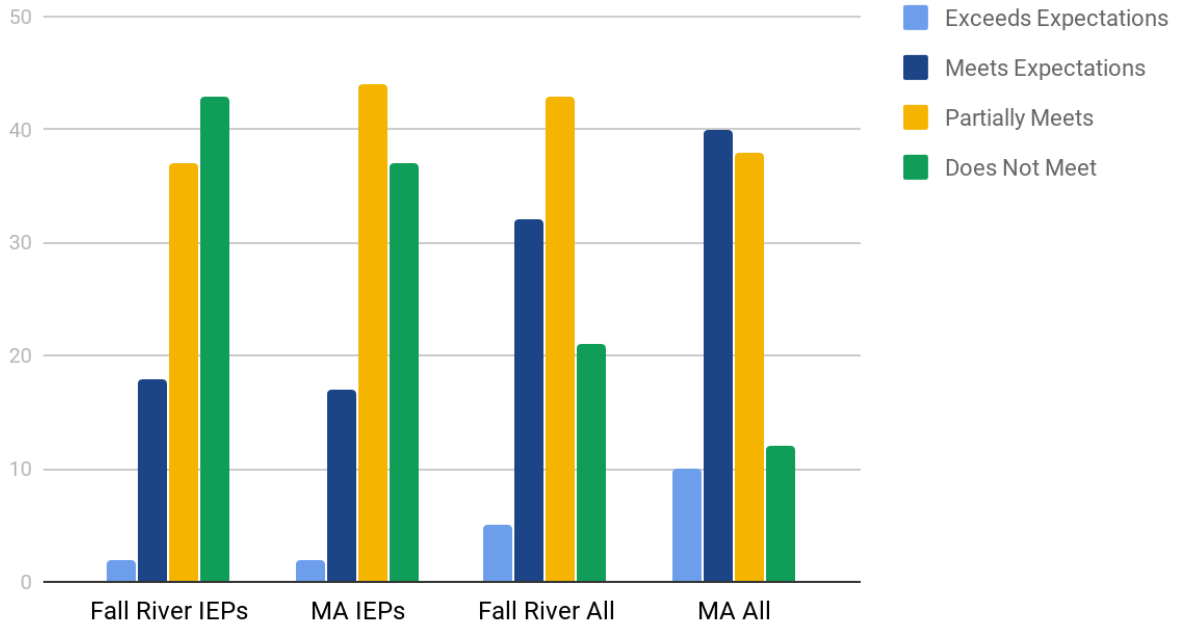
% of Students in Each Achievement Level



Based upon these findings, it would appear that at third grade, most students with disabilities in Fall River score within the Partially Meets Expectations category. More students with disabilities in Massachusetts score within the Exceeds Expectations or Meets Expectations passing range than those with disabilities in Fall River. However, both groups of students with disabilities seem to follow a fairly similar pattern. In contrast, when considering all students in Fall River, the large majority score within the Partially Meets Expectations category. This is lower than the state average for all students, in that the majority of students across the state score within the Meets Expectations range.

2018 Grade 3 Math MCAS Results

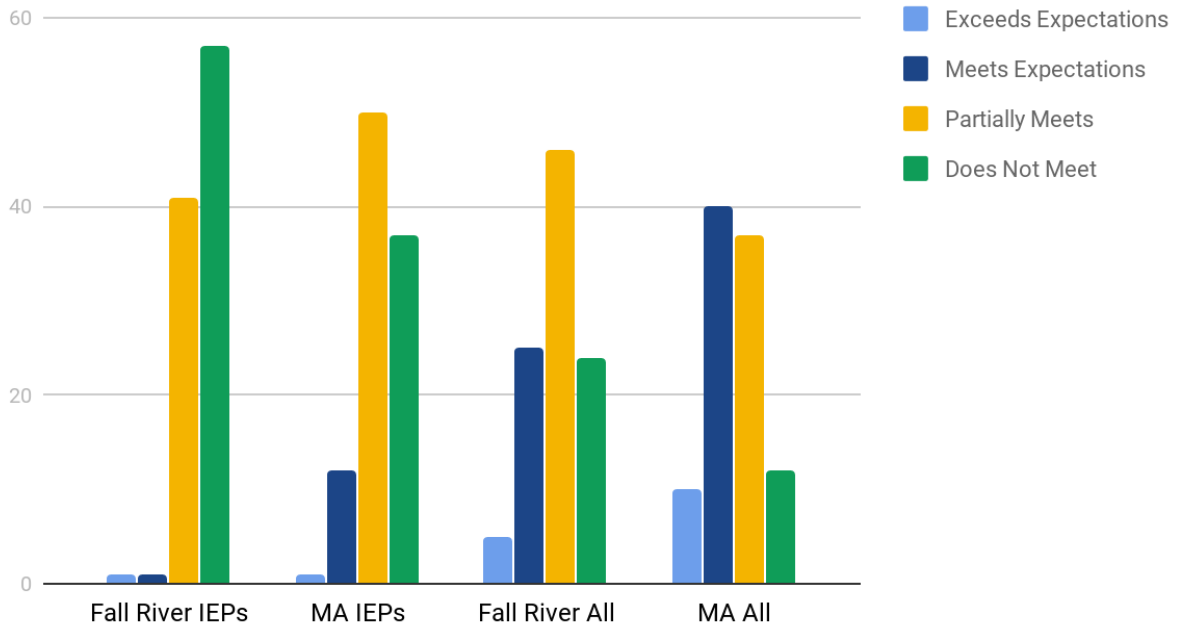
% of Students at Each Achievement Level



The results are somewhat more concerning in Math. At the third-grade level, it appears that most students with disabilities in Fall River score within the Does Not Meet Expectations category. This is somewhat lower than most students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts, who score within the Partially Meets Expectations category. However, once again, both groups of students with disabilities seem to follow a similar pattern. In general, third-grade students in Fall River struggle more in Math than their peers across the state of Massachusetts in that the majority of students in Fall River score within the Partially Meets Expectations range, whereas the majority of students across the state of Massachusetts score within the Meets Expectations range.

