

Review of Special Education
in the
Hastings-on-Hudson Union Free School
District



URBANCOLLABORATIVE

Leading Equitable & Inclusive Education

**Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative
Education Development Center, Inc.**

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Review of Special Education in the Hastings-on-Hudson Union Free School District

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INTRODUCTION

In fall 2016, Hastings-On-Hudson Union Free School District (HUSD or district) contracted with the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative (the Collaborative) at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), to conduct a comprehensive review of programs and services offered by the school district to students with disabilities.

Hastings-on-Hudson is located in Westchester County, New York. The town has a population of approximately 8,000. During the 2015–2016 school year, HUSD enrolled 1,573 students, of which 188 were classified as having a disability requiring an individualized education program (IEP). HUSD encompasses three schools:

1. Hillside Elementary School
2. Farragut Middle School
3. Hastings High School

HUSD’s philosophy states that “all students can learn” and “it is the district’s responsibility to prepare students with the knowledge, understanding, skills, and strategies they need to be productive, responsible citizens in a democratic society.” They “value education because it is a process which helps each individual to achieve his/her maximum potential.”¹

In October 2014, the Hastings-On-Hudson Union Free School District and the Hastings-On-Hudson Board of Education (BOE) were named in class action lawsuit, which included the current superintendent, Roy Montesano, former director of special education, Deborah Augarten, as well as, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the NYSED’s commissioner, John King, Jr. The basis for this lawsuit consisted of nine violations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400–1482 and its implementing regulations, 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.1–300.756; Article 89 of the New York Education Law (Article 89), N.Y. Educ. Law §§ 4401–4410-c, and its implementing regulations, 8 N.Y.C.R.R. §§ 200.1–200.22; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504), 29 U.S.C. § 794, and its implementing regulations, 34 C.F.R. §§ 104.1–104.61; and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 42 U.S.C. § 12132 and its implementing regulations, 28 C.F.R. pt. 35.

The nine violations cited against the district in the lawsuit are as follows:

1. Failure to properly classify children who were deemed disabled and eligible to receive special education and related services and made predeterminations with respect to children’s classification(s).

¹ District Philosophy. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.hohschools.org/>

2. Declined to consider opinions of independent evaluators during Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings.
3. Discouraged meaningful parent, teacher, and service provider participation at CSE meetings.
4. Denied the provision of requested services on erroneous grounds or without any basis
5. Failure to provide special education and related services as required per individualized education programs (IEPs) and to ensure compensatory services were provided in an appropriate amount of time when services were missed.
6. Changed special education and related services without first providing parental notification of said changes.
7. Provided special education and related services of substandard quality.
8. Compelled parents to forego educational opportunities to which they were entitled in order to receive special education and related services.
9. Refused to conduct reevaluations upon parental request.

This review was conducted as part of a settlement agreement between the plaintiffs and the district to provide insight into how the district may improve their special education processes and practices and rebuild relationships with the Hastings-on-Hudson community. This review included collection and analysis of district data, state and national data, information from focus groups and interviews with over 50 district and school-based personnel, parents and guardians of students who attend or have attended district schools.

Method

We collected and analyzed our data during the fall and spring of 2016–2017. While our interviews and focused groups occurred during this time, the quantitative data we collected represented the 2015-2016 school year. As such, the data represent a snapshot of special education at that time. It should be noted that during this time, a new administration was in the process of being formed, as the current superintendent declined to renew his contract and the current director of curriculum and instruction gave his resignation for the end of the 2016–2017 school year.

Various types of information were used to prepare this report. Over several months, Collaborative team members reviewed and analyzed data files, reports, training materials, policies and procedures, organizational charts, state records, and other documents. Additionally, this review included focus groups and interviews with over 50 district and school-based personnel and families, including Central Office administrators, principals, assistant principals, special educators, school psychologists, and therapists.

We also conducted two focus group meetings with Central Office leaders to further discuss their perceptions of the challenges facing special education and later to present our preliminary findings.

We are greatly appreciative of the support and cooperation we received from staff at all levels of the district.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

Based on qualitative and quantitative analyses, we have identified four areas of strength in HUSD as related to the education of students with disabilities. Those findings are detailed here.

Finding 1: The current director of special education has created an overall positive climate and culture and is an asset to the Special Education Department.

Special education leadership in any district is complicated and demanding work. We were impressed with the quality and passion of the newly appointed director of special education. This was also apparent in conversations we had with both families and staff, who felt the new director was working diligently to change the climate and culture and to repair community relationships, which appeared to be rooted in an overall mistrust of the district's special education programming. We were particularly impressed with the fact that when we presented our preliminary findings, the director of special education and current superintendent were not defensive but rather evidenced a desire to address the areas for improvement we had identified. Furthermore, the director of special education was responsive to all requests made for additional documentation to support this review.

Finding 2: The district has identified gaps in their continuum of special education services and continues to develop programs, services, and supports to better meet the range of needs for students with disabilities.

A major principle embedded in special education programming is for school districts to offer a full a full continuum of supports and services to meet the individualized needs of all students with disabilities. A full continuum of supports allows students to remain in their home district and school and provides them the opportunity to be educated in their least restrictive environment, which is one of the cornerstones upon which the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is predicated on. Given there are only three school within HUSD, an elementary, middle and high school, students only have one option for which in-district school they can attend. This lends to an even greater need for a comprehensive continuum of special education supports and services.

At the writing of this report, the director of special education had presented a budget to the BOE regarding additional supports and services for students with disabilities, particularly at the secondary level to accommodate those coming from the elementary level. This was done in direct response to student need and a desire to create services for students that had been parentally placed to encourage transitioning children back into the HUSD. These additional supports also included summer hours for speech and language therapists to time to create their schedules in order to provide services at the beginning of the school year. These actions demonstrated the director's thorough analysis of current supports and services and a concerted effort to ensure the district was providing the necessary services for students with disabilities to access the curriculum and make meaningful progress in the least restrictive environment.

However, the process of implementing effective special education supports and services is dependent on the schools accepting their responsibility to effectively serve all students. On this dimension, we found notable variability. A major finding of this report is the great degree of variability that exists between the three schools in the extent to which students are provided appropriate tiered supports, both academic as well as social and emotional. Consequently, families of children enrolled in HUSD expressed frustration at the degree of variability between schools and the lack of options available if they are unhappy with the supports and services offered at their child's school.

Finding 3: HUSD's overall rate of students (ages 6–22) with IEPs is 12%, which is lower than rates for the state (17%) and the nation (12.9%), indicating HUSD is aligned with the national average for identifying students with disabilities.

It is commendable HUSD has kept their identification rate in line with the national average. This is an indication that HUSD is working to ensure students are properly identified. Not all students with a disability require specialized supports and services, unless the disability is impacting their educational performance. The national average is a baseline indicator of where districts can strive to be in regards to the identification of students with disabilities. This does not mean HUSD has not erred in the past with regards to the identification of students, or that specific ineligibility cases do not warrant further scrutiny. This is simply to note the district disability identification rate is aligned with the national rate.

Furthermore, inappropriate identification of students with disabilities is one of the major concerns typically noted in district reviews. Diagnosing a child with a disability is a major life event and should not be a decision that is made lightly by school teams and outside providers. While there is some relief in identifying a student's struggles and providing necessary supports, there are also negative consequences to diagnostic labeling, including the following:²

² UCLA Center. (2017). Mental health in schools: Program and policy analysis. Retrieved from <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/diaglabel.pdf>

- **People only see the diagnosis, not the person:** A diagnostic label may come to negatively define the individual by focusing on the specific problem and downplaying many positive personal characteristics. That is, people may selectively attend to information that confirms the label while neglecting other information. For instance, parents and teachers may only attend to the time when a child diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) acts restlessly but overlook other times when the child is calm.
- **Diagnostic labels can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and stigmatization:** Diagnostic labels not only change the reputation of an individual but also alter how other people treat them. For example, teachers who expect less from a student labelled as having a learning disability may be reluctant to challenge the student and thus limit his or her opportunities to learn. Consequently, the student may be less likely to perform well in school, which only confirms the diagnostic labels, and this can also lead to negative actions toward the student (e.g., name calling, bullying).
- **Diagnostic labels may mislead understanding of cause:** For instance, the behaviors leading to a diagnosis of ADHD or a learning disability (LD) may stem from an education system that does a poor job in accommodating a student’s differences and needs or any variety of factors that constitute barriers to learning and teaching.