2018 Grade 6 English Language Arts MCAS Results

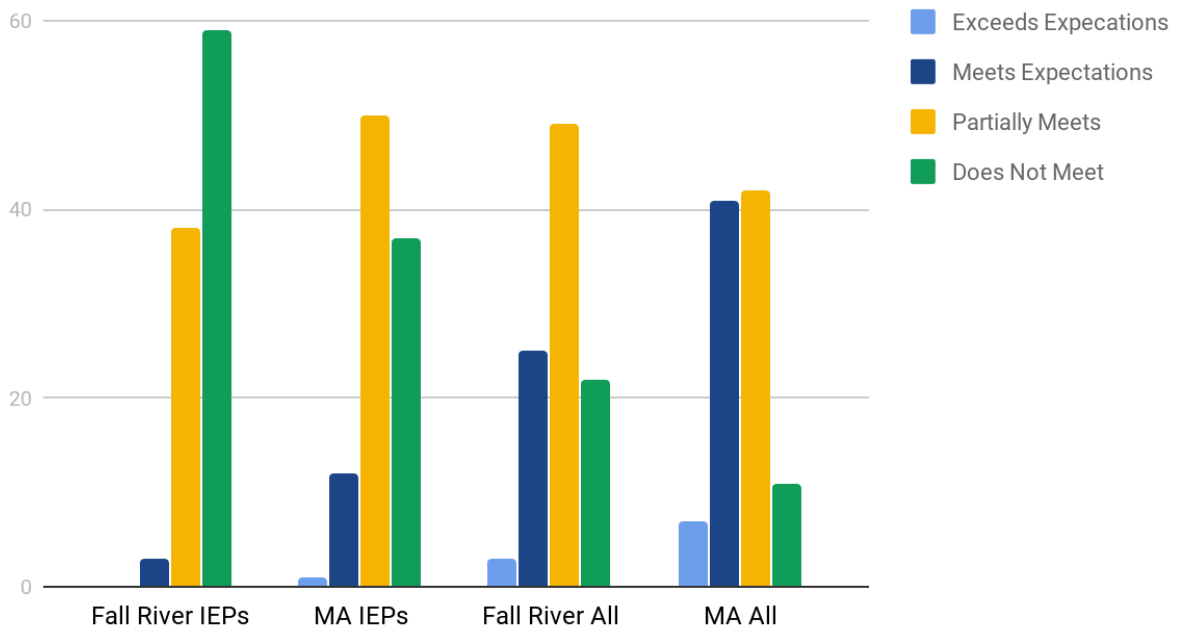
% of Students at Each Achievement Level



At the sixth-grade level, the gap between students with disabilities in Fall River as compared to students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts widens. Where most students with disabilities score within the Partially Meets Expectations category, students with disabilities in Fall River mostly score within the Does Not Meet Expectations range. This is also considerably lower than the results for all students in Fall River, who mostly score within the Partially Meets Expectations range. In general, sixth-grade students in Fall River struggle more than their peers across the state of Massachusetts, though, as most students in Massachusetts score within the Meets Expectations range.

2018 Grade 6 Math MCAS Results

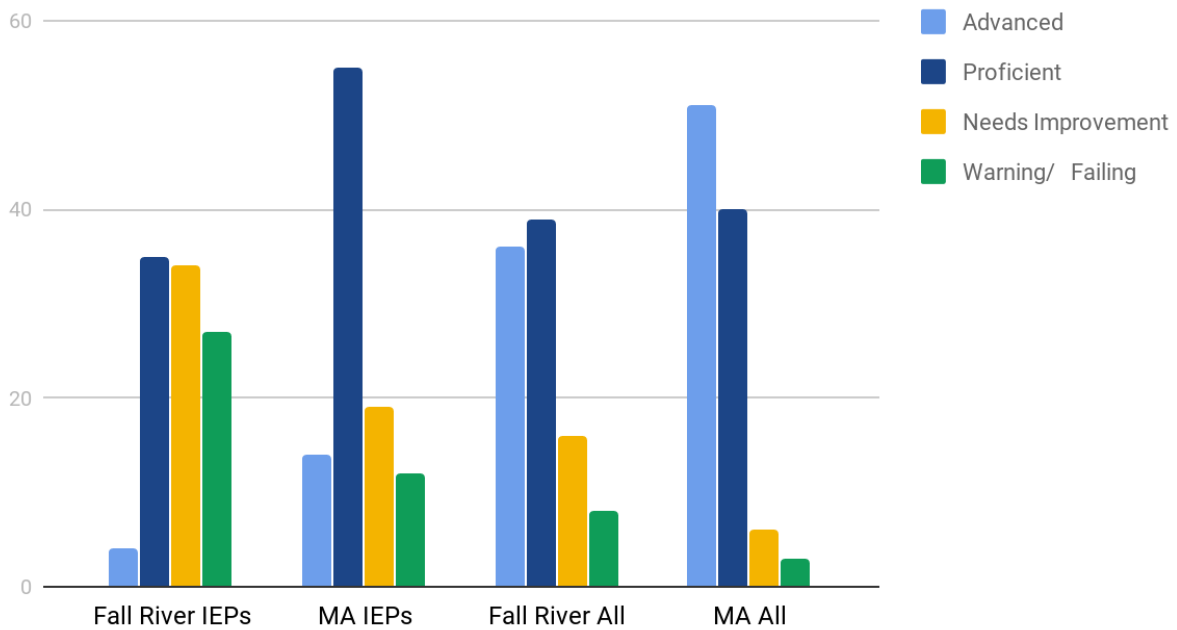
% of Students at Each Achievement Level



The same is true for the results of the sixth grade Math MCAS in Fall River. Where most students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts score within the Partially Meets Expectations range, the scores of most students with disabilities in Fall River fall within the Does Not Meet Expectations range. This is also considerably lower than the scores obtained by all students in Fall River, who score within the Partially Meets Expectations category. Of note, though, most sixth grade students in Fall River score lower than their peers across the state of Massachusetts, where 41% score within the Meets Expectations range and 42% score within the Partially Meets Expectations range.