These are just some of the reasons why a district should exercise caution when identifying and labeling students with a disability and the rationale for why it is positive that current data finds the HUSD disability identification rate aligned with national rate.

Finding 4: Students with and without disabilities in HUSD are outperforming their counterparts in New York State on standardized assessments.

A review of student performance data indicated students with and without disabilities in grades 3–8 outperformed students statewide on the New York ELA and math standardized assessments. Students with disabilities performed slightly better than students with disabilities statewide, however, all students, on average, outperformed all students statewide by a large margin. During the 2015–2016 school year, approximately 69% of all students in HUSD who took the ELA assessment scored at or above proficient, while more than 70% of all students in HUSD who took the math assessment scored at or above proficient. Across the state, less than 40% of all students who took the ELA and math assessment scored at or above proficient for the 2015–2016 school year.

During the 2015–2016 school year, approximately 10% of students with disabilities in HUSD scored at or above proficient on the ELA assessment, compared to 8% of students with disabilities across the state. On the math assessment, approximately 18% of students scored at or above proficient, compared to 10% of students with disabilities statewide. While math scores for students with disabilities saw a steady increase from 2012 to 2016, there was a small

dip in ELA assessment scores for students with disabilities in HUSD. In our discussions with staff regarding the decline in scores, we were informed that many students with disabilities had families who decided to “opt out” of state standardized assessments, which may have impacted the overall performance percentages of the district as a whole.

I. DISTRICT ORGANIZATION AND INTERNAL STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING

Areas for Improvement

Districts and schools that are successful in raising the achievement of students receiving special education services have established a culture in which the achievement of all students is considered a shared responsibility. District, school, and classroom leaders set the tone of collective ownership and serve as primary advocates for students requiring additional supports and services to access the curriculum. Administration, faculty, and parents are integral to the successful and sustainable implementation of identified strategies to improve student performance for students with and without disabilities.³ In contrast, when districts organize themselves in siloes, with one dedicated office in charge of specific populations, the unintended impact is the overall Central Office structure focuses on students without disabilities or monolingual students and leaves the education of students who do not fit into those categories to specialized teams.

Finding 5a: In the Central Office, collaborative structures are evident; however, collaborative practices are informal, creating a disconnect between special education and general education.

In Hastings on Hudson Union Free School District (HUSD), we found the Central Office consisted of three main cabinet members: the superintendent, the director of curriculum and instruction, and the director of special education. Organizationally, the structure of the three cabinet members comprises a team, as shown in Exhibit 1. Even though the director of special education is part of the district leadership team, based on our review, it was unclear how each of these cabinet members interacted to support best practices for students with disabilities. Specifically, it was unclear how the director of special education and the director of curriculum and instruction collaborated to lead the instructional vision for all students. To be sure, there are meetings, both planned and unplanned, that take place between the Director of Special Education, the Director of Curriculum, and the Superintendent. That said, while we were told that they are in regular communication, we did not see evidence of a collaborative decision-making process operating to support all students in both general and special education. Parents and staff also referenced a disconnect between special education and general education during interviews. This further provided evidence of these two departments operating in siloes and the importance of developing a collaborative partnership.

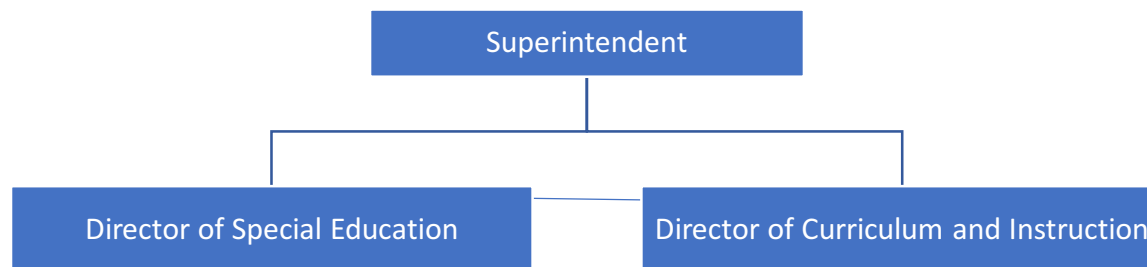
Specifically, special education services must be an intentional and coordinated effort in the district. Decisions concerning curriculum, instruction, and social emotional supports should be the joint responsibility of all cabinet members. This collaboration must live in both the Central

³ McNulty, R. J., & Gloeckler, L. C. (2011). Fewer, clearer, higher Common Core State Standards implications for students receiving special education services. Rexford, NY: International Center for Leadership in Education. Retrieved from <http://www.leadered.com/pdf/Special%20Ed%20&%20CCSS%20white%20paper.pdf>

Office and at the school level to ensure curriculum and instructional practices meet the needs of both students with and without disabilities.

In our discussions with staff, we discovered collaborative practices currently exist within the Central Office team, although, they are informal; these should be formalized with specific collaborative structures outlined. There have been challenges for HUSD in creating formalized structures at Central Office due to the high turnover rate of the director of curriculum and instruction. At the time of the writing, the current director of curriculum and instruction had resigned, which will be the fourth director of curriculum and instruction to leave the district within the last seven years. A further investigation into why this is happening is warranted. It is challenging to create consistent structures at the Central Office level when there is a constant turnover in high-level positions. It takes considerable time to find appropriate replacements for high-level district positions and additional time for new hires to become familiar with the district. The high turnover for this position could be interrupting systemic efforts to develop collaborative structures to support all students.

Exhibit 1: Central Office Organizational Structure



Finding 5b: The director of special education should have the responsibility of districtwide systemic planning as it relates to special education; however, her role and the role of the supervisor of special education are predominantly focused on facilitating all CSE meetings and writing all students' IEPs.

The director of special education is responsible for the instruction, operation, and management of special education services for HUSD, focusing the district towards a vision and implementing systemic change that should include collaboration with the teaching and learning team, joining school walk-throughs, and evaluating special education programs and services. Such work is integral to overall growth and specifically to identifying best practices and areas for improvement in the Special Education Department. Based on our discussions and review of documents, it was clear that the director did not have time to focus on this work.

During our interviews with staff we discovered that most of the director's time is spent in CSE meetings and writing IEPs. The current director is responsible for chairing all CSE meetings for students in grades 5–12 and all students in out-of-district placements. The current supervisor of special education is responsible for chairing CSE/CPSE meetings for grades pre-K–4, writing IEPs, and ensuring compliance.

This work not only includes chairing the meetings, but writing the IEP following the meeting. In addition to that, the director of special education is the first point-of-contact for all parent concerns regarding special education. We were told the director spends anywhere from 1–2 hours per day addressing parent concerns either via e-mail, phone, or in-person. While some student's IEPs and some complaints warrant the director's input, not all concerns should be the director's responsibility to address. This takes away from time spent developing best practices for instruction, collaborating with Central Office staff, monitoring special education programs, developing professional development, overseeing personnel, and managing the special education budget. To have a functioning Special Education Department, there needs to be enough time in the director's schedule to attend to these areas.

While not an official document, the following job description was described to us and represents the work the director of special education is responsible for. As chairing CSE meetings and writing IEPs takes up the majority of the director's time, there is not adequate room for the rest of her responsibilities:

- Chair CSE meetings and write IEPs for students in the initial phase of IEP development, annual reviews, those educated in out-of-district placements, and IEP amendments.
- 504 compliance officer
- Homeless liaison
- Site visits for all out-of-district programs
- Monitor data and service delivery for all special education services
- Interview and hire all special education staff (collaboratively with building administration)
- Staff observations
- Placement of teacher aides and teacher assistants
- Budget (development, approval of transportation and out-of-district tuition, contracts, and purchase orders)
- Committees (administrative council, diversity and social emotional learning, technology, community leaders, and student support team at the high school)
- Attend BOE meetings
- Oversee and develop all professional development (in the area of special education), for administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals

Finding 5c: There is a need for HUSD to develop a districtwide vision for special education.