2018 Grade 10 English Language Arts MCAS Results

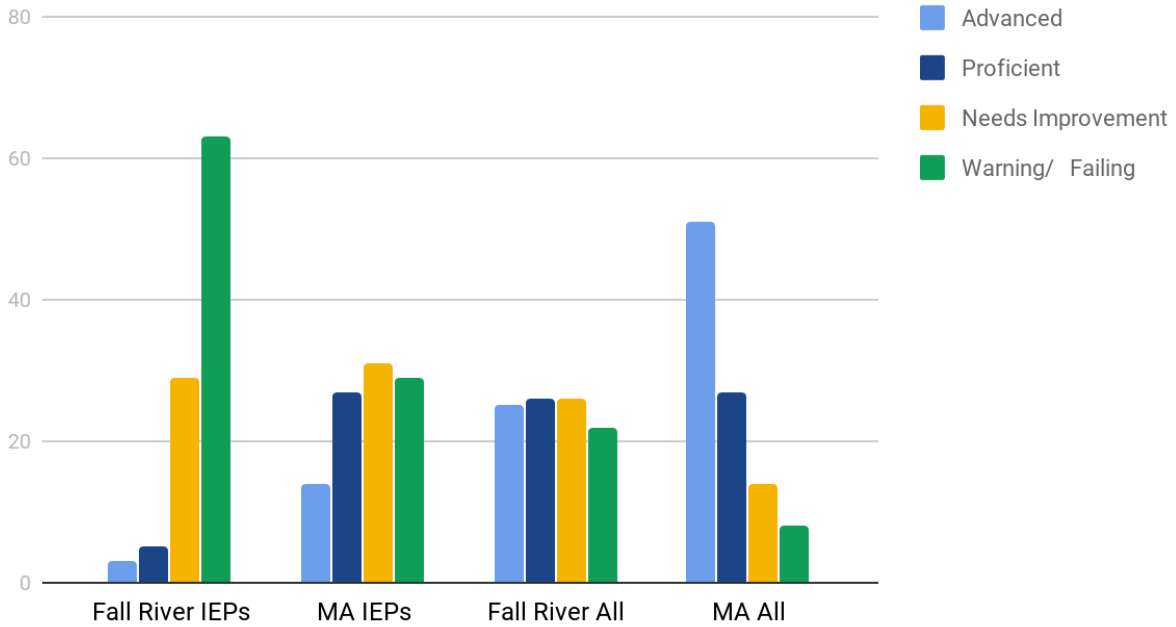
% of Students at Each Achievement Level



The results of the tenth grade English Language Arts MCAS are concerning. Here, only 39% of the students with disabilities in Fall River achieve passing scores within the Advanced or Proficient range. This is much lower than the state average for students with disabilities in tenth grade, where 69% score within the Advanced or Proficient range. This is also much lower than the average for all students in Fall River, where 75% pass and score within the Advanced or Proficient range. Still, even higher, the percent of all students across the state of Massachusetts who pass the tenth grade English Language Arts MCAS by scoring within the Advanced or Proficient categories is 91%.

2018 Grade 10 Math MCAS Results

% of Students at Each Achievement Level



The results of the tenth grade Math MCAS are quite concerning. Here, only 8% of students with disabilities in Fall River achieve the scores needed for passing, within the Advanced or Proficient range. The majority of the students with disabilities in Fall River score within the Warning/Failing range. This is significantly worse than other students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts where 41% score within the passing range, achieving scores of Advanced or Proficient. The general population of tenth-grade students in Fall River lag behind their peers across the state of Massachusetts, though, in that only 51% score within the passing range, achieving scores of Advanced or Proficient. In contrast, 78% of all students in Massachusetts pass the Math MCAS at 10th grade, with 51% scoring in the Advanced category.



Social-Emotional-Behavioral

In terms of social-emotional-behavioral growth, according to observation, there is not one consistent tool or reliable indicator that is used to measure social-emotional-behavioral growth across the district.

Graduation Rates for Students With and Without Disabilities
(2016-2017)

Reported	Cohort 2017 Graduates	# of Students In 2017 Cohort	District Rate	State Rate	State Target
Students with IEPs	58	156	37.2%	72.7%	86.0%
General Ed	419	514	81.5%	91.8%	NA
All Students	477	670	71.2%	88.1%	NA

4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (2018)							
Student Group	# In Cohort	% Graduated	% Still in School	% Non-Grad Completers	% H.S. Equiv.	% Dropped Out	% Permanently Excluded
All Students	544	71.5	5.9	6.1	1.8	14.7	0.0
Male	311	67.5	5.5	6.4	1.9	18.6	0.0
Female	233	76.8	6.4	5.6	1.7	9.4	0.0
EL	35	54.3	8.6	11.4	0.0	25.7	0.0
Students w/ disabilities	146	39.0	15.8	14.4	2.1	28.8	0.0

District measures from the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years demonstrate that the rate of students who graduate from Fall River schools at 71.2-71.5% is lower than the rate of students graduating across the state of Massachusetts at 88.1% in 2016-2017. The rate of students with disabilities who graduate from Fall River schools is even significantly lower at 39% as of 2017-2018.