Given the changes HUSD has seen in the last several years with various leaders, the need for a shared vision is critical. In our discussions with staff, it was clear HUSD's Special Education

Department lacked a vision and purpose to drive their work. The current director took over the district soon after the previous director, named in the class action lawsuit, resigned. Since being hired, the director has spent most of her time focused on addressing parent complaints and helping to triage the department. This has not allowed the current director ample time to develop a vision for the Special Education Department to lead the work of the organization, or if one exists, it was not mentioned to us in our interviews with HUSD staff.

Developing a vision is a necessary step in moving the organization forward and toward a common goal. The process of developing a collective vision can be time consuming, but it is necessary and particularly important for new leaders to establish a shared vision with their constituents. Vision-based leadership is distinct from management. Specifically, when complex challenges confront an organization, and change is needed, vision becomes important. If an organization's leadership only knows how to manage and not how to adapt and transform, organizational structure can suffer in times of challenge.⁴ Given the class action lawsuit and strong tensions between HUSD and the community, a clear vision for the Special Education Department is imperative.

Finding 5d: There is a need to clearly define roles and responsibilities of staff in the Special Education Department.

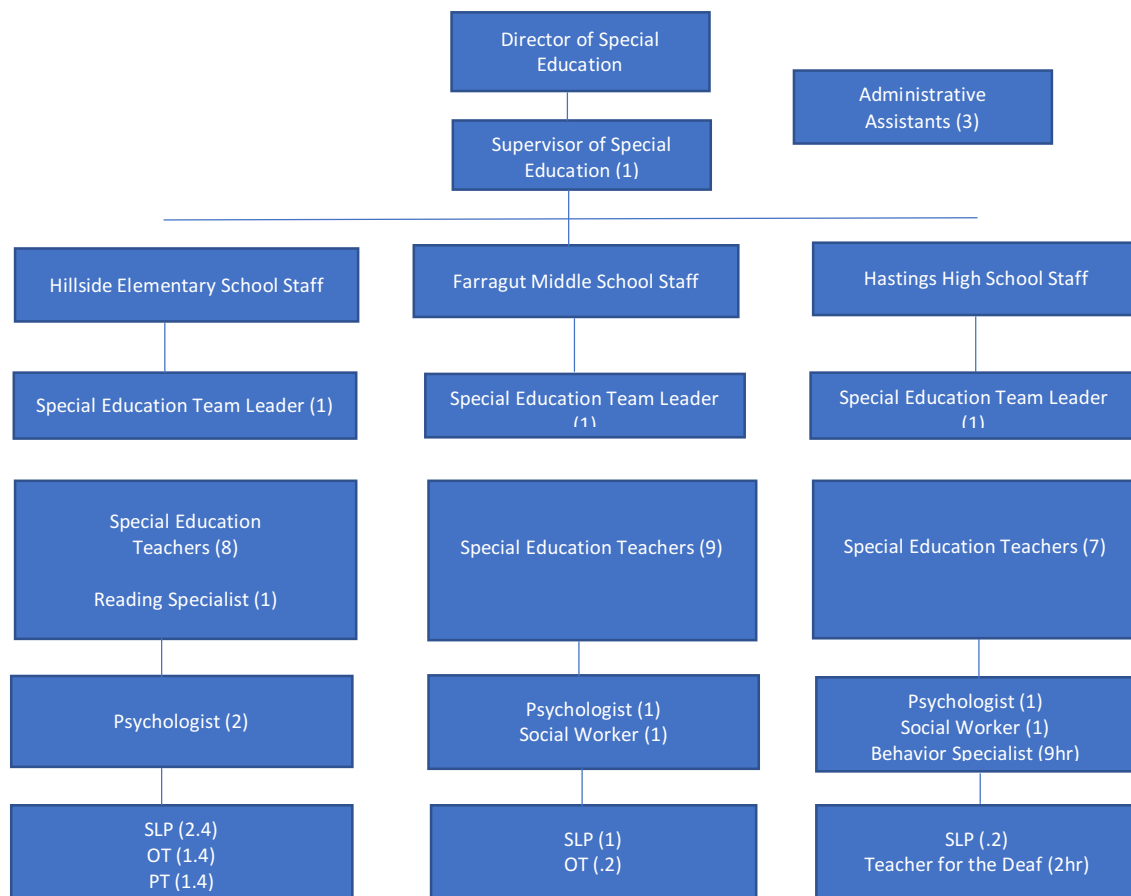
During document analysis and interviews with staff, it became clear there was confusion around specific roles and responsibilities for staff within the Special Education Department. Several staff reported they felt they were pulled in several directions and had to “wear many hats,” which took time away from providing direct services to students. This was especially relevant for staff working at the secondary level. Many explained that they spent more time completing evaluations and paperwork than they did providing necessary services to students. Providing services to students should be the primary responsibility and the first priority for special education staff. Some staff reported the high turnover in the director of special education position made it challenging to understand their roles since they constantly changed according to each new director's idea of how the workload should be managed.

Interviewees reported that a new position, supervisor of special education, was created for the 2015–2016 school year to support the director of special education. When asked, staff were unclear on the supervisor's role, and many thought she was responsible for chairing CSE/CPSE meetings for grades PK–4, writing IEPs, and ensuring compliance, which at the time was the responsibility of the Director. They did not know of any other responsibilities the supervisor had or when they should seek her support outside of CSE meetings. This created confusion across the district, as staff working at the secondary level noted little interaction with the supervisor since they believed she only supported the lower grades through chairing CSE meetings.

⁴ Archbald, D., (2013). Vision and leadership: Problem-based learning as a teaching tool. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, 12(2), 136–147. Retrieved from <http://www.journalofleadershiped.org/attachments/article/304/Archbald.pdf>

We were provided with an organizational structure and special education staffing at each building to provide more clarity on how the district staff. As shown in Exhibit 2, the organizational structure is clear. However, as with the Central Office, while the structure is clear, the work required of each position and the manner in which the roles and responsibilities interact needs to be defined.

Exhibit 2: Organizational Structure of the HUSD Special Education Department



Based on the feedback we were given from special education staff feeling their responsibilities and caseloads were growing, with many believing HUSD was understaffed, we conducted a review and comparison of the most recent HUSD staffing numbers with two local districts. We want to make clear that this data is self-reported and is therefore not verified. However, we use this information to explore whether understaffing was an issue in HUSD, as believed by many staff.

As shown in Exhibit 3, the student-to-staff ratios for special teachers and for teacher assistant/teacher aides are comparable, with all ranging between 8 to 10 students to 1 teacher or teacher assistant/aide.

Exhibit 3: Ratios of Students with Disabilities to Special Education Teachers and Educational Assistants, HUSD and Neighboring Districts

Areas of Comparison for 3 Districts	Students per Special Education Teachers	Students per Teacher Assistants/Teacher Aides ⁵
SwD-to-Staff Ratios – HUSD	10:1	8:1
SwD-to-Staff Ratios – Neighboring District #1	9:1	8:1
SwD-to-Staff Ratios – Neighboring District #2	8:1	10:1

Next, we analyzed staffing at each school, again with self-reported data from HUSD (results are shown in Exhibit 4). Based on current staffing numbers, we determined the following:

- At the elementary school:
 - 8 special education teachers
 - 1 reading specialist
 - 8 teacher assistants
 - 5 teacher aides
 - 5.5 1:1 teacher aides
 - 1 program aide
- At the middle school:
 - 9 special education teachers
 - 2.2 teacher assistants
 - 4 1:1 teacher aides
- At the high school:
 - 7 special education teachers
 - No support staff

The elementary school is the only school to employ a reading specialist. As will be discussed, based on staff feedback, there were concerns at the secondary level regarding the literacy supports available to students. Given the analysis, it appears HUSD is heavily resourced at the elementary level, but staffing resources decrease at the secondary level.

⁵ While combined in this chart, HUSD makes distinction between the role of the paraprofessional and the role of the educational assistant. Paraprofessionals provide support to students with disabilities and are managed by the special education teacher. HUSD also employs educational assistants, who have more schooling than paraprofessionals and are typically teachers in training. Therefore, they are able to provide instruction to students with disabilities; however, they are supervised by a licensed special education teacher.