Drop Out Rates for Students With and Without Disabilities
(2016-2017)

Reported	2017 Dropouts	Students Enrolled In Grades 9-12	District Rate	State Rate	State Target
Students with IEPs	2	437	0.5%	2.5%	2.4%
General Ed	116	1874	6.2%	1.6%	NA
All Students	118	2311	5.1%	1.8%	NA

The percentage of students with disabilities in Fall River who dropped out during the 2016-2017 school year was lower than the state average for students with disabilities. In contrast, the percentage of general ed students who dropped out that year was significantly higher than the state average and than their counterparts with disabilities. This seems to suggest that students with disabilities in Fall River who do not graduate, do so not because they drop out first, but because they do not meet graduation requirements.

Suspensions and Expulsions for Students with IEPs

Indicator 4 - Suspension/Expulsion for Students with IEPs

In all years, the state target for Suspension/Expulsion is 0%.

Indicator 4A: Significant discrepancy in the rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater than ten days in a school year for children with IEPs. Massachusetts' definition for 'significant discrepancy' is five times the state rate for two consecutive years.

Reported	Special Education			
	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
# of Students	NA	2132	1988	1942
# of Students Suspended for Greater than 10 days	89	84	40	58
District Rate	3.9%	3.9%	2.0%	3.0%
State Rate	1.2%	1.1%	0.7%	0.7%
State Target	0	0	0	0

Special Education data are suppressed for enrollment counts fewer than 6.

Indicator 4B: Significant discrepancy (a) by race or ethnicity, in the rate of suspensions and expulsions of greater than ten days in a school year for children with IEPs; and (b) policies, procedures or practices (PPPs) that contribute to the significant discrepancy and do not comply with requirements relating to the development and implementation of IEPs, the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and procedural safeguards. Massachusetts identifies a district as having a significant discrepancy, by race or ethnicity, in the rates of suspensions and expulsions of greater than 10 days in a school year of children with IEPs rates if, for three consecutive years, the district's suspension rate for students with disabilities in a particular race or ethnicity has been five times the state suspension rate for students with disabilities.

District	Indicator 4B: Significant Discrepancy by Race or Ethnicity in Rates of Suspension and Expulsion	
	1) Significant discrepancy by race or ethnicity	2) Noncompliant PPPs that contribute to significant discrepancy
Fall River	Yes	No



Teaching. Caring. Building Hope.

2017-18 Student Discipline Data Report All Offenses



Offense:  

The Student Discipline Data Report reports the disciplines that public school students in Massachusetts received for the offenses committed, as reported by school districts in the School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR). For more detailed information on the SSDR collection, see the documents at the [School Safety Discipline Report \(SSDR\)](#) page on the ESE website. [More about the data.](#)

Student Group	Students	Students Disciplined	% In-School Suspension	% Out-of-School Suspension	% Expulsion	% Alternate Setting	% Emergency Removal
All Students	10,977	1,057	4.3	6.7	0.0	0.6	0.0
English Learner	1,889	176	4.4	6.4	0.0	0.4	0.0
Economically disadvantaged	7,944	918	5.2	8.0	0.0	0.7	0.0
Students w/disabilities	2,379	388	6.2	11.9	0.0	2.6	0.0



Important Note Concerning the Challenges in Measuring Student Outcomes

It is important to understand that these measures allow for analyses at the district, school, grade, and categorical levels, but not at the individual student level. Comparisons of MCAS scores are the most commonly used.

The comparisons that should be made are those of the individual student's proficiency at different points in time, and his/her individual progress, or lack of progress over time. Schools and districts should be monitoring and reporting on the trajectories of individual students with disabilities and link these individual trajectories to specific inputs (interventions, supports, service) and outputs (amounts and rates of services).

It is also critical to note that some common measures of academic and social-emotional-behavioral change in students' progress and/or proficiency actually track the actions of adults rather than the learning of students. Examples of such measures include promotion rates, graduation rates, and drop-out rates, and numbers of office discipline referrals, detentions, suspensions, expulsions. These approaches measure what the adults do and not what the students have accomplished.



Recommendations for Student Outcomes

Immediate

- Utilize the currently available data in valid ways to illuminate the status of progress and proficiency among students with disabilities and inform the process of improving the approach to measuring student outcomes.

Short-Term

- Establish the criteria for the selection of approaches to measuring progress and proficiency in academic learning. Suggested criteria include:
 - Research-based
 - Measures individual student progress and proficiency over time
 - Linked to adopted academic curricula
 - Linked to the Massachusetts Frameworks
 - Measures important concrete learning

Long-Term

- Collect, analyze, utilize, and evaluate the adopted progress and proficiency data in Teams supported by trained facilitators, with guidance provided by expert consultants
- Provide professional development and on-going support for special education staff together with their general education colleagues in content instruction to be able to more closely adhere to curriculum frameworks.
- Establish a multi-disciplinary task force to investigate how to improve graduation rates in Fall River, especially for students with disabilities.



Compilation of Recommendations

Recommendations for Academic Curriculum and Instruction

Immediate

- Define access to the core curriculum for students with disabilities, following guidance provided by the Federation for Children with Special Needs, in alignment with the principles of Universal Design for Learning:
 - Adjustments to content
 - Different ways of teaching
 - Different ways for students to show what they have learned
- Provide professional development, on-going support (coaching), and professional supervision in the adopted curricula and approaches to instruction, providing specific training in ways to provide access for students with disabilities

Short-Term

- Create opportunities for role-specific (e.g., inclusion elementary, sub-separate language based, etc.) learning communities so teachers can collaborate and learn from one another (per mentoring).
- Provide technical assistance for school and district leaders in implementing the adopted approaches.
- Review or create curriculum maps for the district, including entry points and scaffolding for students with disabilities, and provide regular coaching and mentoring for special education teachers and for their general education partners in integrated settings.
- Investigate alternative ELA and Math curricula and approaches to instruction, guided by the principles of Universal Designs for Learning, that are rigorous and adhere to the Learning Frameworks for all students who are unable to access the core curriculum.