Exhibit 4: Special Education Staffing at Three HUSD Schools

HUSD Special Education Staffing	Special Educators	Reading Specialist	Teacher Assistants	Teacher Aides	Teacher Aides (1:1)	Program Aides
Hillside Elementary School	8	1	8	5	5.5	1
Farragut Middle School	9	0	2.5	0	4	0
Hastings High School	7	0	0	0	0	0

While the district does not appear to be underresourced, as shown, there seem to be gaps as we move from elementary to middle to high school.

We also examined the number of speech and language pathologists and found a higher student-to-staff ratio at HUSD compared to neighboring districts (65:1 vs. 42:1). That said, 65:1 is within the standards of practices of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and therefore considered acceptable.

Finding 5e: Although some protocols and procedures in the Special Education Department are evident, there is a need to create and disseminate a standard operating procedures manual (SOPM) for the department.

Staff reported positive changes in the Special Education Department since the new director of special education came onboard. Specifically, staff felt the new director was accessible and helpful when they needed support and guidance. However, during our review, it became clear there was confusion regarding roles and responsibilities and overall processes in the Special Education Department. Staff mentioned they frequently did not know who to go to in their department or of any specific protocols in the district for special education since there were many changes in the administration over the last five years. This also came out in discussions with parents who felt a parent-friendly guide of the district’s protocols for special education would encourage effective communication between the district and families.

Additionally, in our interviews, participants made references to procedures (e.g., high-quality process across each school, special education caseloads, determining the maximum number of students in a class) that varied from school to school, and it became evident that each school had separate processes that staff and parents found confusing to follow. Lack of clarity within the organization will lead to confusion and frustration from both the staff and parents as they try to navigate a system without any consistency.

Finding 5f: Data collection is currently a challenge for HUSD; therefore, the district needs to develop a plan to create alignment between the district's student information and special education software systems.

In collecting data for this report, HUSD staff were open to fulfilling all requests, however, there were significant challenges in the data submitted. In general, we found errors and confusion in data labeling (e.g., dates, race, educational placement) and a lack of communication about the district's student information and special education software systems. Specifically, we were provided with conflicting information from the two data management systems in the district, which created challenges in verifying its accuracy. For example, when we merged general demographic and special education data, we found discrepancies in the racial identification of students. For example, students who were identified as white on the special education report were identified as either Asian, black, Hispanic, or multiracial on the general education report. Also, there were students with disabilities in the special education data set but not in the general demographic data set. For a more detailed description of these issues, see Appendix D.

The findings in this section lead us to recommend that the district create structures at the Central Office level that promote greater collaboration among those responsible for the teaching and learning of all students and systems that support effective management of special education supports and services. These will be explored in more detail in the section on recommendations.

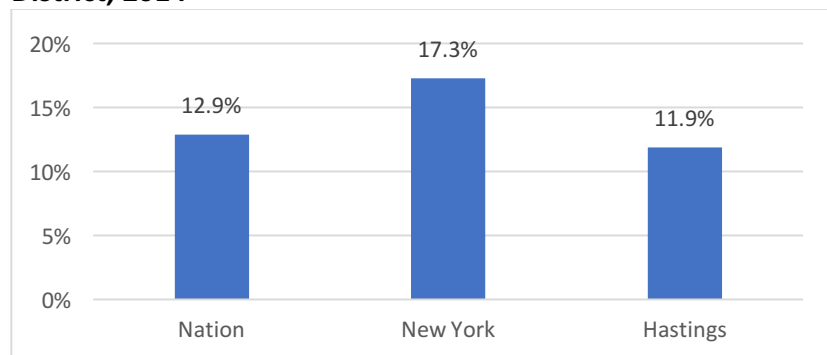
II. DEMOGRAPHICS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY

This section provides demographic information pertaining to students with disabilities who receive special education services and have an IEP. Data are summarized and compared to the state and nation as it relates to overall percentages of students with disabilities and disaggregated by disability area, gender, and age. Typically, we disaggregate also by race/ethnicity; however, due to the data issues described above and the small number of black and Latino students in HUSD, we could not conduct these analyses. We also examined the amount of time students with disabilities are educated in general education classes alongside their peers without disabilities. For much of this data, we sought to identify any unusual patterns and to then guide a review of HUSD’s referral, evaluation, and eligibility decision-making processes.

Classification Rates

We started with a more in-depth examination of one of the initial areas of strength. HUSD’s overall rate of students (ages 6–22) with IEPs is 12%, which is lower than rates for the state (17%) and the nation (12.9%), indicating HUSD is aligned with the national average for identifying students with disabilities (Finding 3), as shown in Exhibit 5.

Exhibit 5: Students with Disabilities as a Percentage of All Students: Nation, State, and District, 2014



Source: United States Department of Education. (2014-2015). IDEA Section 618 Data Products: Static Tables [2014-2015 Number of children ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, by disability and state] Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html>; New York State Education Department. (2014-2015). Hastings-on-Hudson UFSD Data [2014-2015 Enrollment Data] <https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?instid=800000035553>; 37th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (2014-2015 school year). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2015/parts-b-c/37th-arc-for-idea.pdf>.

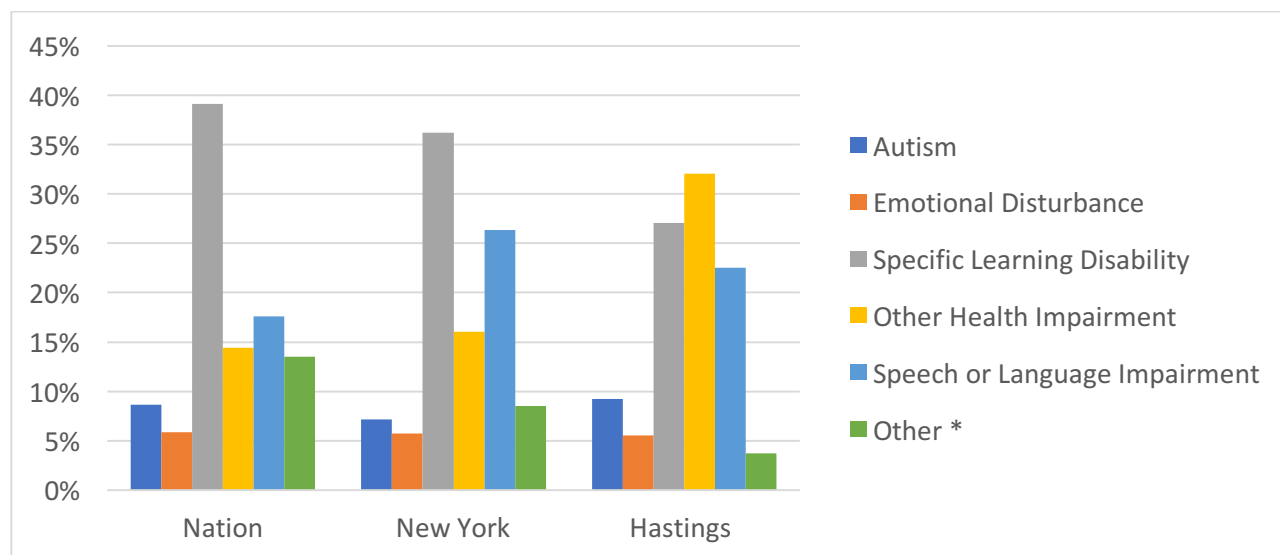
To be clear, there is no way to determine what is the “right” percentage of people with disabilities, as the majority of disability categories are subjectively determined. That said, one measure that provides a guide is the percent of students classified nationally, as shown above at 12.9% for the 2014 school year. While under by 1%, HUSD is closely aligned with the national average, and additionally, such a small percentage point in a small district does not indicate a great number of students. However, when disaggregated by disability, we noted interesting patterns emerge.

Finding 6a: *HUSD over-identifies students with Other Health Impairment (32% of all students with disabilities in HUSD) of which ADHD is included, compared to 14% of all students with disabilities nationally and 16% of all students with disabilities in the state of New York.*

Finding 6b: *HUSD under-identifies students with Specific Learning Disabilities (27% of all students with disabilities in HUSD) compared to 40% of all students with disabilities nationally and 36% of all students with disabilities in the state of New York.*

Exhibit 6 shows students with disabilities by disability classification compared by nation, state and the HUSD district. As indicated in our findings, HUSD over-identifies students with ADHD compared to the state and national averages. It is important to note that nationally, white students are overidentified in the OHI category⁶, and as HUSD is predominantly White, this data is not surprising. Conversely, HUSD under-identifies students with Specific Learning Disabilities compared to both the state and national averages.

Exhibit 6: Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Disability Classification: Nation, State, and District, 2015



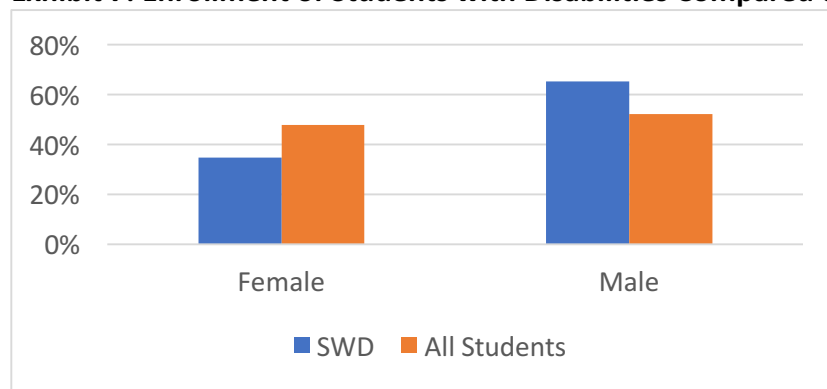
Source: District-provided data 2015-2016.; 37th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (2014-2015 school year). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2015/parts-b-c/37th-arc-for-idea.pdf>; United States Department of Education. (2014-2015). IDEA Section 618 Data Products: Static Tables [2014-2015 Number of children ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, by disability and state] Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html>

⁶ Bloom B, Cohen RA, Freeman G. Summary health statistics for U.S. children: National Health Interview Survey, 2009. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 10(247). 2010. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_247.pdf

These patterns of classification found in HUSD warrant an examination of current evaluation procedures, most prominently in the areas of OHI and SLD. Questions to consider are the evaluation criteria, assessment tools, whether the district requires a medical diagnosis to provide services to students with ADHD under OHI, whether the district uses the discrepancy or response-to-intervention model to determine SLD, and how to determine whether a student with a disability requires legal protections and accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitative Act of 1973 or the additional special education supports and services under the IDEA. Furthermore, the procedures for referral evaluation and eligibility processes should be included in the district's SOPM.

We also disaggregated data by gender. In HUSD, as in the nation, a larger percentage of boys are classified with a disability than girls. This information is shown in Exhibit 7.

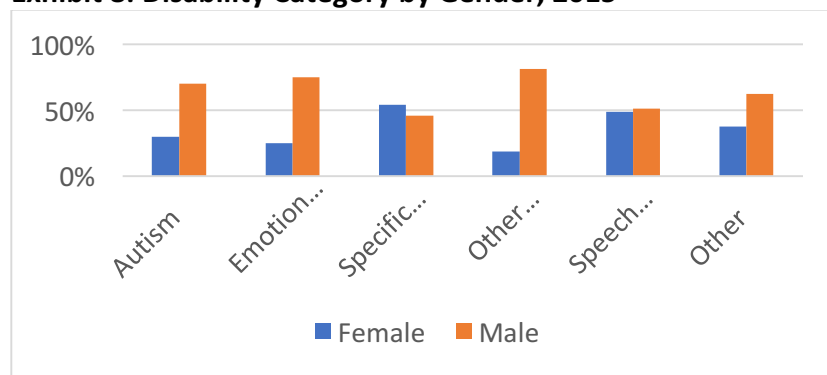
Exhibit 7: Enrollment of Students with Disabilities Compared to All Students by Gender, 2015



Source: District-provided data 2015-2016.

Further disaggregation shows that gender plays a role in students classified with autism, emotional disturbance, and OHI (Exhibit 8). There is research suggesting that rates of autism are actually higher for male students with disabilities. While there are more boys than girls classified with emotional disturbance and OHI, there is no research suggesting that these disabilities are actually more prevalent in boys than girls

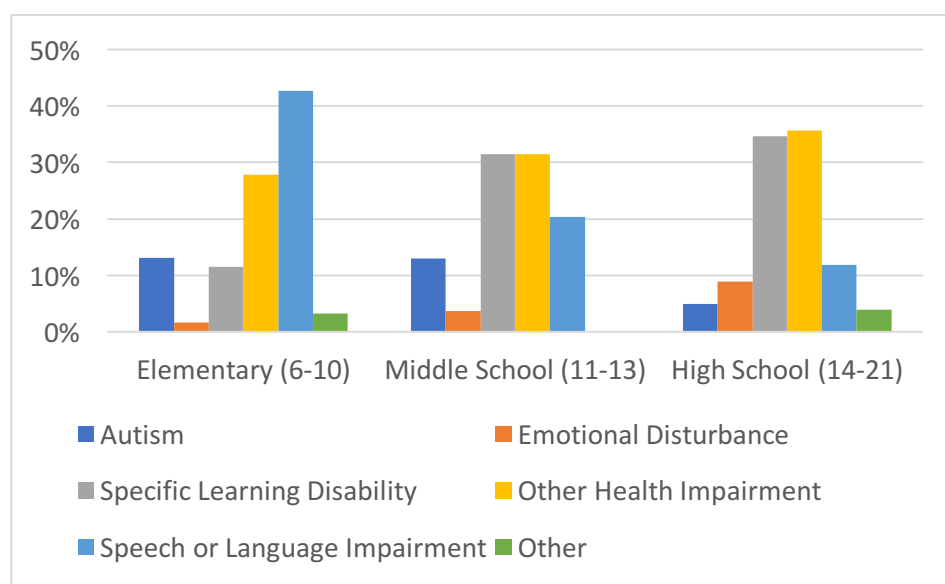
Exhibit 8: Disability Category by Gender, 2015



Source: District-provided data 2015-2016.

Finally, we examined disability classifications disaggregated by age spans. Most disability classifications are consistent throughout the grade spans, with the exception of autism and speech or language impairment (Exhibit 9). The number of students classified as autistic in HUDS is small, so the shift in percentages could likely be the difference of very few students. The decline in speech or language impairment services from elementary school to middle school to high school is appropriate, as these services are most appropriate for younger students and students of all ages with more significant disabilities.

Exhibit 9: Percentage of Students by Disability Category: Elementary School, Middle School, and High School, 2015



Source: District-provided data 2015-2016.

Educational Placement

The purpose of the IDEA is to ensure that all students with disabilities are provided with a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. This includes special education and related services designed to meet students' unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. All services are required to be provided in the least restrictive environment appropriate.

Research has consistently shown a positive relationship between effective and inclusive instruction and better outcomes for students with disabilities, including higher academic performance, higher likelihood of employment, higher participation rates in postsecondary education, and greater integration into the community. The 10-year National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS 2) described the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth, ages 13–16, who were receiving special education services in grade 7 or above when the study began in 2001. The study found

that, while more time spent in general education classrooms was associated with lower grades for students with disabilities compared to their nondisabled peers, students who spent more time in general settings scored closer to grade level on standardized math and language tests than did students with disabilities who spent more time in separate settings.⁷ Research shows also that including students with a range of disabilities in general education classes does not affect the achievement of their nondisabled peers.⁸

Similar results were recently found in a comprehensive study of school districts in Massachusetts.⁹ Students with disabilities who had full inclusion settings (spending 80 percent or more of the school day in general education classrooms) appeared to outperform similar students who were not included to the same extent in general education classrooms. On average, these students earned higher MCAS scores, graduated high school at higher rates, and were more likely to remain in their local school districts than students who were educated in substantially separate placements (spending less than 40 percent of the day in the general education classroom). These findings were consistent across the elementary, middle, and high school years as well as across test subject areas.

Local school districts are required by IDEA to provide a continuum of special education services to their students, ranging from special education supports and services provided directly or indirectly to students in the general education classroom, where most students should be placed, to special education services provided outside of the general education class and even outside of the general education school. If a student's need is so great the district cannot provide supports, the district is to provide this small population of students with an educational placement outside of the district that meets their needs. Exhibit 10 provides a visual representation of a comprehensive continuum of special education services.