Long-Term

- Establish the criteria for the selection of academic curricula and approaches to instruction in all areas of teaching and learning, including all special education settings and integrated general education settings.
- Analyze the various academic curricula and instructional approaches and adopt those that meet the criteria that have been established.
- Implement structures and processes for the on-going monitoring and adjustment of curricula and instructional approaches.

Recommendations for Inclusive Settings and Services

Immediate

- Identify and analyze the existing inclusive settings and services that are effective and efficient, describe the critical features contributing to their effectiveness, and celebrate/share these approaches with both special education and general education staff.
- Identify and analyze the existing inclusive settings and services that are less effective, describe the opportunities and challenges of these programs, and develop plans for the restructuring of these programs and partnerships.

Short-Term

- Provide critical organizational support for the implementation of the adopted approaches.
 - Professional development, on-going support, and professional supervision provided by expert consultant/trainers, including for example Landmark in the areas of Specific Learning Disabilities, Language-Based Learning Disabilities, and Dyslexia.
 - Teams and team time for planning and problem solving for special educators, general educators, related and support staff, and paraprofessionals
 - Appropriate school and class scheduling
 - Expert consultation to staff
 - Resources regarding best practices

Long-Term

- Clearly describe the various approaches in inclusive settings and the services provided to students with disabilities. These approaches may include, for example:
 - Co-teaching by a general education teacher and a special education teacher
 - Teaching by a dual-certified general/special education teacher
 - Teaching by a general education teacher with a special education paraprofessional
 - Teaching by a general education teacher with push-in special education and/or related services
- Establish the criteria for selecting the approaches to inclusive settings and services that will be used in the District. Suggested criteria include, for example:
 - Appropriateness for the needs of the students
 - Feasibility given staff resources
 - Basis in the principles of Universal Design
 - Incorporating differentiated instruction and services

Recommendations for Specialized Services and Programs

Immediate

- Identify and analyze the existing specialized programs that are effective and efficient, and describe the critical features contributing to their effectiveness.
- Identify and analyze the existing programs that are less effective, describe the opportunities and challenges of these programs, and develop plans for the restructuring of these programs. Examples of these programs include:
 - The high school substantially separate emotional impairment setting
This program should be redefined and restructured. A continuation of the elementary middle school strands into the high school would be appropriate, but specific features absent from the current program should be developed:
 - ✓ Differentiation of programming to address the different populations of high school students with significant social-emotional-behavioral challenges
 - ✓ New programming to provide occupational awareness, exploration, and preparation for many of these students
 - ✓ More comprehensive and intensive social-emotional-behavioral programming
 - ✓ More robust academic interventions, supports and services
 - Alternative High School
This program should be redefined and restructured as a non-special education alternative high school with occupational awareness, exploration and preparation programming, and strong social-emotional-behavioral services.
 - Community-Based High School Strand
This program should be redesigned as two programs:
 - ✓ One that should be a school-based strand for students with moderate Cognitive Impairment and Multiple Disabilities for whom a school day in a school facility would be appropriate. This program should offer specialized occupational awareness, exploration and preparation.
 - ✓ The other should be a community-based setting for students with severe Cognitive Impairment and Multiple Disabilities. This program should offer community oriented, functional skill development and life preparation.
 - Language-Based Learning Disability Strands
This program should be re-established as a highly specialized strand for students who have language-based learning disabilities, including dyslexia, providing intensive specialized instruction by specially trained teachers and related service providers.

Short-Term

- Establish a functional, rather than a categorical approach to the programmatic grouping of students with significant disabilities for the purposes of providing academic and social-emotional instruction and services. Guidelines for the groupings should include, for example:
 - Consideration of their primary and secondary disabilities
 - Emphasis on functional opportunities and challenges
 - Utilization of data from formal and informal academic and behavioral assessments in planning and placement

- Address issues of organizational support specific to specialized programs, including for example,
 - Develop clear and complete program descriptions for all specialized programs
 - Establish, monitor and adjust clear entry and exit criteria and processes for the specialized program for each functional category
 - Establish consistent approaches to student instruction and services, and for professional development across specialized programs within each functional category to support programmatic consistency and more effective transitions from grade to grade and level to level
 - Identify and pursue more structured opportunities provided to students to integrate with non-disabled peers, and monitor and evaluate the data regularly.

- Analyze the various SEB interventions, supports, and services, adopt those that meet the established criteria, and implement structures and processes for the on-going monitoring and adjustment of SEB approaches. We recommend, for example:
 - Trauma Sensitive Practices
 - Cognitive Behavioral Approaches
 - Solution-Focused Approaches
 - Engaging Families as Partners in Planning and Problem Solving.

- Provide professional development, on-going support, and professional supervision in the adopted approaches to intervention, support, and service.

- Provide technical assistance for school and district leaders in implementing the adopted approaches.

- For specialized programs for students with Emotional Impairment or Autism, we recommend Safety Care or Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) as alternatives to Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) for physical crisis prevention, de-escalation, management, debriefing, and documentation.

- Analyze current challenges and develop plans to address these challenges over time:
 - The staffing-student ratios in specialized strands, taking into consideration both the number of students and student needs.



- Explicit, consistent expectations, on-boarding and on-going professional development, supervision, and support for paraprofessionals in all settings (e.g., inclusion, sub separate autism, sub separate social-emotional)
- Assignment of paraprofessionals as this relates to the needs of students and the effectiveness of the paraprofessionals
- Protocols relating to paraprofessional absence to provide for adequate coverage, perhaps hiring specific substitute paraprofessionals to float among the district.
- Paraprofessional training opportunities that directly relate to their position (e.g., social-emotional specialized setting vs. inclusion)
- The level of specialized staff employed by the district and the utilization of external providers.
- For services required by IEPs, monitoring caseloads closely to ensure that staff can adequately meet student needs.
- Tailoring professional development offerings to better prepare teachers in supporting the social-emotional needs of students.
- Providing specialized training in the area of teaching students affected by trauma.
- Incorporating social-emotional learning professional development into the onboarding of new teachers.
- Developing learning communities for each strand and provide time for educators to meet and collaborate.
- Reviewing job posting procedures and utilizing earlier timelines to help attract quality candidates.

Long-Term

- Clearly describe the continuum of settings, and array of services to be provided for students with significant disabilities. The continuum of settings should include:
 - Full-time integration in general education
 - Full-time placement in general education with push-in/pull-out for special education
 - Partial integration in general education and in a special education class or strand
 - Full-time placement in a special education class
 - Placement in a specialized strand
 - Placement in a specialized public school
 - Placement in a specialized collaborative school
 - Placement in a specialized private day school
 - Placement in a specialized residential school

The array of services available for students with disabilities should include all related and support services for student success and should be available to all students as needed, regardless of their placement in the continuum.

- Establish the criteria for selecting social-emotional-behavioral approaches to interventions, supports, and services that will be used universally and consistently across the schools.
- Establish structures and processes, policies and procedures for SEB interventions, supports, and services. These may include, for example
 - Service Teams at the direct service level



- School Management Groups at the management level
 - District Leadership Committee at the leadership/policy level
 - Skilled facilitation of the Teams, Groups, and Committee
 - Expert consultation at each level
 - Specific approaches and guidelines for planning and problem-solving at each level
 - Interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration
 - Guidelines for the implementation, monitoring, and adjusting of approaches
 - Specialized facilities for supporting calming, problem solving, de-escalation, and physical restraint when necessary
- Analyze and develop plans to address a myriad of staffing challenges including:
 - The staffing-student ratios relating to SEB interventions, supports, and services, taking into consideration both the number of students and student needs.
 - Explicit, consistent expectations, professional development, supervision, and support for paraprofessionals in all settings (e.g., inclusion, sub separate autism, sub separate social-emotional)
 - Protocols relating to paraprofessional absence to provide for adequate coverage, perhaps hiring specific substitute paraprofessionals to float among the schools.
 - The level of specialized staff employed by the district and the utilization of external providers.
 - For services required by IEPs, monitoring caseloads closely to ensure that staff can adequately meet student needs.
 - Tailoring professional development offerings to better prepare teachers in supporting the social-emotional needs of students.
 - Providing specialized training in the area of teaching students affected by trauma.
 - Incorporating professional development in social-emotional learning into the onboarding of new teachers.

Recommendations for Organizational Support

Immediate

- Develop and implement plans for more adequate leadership and management in Special Education
 - Redevelop the role of Special Education Supervisor, establishing an adequate number of positions, and focusing each position on specializations, including for example:
 - ✓ Disability/functional need categorical specializations
 - ✓ Related Services
 - ✓ Occupational Awareness/Exploration/Preparation
 - Expand the number of Team Chairs to implement a restructuring of the role definition to include:
 - ✓ Responsibility for chairing all IEP meetings including annual reviews, 3-year re-evaluations, unscheduled re-evaluations, extended evaluations, etc.
 - ✓ Serving as a member of the school-based leadership team for closer collaboration with Principals and Assistant Principals
 - ✓ Liaison with other Student Services staff in the schools, including, for example, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers
 - Restructure the role and assignments of Clerks
 - ✓ Assign them to geographic clusters of schools
 - ✓ Relocate their offices and files to the schools
 - ✓ Clarify and support the importance of their role as resources and facilitators of communications
 - Establish positions of Strand Specialist for certain Specialized Strands
 - ✓ First priority: Specialists in strands for students with Emotional Impairment and Autism
 - ✓ Tailor the requirements for each Strand Specialist with regards to their education, training, experience, and expertise
 - ✓ Arrange direct supervision by the appropriate Disability/Functional Need Supervisor

Short-Term

- Define the critical features, at the school and district levels, necessary to improve program inputs and outputs, leading to improved student outcomes. These features typically include, for example:
 - Skilled leadership, management, and supervision
 - Teaming, and time for staff to meet
 - Skilled team facilitation
 - Expert consultation to the teams



- Engagement and support by school level managers and district level leaders/policy makers
- Targeted and transformational professional development
- On-going professional support
- Regular professional supervision
- Engagement of families as partners
- Appropriate scheduling
- Specialized facilities

Long-Term

- Establish regular meetings of a working group to analyze the current level of organizational support, and develop and implement plans for improvements in this support. This group should include, for example:
 - The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
 - The Director of Special Education (Group Facilitator)
 - A School Administrator from each level – elementary, middle, and high
 - Special Education Supervisor representatives
 - Staff representatives from each level
 - Parent leader representatives from each level
- Develop a district-wide structure and process for planning and problem solving, to assume the functions of current teams including, for example, pre-referral teams, student assistance teams, 504 evaluation teams, and others.
 - Three levels of planning and problem solving: direct-service, management, leadership, and policy
 - Student-centered focused on student progress and proficiency
 - Structured planning and problem solving
 - Team-based, with regular weekly meetings
 - Skilled facilitation
 - Expert consultation
 - Implementing tiered systems of support
 - Data-oriented
 - Inter-disciplinary



Recommendations for Policies, Procedures, Structures and Processes

Immediate

- Restructure Specialized Strands
 - Establish “Flexibility within Structure” as the organizational and operational model for strands
 - ✓ Clarify the internal structure of Specialized Strands (Structure)
 - ✓ Describe the range of options for the distribution and redistribution of resources (Flexibility)
 - Define or redefine all Specialized Strands as district-wide settings
 - ✓ All schools should host one or more Specialized Strands
 - Each elementary school would host one or more strands
 - Each middle school would host a selection of strands, not all strands
 - The high school would host all strands
 - ✓ Specialized Strands should extend across the grade levels from elementary through middle to high school settings
 - Prescribe the number and location of Specialized Strands annually based on the numbers of students in need of such settings
 - Establish sets of guidelines for the placement of students in the various strands and the various host sites

Short-Term

- Identify the structures, processes, policies, and procedures for each area of special education and related services. These should include, for example:
 - Staffing
 - Descriptions of interventions, supports, and services
 - Entry and exit criteria and processes
 - Student grouping
 - Teams and team practices
 - Schedules
 - Crisis prevention, intervention, management, debriefing, and documentation
 - Tiered systems of support
- Formulate specific guidelines for all processes and procedures, and compile these into digital Guidebooks.