⁷ Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006

Thomas Hehir & Associates. (n.d.). *Review of special education in the Houston Independent School District* (p. 25). Boston, MA: Author. Retrieved at

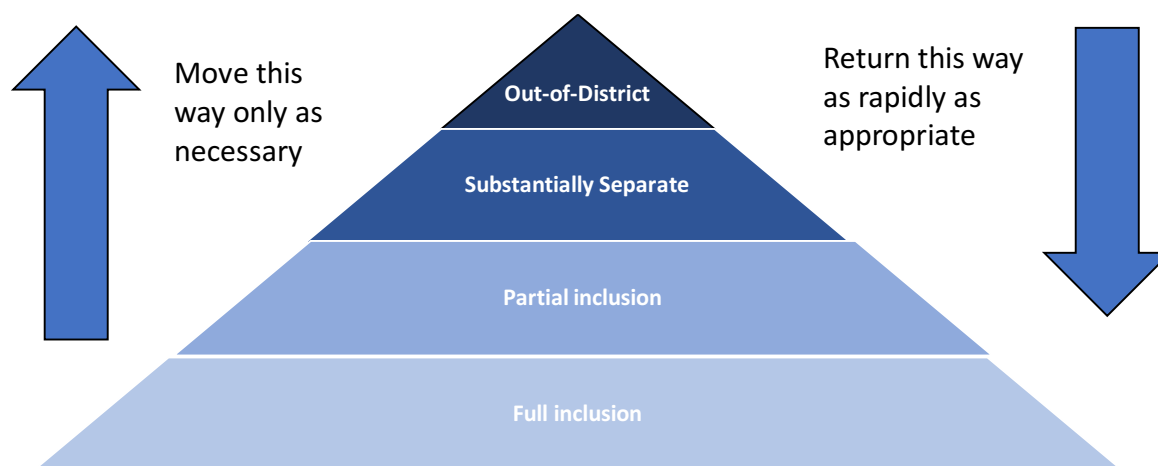
http://www.houstonisd.org/cms/lib2/TX01001591/Centricity/Domain/7946/HISD_Special_Education_Report_2011_Final.pdf

⁸ See Kalambouka A., Farrell P., Dyson A., & Kaplan, I. (2007, December). The impact of placing pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools on the achievement of their peers. *Educational Research*, 49(4), 365–382.

⁹ Thomas Hehir & Associates. (n.d.). *Review of special education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts: A synthesis report*. Boston, MA: Author. Retrieved from

<http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/249/Hehir%20SynthesisReport.pdf>

Exhibit 10: Continuum of Special Education Services



- **Full inclusion:** Instruction in general education at least 80% of the time
- **Partial inclusion:** Instruction in general education between 40% to 79% of the time
- **Substantially separate:** Instruction in general education less than 40% of the time
- **Out-of-district:** Instruction in a separate day or residential school

Finding 6c: *HUSD has a high rate of students with disabilities placed in out-of-district or private schools, with most of these students being parentally placed.*

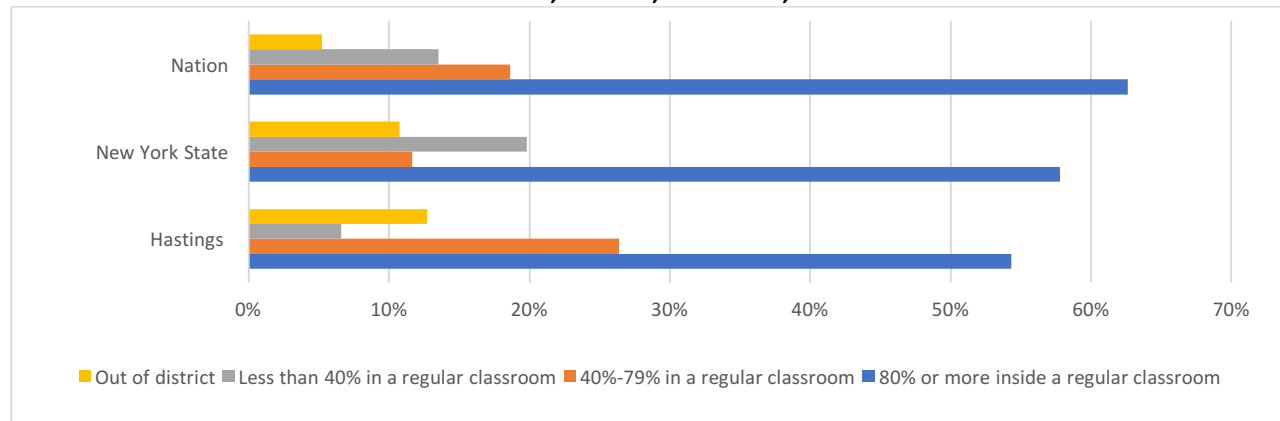
Exhibit 11 shows percentages of educational environments for the district in 2015–2016 compared to 2014–2015 state and national rates. As the national data shows, over 60% of all students with disabilities are educated for at least 80% of their time in the general education classroom, often called “full inclusion.” This is followed by less than 20% of all students with disabilities educated between 40% to 79% of their time in the general education classroom (partial inclusion), less than 15% educated in general education less than 40% of the time (substantially separate), and approximately 5% educated in in general education less than 40% of the time (separate day and residential schools).

Compared to the national data, the state of New York educates a disproportionate percentage of their students in out-of-district placements (instruction in a separate day or residential school) and substantially separate settings (less than 40% of the time in general education).

HUSD data shows a remarkable over-representation of students educated in out-of-district placements (instruction in a separate day or residential school), lower percentages of students educated in general education less than 40% of the time (substantially separate), higher percentages of students educated between 40% to 79% of their time in the general education classroom (partial inclusion), and lower percentages of students educated for at least 80% of their time in the general education classroom. The starkest of these is the disproportionate representation of students educated in out-of-district placements (instruction in a separate day

or residential school) and the smaller percentage of students educated in the district in substantially separate settings.

Exhibit 11: Educational Environment: Nation, District, and State, 2015¹⁰

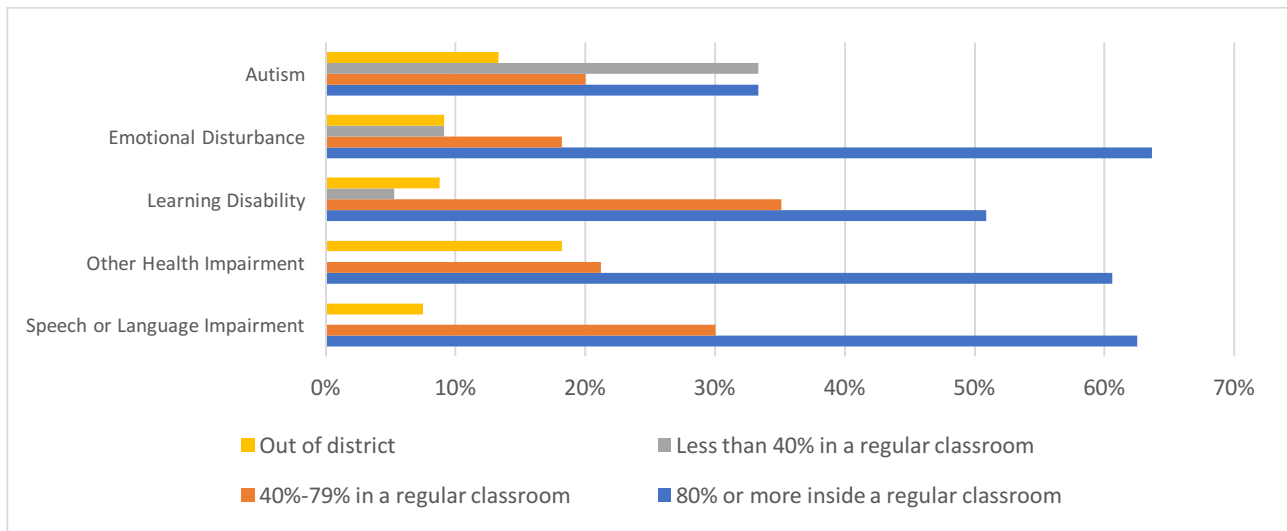


Source: District-provided data 2015-2016.; United States Department of Education. (2014-2015) IDEA Section 618 Data Products: Static Tables [2014-2015 Number and percent of children ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, by educational environment and state] Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html>; United States Department of Education. (2014-2015) IDEA Section 618 Data Products: Static Tables [2014-2015 Number and percent of children ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, by educational environment and state] Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html>

Exhibit 12 disaggregates these data further and examines educational placement for the largest areas of disability classification. In all categories but autism, HUSD provides the majority of educational services in the general education classroom, which is appropriate. From here, we see the pattern of more use of out-of-district placements and no in-district substantially separate placements with students who are classified as learning disabled, OHI, and speech or language impaired, with the greatest percentage of students educated out-of-district being those classified with OHI.