Long-Term

- Provide professional development and support for school and district leaders and managers in developing and implementing critical structures, processes, policies, and procedures for the effective and efficient implementation of special education and related services
- Arrange for the Joint Union Management Committee to monitor, adjust, revise and update the guidelines at least yearly.



Recommendations for Student Outcomes

Immediate

- Utilize the currently available data in valid ways to illuminate the status of progress and proficiency among students with disabilities and inform the process of improving the approach to measuring student outcomes.

Short-Term

- Establish the criteria for the selection of approaches to measuring progress and proficiency in academic learning. Suggested criteria include:
 - Research-based
 - Measures individual student progress and proficiency over time
 - Linked to adopted academic curricula
 - Linked to the Massachusetts Frameworks
 - Measures important concrete learning

Long-Term

- Collect, analyze, utilize, and evaluate the adopted progress and proficiency data in Teams supported by trained facilitators, with guidance provided by expert consultants
- Provide professional development and on-going support for special education staff together with their general education colleagues in content instruction to be able to more closely adhere to curriculum frameworks.
- Establish a multi-disciplinary task force to investigate how to improve graduation rates in Fall River, especially for students with disabilities.



ADDENDUM

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum and Instruction

Effective social-emotional learning (SEL) is widely recognized as critical to the overall growth and development of all students. This current program evaluation focuses specifically on special education services and settings for students with disabilities, and not on the curriculum and instruction for all students. In the process of implementing the evaluation, collecting and analyzing data from interviews, observations, and document submissions, however, the Consultants came to find areas of significant concern in the social-emotional learning curriculum and instruction provided by the District. We are offering in this Addendum our perspectives on these issues in the interest in supporting efforts of the District in this area.

Consultants' Perspectives

There is no district-wide agreement or consistency in the area of social-emotional learning. Each school seems to have different understandings and approaches ranging, for example, from the partial implementation of PBIS to abridged versions of "Responsive Classroom." Social-emotional instruction is implemented differently across the District's schools and special education settings.

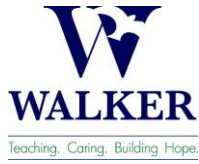
SEL Curriculum

Responsive Classroom is one curriculum that is being utilized to varying degrees throughout the district. It became evident that a lack of continuity comes in part from the varying emphasis placed by administrators on and support given to social-emotional learning.

At one elementary school, for example, all classrooms that were passed by during the morning meeting were using a circle formation with all students in that circle. During an interview, the Principal conveyed her belief in using this in every classroom. Responsive Classroom is clearly part of the organizational culture at the school as all students and teachers were engaged through its utilization.

Through various interviews with administrators, however, it became evident that this approach is not stressed at all schools. Further, certain specialists communicated that they felt that Responsive Classroom was not the best approach to meet student needs, in particular, the autism strands.

In one elementary social-emotional program teachers expressed having been trained in and use Superflex and Behavior Companion for social thinking curricula. However, at the middle school, no programs or curriculums were mentioned or observed being implemented in the social-emotional strand.



SEL Instruction

Though there were certain schools and/or classrooms that referred to SEL instruction, Walker consultants observed little in the way of consistent explicit social-emotional instruction across the district.

First graders at one school were observed participating in a version of a morning meeting. Students were greeted together and read a daily message from the teacher after which one student shared a picture and story about her family. The student was supported by the teacher in such a way that she felt comfortable sharing about her family experience. Students had clearly learned how to share and how to ask respectful comments/questions during student sharing.

A large number of teacher-survey respondents working in substantially separate settings responded that SEL professional development for general education teachers would benefit students and would increase the likelihood that students with significant learning differences would be successful in a less restrictive environment.

Recommendations for Social-Emotional Learning

Immediate

- Utilizing the CASEL Framework for Effective SEL Programming as a model, establish the criteria for the selection of social-emotional curricula and approaches to instruction that will be used consistently within and across the schools. Suggested criteria include:
 - Addresses the five CASEL core competencies – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making
 - Research-based
 - Developmentally appropriate
 - Data-oriented
 - Inclusive (based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning)
 - Tiered
 - Culturally competent
- Analyze the various SEL curricula and approaches to instruction and adopt those that meet the criteria that have been established. We recommend, for example:
 - Responsive Classroom
 - Open Circle
 - Second Step
 - Restorative Justice.