¹⁰ The data reflect 2015-16 school year data that the district provided. State and national data were reported in the 2015 37th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (2014-15 school year). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2015/parts-b-c/37th-arc-for-idea.pdf>

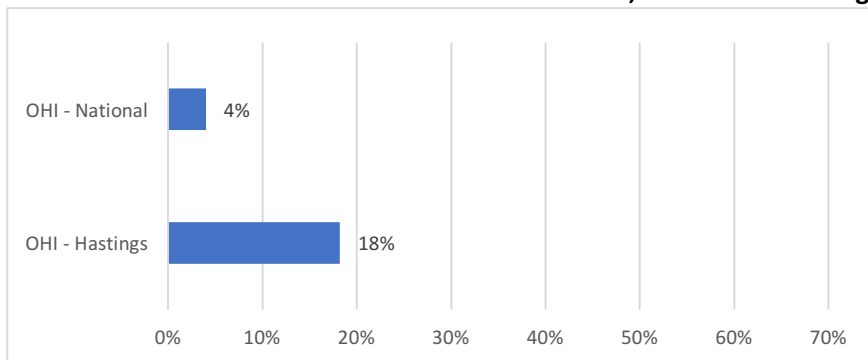
Exhibit 12: Percentage of Students in HUSD by Disability Category, 2015



Source: District-provided data 2015-2016.

Parsing this out-of-district data out further, we compared the percent of students classified with OHI (under which students with ADHD can receive services) educated in out-of-district placements between the nation and HUSD. As shown in Exhibit 13, students classified with OHI in HUSD are over four times more likely to be educated in out-of-district placements than their counterparts nationally. Typically, an out-of-district placement is used when a district cannot provide the students with the needed services. Also, students with ADHD are often provided with Section 504 protections, rather than IDEA services, as they often require accommodations rather than special education services. That such a large percentage of HUSD students classified under OHI are educated in out-of-district placements is of concern.

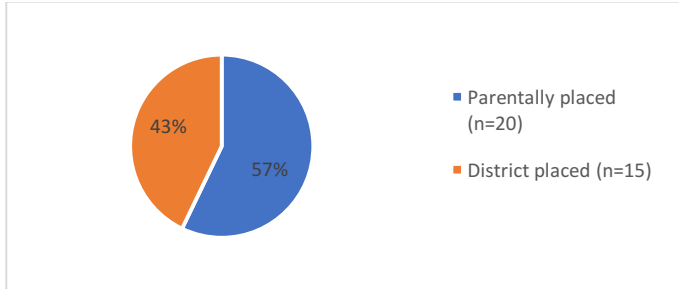
Exhibit 13: Students with OHI Placed Out of District, 2015-2016 Hastings, 2014-2015 National



Source: District-provided data 2015-2016.; United States Department of Education. (2014-2015). IDEA Section 618 Data Products: Static Tables [2014-2015 Number of children ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, by disability and state] Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html>

Disaggregating this data further, Exhibit 14 shows that the majority of students with OHI who are receiving their education in an out-of-district placement are there because parents have chosen that placement over a district placement stating the district cannot provide the appropriate services.

Exhibit 14: Out-of-District: Parentally Placed vs. District Placed, 2015



Source: District-provided data 2015-2016.

The findings in this section lead us to recommend that the district examine their evaluation procedures and monitor the number of students classified with both OHI and SLD, as well as to continue building out their special education supports and services in the district's least restrictive environment to provide students who are currently educated in self-contained classes or out-of-district schools. These will be explored in more detail in the section on recommendations.

III. HIGH QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION WITHIN A SYSTEM OF TIERED SUPPORTS

In this section, we first examine academic achievement, as measured by large-scale assessments, followed by an exploration of the framework known as *multi-tiered system of supports* (MTSS). Then we will examine HUSD's work in this area looking at both academics and social emotional supports. We end the section examining graduation rates and transition planning for students with disabilities.

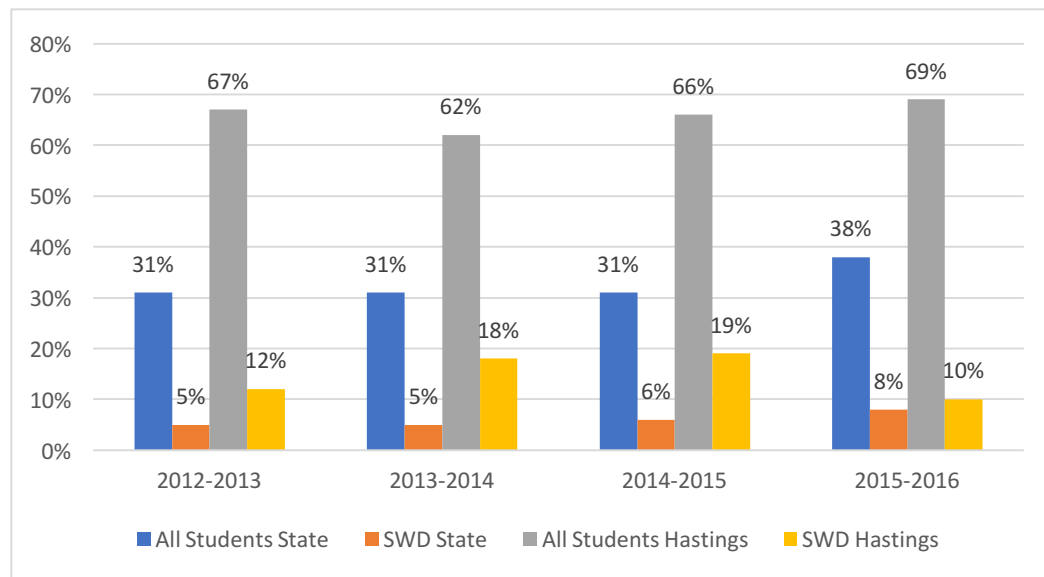
Finding 7a: In HUSD, there is a gap in academic achievement in both literacy and math between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.

As shown in Exhibit 15, students (both with and without disabilities) in HUSD performed at higher levels on the NY State ELA assessment in grades 3–8 than did their peers in the state. For all students, the percentage of all HUSD students scoring at or above proficient was approximately double the state. Students with disabilities in HUSD also outperformed their counterparts in the state at double and even triple the rate from 2012 to 2015. In the 2015–2016 school year, the HUSD rates were lower and the state rates were higher, leaving the difference between the two at only 2 percentage points.¹¹

A remarkable pattern in these data is the point gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities at the state and district level. For students with and without disabilities at the state level, the gap was an average of 27 points (ranging from 25 to 30 points), whereas for students with and without disabilities at the district level, the gap was an average of 50 points (ranging from 44 to 59 points).

¹¹ It is important to note that an increasing number of students have opted out of taking state assessments and data might look different if all students participated.