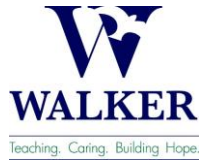
Short-Term

- Provide technical assistance for school and district leaders in implementing the adopted approaches to SEL curricula and instruction.
- Provide professional development, on-going support, and professional supervision in the adopted approaches, and Include SEL instruction as part of Standard I and Standard II of teacher evaluations.
- Analyze and adopt appropriate approaches to measuring SEL proficiency and progress
 - Investigate and adopt a screening tool to measure social-emotional goals consistently across grades to be able to track progress.
 - Consider the CASEL frameworks for guidance and link below. <Helpful link: <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/tools-assess-sel-in-schools-susanne-a-denham>>
 - Investigate DESSA screening and evaluation approaches and instruments



Long-Term

- Implement structures and processes for the on-going monitoring and adjustment of EL curricula and approaches.
- Support the building of school climates that foster growth and development for children and youth who have been the victims or witnesses of trauma
 - Address the issues of physical environment, organizational culture, activities and routines, the importance of relationship, and individualization
 - Utilizing social workers as “champions” of trauma-sensitive programming, guiding educators in their classroom to integrate the model more into the culture.
 - Establish hiring practices that help ensure that new teachers are willing and able to use trauma-sensitive approaches.
- Train administrators in alternative approaches to social-emotional-behavioral support in significant disciplinary situations including, for example, Collaborative Problem Solving, Restorative Justice, etc. Ensure that principals are familiar with the Manifestation Determination process.



Appendices

- Formats for the Evaluation
 - Data Collection Plan
 - Interview Guide
 - Observation Guide



Walker Consulting at the Walker Trieschman Institute

Fall River Public Schools: **The Evaluation of Services and Settings for Students with Disabilities**

DATA COLLECTION PLAN **(2/20/19)**

Documents to be Reviewed

Questions for written response in advance of the visits, interviews and observations:

1. What are the vision and the mission?
2. What is the philosophical orientation?
3. What models or approaches are utilized, and are these evidence-based?
4. What is the intended student target populations (primary, secondary and tertiary disability categories)?
5. If defined, what are the entrance and exit criteria for placement, and for graduating/exiting?
6. What are the adopted indicators of student success, and what student outcome data are currently collected?
7. What are the critical features of the program(s), and which features mostly strongly affect student outcomes?

Existing documents to be provided in advance of the interviews and observations:

1. Program descriptions
2. Organizational charts for district, schools, programs
3. List of professional, paraprofessional, and administrative/supervisory staff with their job titles and credentials
4. List and description of professional development and support activities currently provided
5. Student demographic data, including summaries of age, grade, gender, race, primary home and student language
6. Data on student outcomes – academic and social-emotional-behavioral
7. List of students (by initials), who have entered placements over the past 12 calendar months, indicating:
 - a. Grade at entry
 - b. Previous placement, by level of restrictiveness
 - c. Length of stay to date in the program
 - d. Subsequent placement, if any, by level of restrictiveness
8. Selected IEP's for students



Interviews to be Conducted

- Individual interviews with administrators, supervisors, and direct service staff
 - 30 minutes per interview
 - Questions on topics selected for each person
- Group interviews with students and parents
 - 60 minutes per interview
 - Questions on topics selected for each group

Observations to be Made

- Overview of the setting
 - Introductions
 - Physical tour
- Observation of the school, program, and service settings
 - Facilities – general and program-related
 - Student movement – within and around the setting
 - Climate – student interpersonal interactions, staff-student interactions, parent engagement
- Observations of specific student activities
 - Instructional – classes, labs, shops, related services, physical education, etc.
 - Social – breaks, lunch, structured social activities, etc.
 - Logistical – arrival, transitions, departure, etc.



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The Evaluation of Services and Settings for Students with Disabilities

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewee:

Date:

Interviewer:

Student Outcomes

How does the district measure student proficiency and progress among students with disabilities? How might this be improved?

How would you rate academic and social-emotional-behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities?

In inclusive settings

In specialized settings

Curriculum and Instruction

How would you describe the specific approaches to curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities?

In the academic domain

In the social-emotional-behavioral domain (SEL curriculum?)

In inclusive settings

In highly specialized programs (e.g.; Unique, Teachpoint?)



Settings and Services

What adjustments/expansions in settings and/or services would improve student progress and proficiency?

In the academic domain

In the social-emotional-behavioral domain

In inclusive settings

In specialized settings

Tiered System of Support

How would you describe current Tier 1, 2, and 3 interventions, supports and services?

In the academic domain

In the social-emotional-behavioral domain

In inclusive settings

In highly specialized programs

How are planning, decisions, and problem solving implemented in the current tiered system?

Staffing

What are the current strengths and weaknesses in staffing?

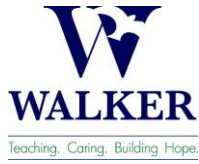
In inclusive settings

In specialized programs

In the number and types of staff in particular settings

In the professional development provided

In staff support and supervision



Organizational Support

How would you describe the strengths and weaknesses in organizational support, and how might the specific features of organizational support be improved?

Examples of specific features:

Policies and procedures

Structures and processes

Program and service definitions/descriptions

Entry/exit process and criteria

Intra-staff communication and collaboration

Teaming and team facilitation

Expert consultation to teams

Placement into specialized strands and special schools

Placement out of district

Is there anything else that you would want to share with us?



Walker Consulting at the Walker Trieschman Institute
Evaluation of Settings and Services in Public Schools
OBSERVATION GUIDE

Name of School/Program:

Consultant:

Date:

Observations of Specific Student Activities - Focus on both ACADEMIC and SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL-BEHAVIORAL teaching and learning

- Instructional Activities – classes, labs, shops, related services, physical education, etc.

Expectations for Students

Posted Rules

Posted Schedules

Displays of Student Learning – student work, progress and proficiency data

Evidence of Instructional Planning

Approach to Instructional Grouping

Approach to Teaching and Learning – roles of the staff, roles of the students

Arrangement and Utilization of Materials, Supplies, Equipment

Arrangement and Utilization of Physical Space

Student Engagement in Learning

Evidence of Student Learning



- Support Activities – Related services, social-emotional-behavioral interventions and services

- Social Activities – breaks, lunch, structured social activities, etc.

- Logistics – arrival, transitions, departure, etc.

- **Overall Impressions of Accessibility for Students with Various Disabilities**