Exhibit 15: Percentage of Students Scoring at or above Proficient on NY State 3–8 ELA Assessment, 2012–2016

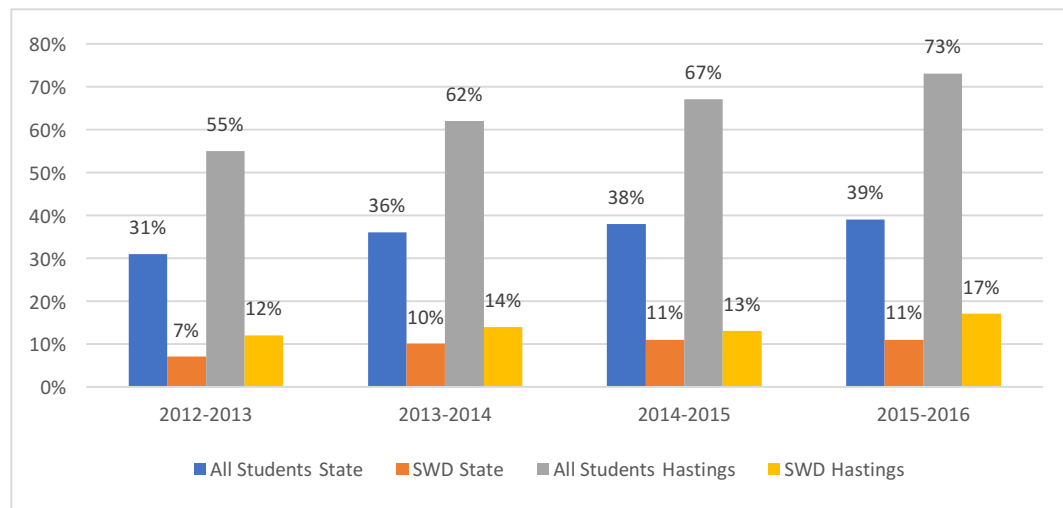


Source: New York State Education Department. (2014-2015). Hastings-on-Hudson UFSD Data [2014-2015 3-8 ELA Assessment Data]<https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?instid=800000035553> ; New York State Education Department. (2014-2015). New York State Education Data [2014-2015 New York State 3-8 ELA Assessment Data

Similar patterns were found in mathematics. While the gaps were smaller than in ELA, as shown in Exhibit 16, students (both with and without disabilities) in HUSD performed at higher levels on the NY State mathematics assessment in grades 3–8 than did their peers in the state. Students with disabilities in HUSD also outperformed their counterparts in the state.

A similar pattern of gaps between students with and without disabilities at the state and district level were found in the mathematics data. The point gap for students with and without disabilities at the state level was an average of 26 points (ranging from 24 to 28 points), whereas the gap for students with and without disabilities at the district level was an average of 50 points (ranging from 43 to 56 points).

Exhibit 16: Percentage of Students Scoring at or above Proficient on NY State 3–8 Math Assessment, 2012–2016



Source: New York State Education Department. (2014-2015). Hastings-on-Hudson UFSD Data [2014-2015 3-8 Math Assessment]; New York State Education Department. (2014-2015). New York State Education Data [2014-2015 New York State 3-8 Math Assessment.

Finding 7b: HUSD does not have a consistent multi-tiered system of academic and behavioral supports, especially at the secondary level.

Multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a relatively new term for what we know to be good teaching. MTSS has incorporated the idea that the more complex the learner is, the more intensive support they need, both in academics and in the social-emotional realm. MTSS says that all students must have high-quality instruction (Tier 1). There will be a small group of students who need a bit more support, and they might receive skill building in a small group (Tier 2). After high-quality instructional and supplemental supports have been tried, there will be a smaller group of students who need a bit more intensive supplemental supports (Tier 3). These multi-tiered supports should be offered to all students for all academic subjects and social-emotional supports.

The beneficial use of an MTSS¹² framework is that it draws from the strong research base that highlights both Response to Intervention (RTI) and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). An MTSS framework implemented with fidelity integrates assessment and intervention in a school-wide, multi-tiered prevention system to “maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems.”¹³

¹² Commonly, the term multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is used to refer to a framework that supports academic achievement and positive behavior; the term is used in the recently reauthorized federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

¹³ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (n.d.) Response to Intervention. Retrieved from <http://www.k12.wa.us/RTI/default.aspx>

The MTSS framework relies on high-quality general education instruction, which is aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) curriculum and is differentiated to provide all students with a meaningful opportunity to learn. MTSS builds on the Common Core to provide a framework and a set of critical and additional time to support teaching and learning at differing levels of intensity, depending on the needs of the student. In this way, the CCSS articulates the “what” in teaching, and MTSS provides a framework for “how and when” to provide it¹⁴. As succinctly described by the Council of the Great City Schools¹⁵:

In short, MTSS employs a problem-solving process that helps match instructional resources and focus to educational needs; makes the instructional adjustments necessary for continued improvement in both student academic performance and students’ rates of progress; and assesses the effectiveness of instruction/interventions on student outcomes. MTSS is also designed to be preventive in nature because it uses a variety of early warning signs to ensure that educators can work to accelerate student progress before it is too late. Furthermore, MTSS provides an earlier and more appropriate identification of students who are not on track academically, and allows differentiated instruction and intervention as soon as a need is identified. So, students do not have to exhibit significant academic failure or behavioral difficulties before they receive support.

When teaching and learning in general education is culturally competent¹⁶, based on universal design for learning¹⁷, and supports diverse learners, achievement for all students should increase and the special education identification process should be more effective and free from unintended bias¹⁸. The process of developing a systemwide MTSS creates a shared sense

¹⁴ This reference to when to provide MTSS is not to be confused with any timing specified in school or district pacing guides, which provide information on “when” to teach a concept or skill. See Gamm, S., Elliott, J., Halbert, J. W., Price-baugh, R., Hall, R, Walston, D., Casserly, M. (2012). Common Core State Standards and diverse urban students: Using multi-tiered systems of support. Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools.

¹⁵ Gamm, S., Elliott, J., Halbert, J. W., Price-Baugh, R., Hall, R, Walston, D., Casserly, M. (2012). Common Core State Standards and diverse urban students: Using multi-tiered systems of support. Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools. Retrieved from <http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/87/77--Achievement%20Task%20Force--RTI%20White%20Paper-Final.pdf>

¹⁶ “Cultural competence enables educators to work effectively across cultures their students represent. Competence in school settings is a process based on a clearly defined set of core values and principles that support policies, practices, behaviors, attitudes, and structures that enable educators to work effectively across the cultures their students represent. The system must develop the capacity not only to value diversity, but to manage the dynamics of diversity. A second element of cultural competence is to acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and adapt to diversity in the contexts of the communities being served.” Elam, D., Robinson, S., & McCloud, B. (n.d.). New directions for culturally competent school leaders: Practice and policy considerations. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, College of Education, David C. Anchin Center. Retrieved from http://anchin.coedu.usf.edu/publication/policybrief/PolicyBrief_Issue_1-1.pdf

¹⁷ 10 CAST, retrieved from <http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.VrFH21KrbUk>

¹⁸ The suggested activities are not intended to be a blueprint or exclusive. They are provided as a basis for discussion and further development.

of urgency among all stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for all students and articulate an accountability system for results.

Districts use the MTSS framework to ensure (1) the development of core curriculum and tiered supports for all students; (2) that students identified as needing special education services have ample opportunities to receive evidence-based instruction and interventions in reading, math, and social-emotional supports; and (3) that their disability identification (as needing special education services) is not based on a lack of such opportunities. In this way, districts are also better able to mitigate any disproportionality in racial/ethnic disability identifications due to lack of instruction. Research also shows that the use of MTSS to support intensive interventions for all students leads to higher achievement for students with IEPs.¹⁹

HUSD currently has an inconsistent written structure and process to guide its implementation of a comprehensive MTSS for improved academic achievement and positive behavior. There is no consistency in how MTSS is utilized across the district. In focus groups, we were told some practices across the three schools have MTSS elements. For example, Hillside Elementary School has a 98-page document outlining the MTSS process, with corresponding forms to track student data and monitor progress. Farragut Middle School has a two-page referral form, and Hastings High School has no referral form, only a description of classes and a letter for parents stating their child has been placed in an intervention class based on their most recent state standardized test scores. Farragut Middle School was the only school to have a PBIS guide for both staff and parents.

Finding 7c: A review of special education programming revealed HUSD lacks evidence-based literacy interventions for students at all grade levels, specifically at the secondary level.

Based on our discussions with staff, it was determined HUSD currently lacks evidence-based literacy interventions, specifically at the secondary level. Teachers at the elementary level have several different reading interventions they can use as well as support from a reading specialist if they have students who are struggling readers. When we spoke to staff at the secondary level, this was not the case. Several staff reported they were not trained in any specific literacy interventions, and reading specialists did not support the upper grades, namely middle school and high school.

This concern was mirrored by itinerant staff as well, who felt literacy instruction for students with learning disabilities or communication impairments were lacking at the secondary level. Many staff felt they were unable to support students with reading challenges based on limited intervention options and training for staff.

¹⁹ See, for example, research published by the RTI Action Network, retrieved at <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/research>, and by the Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes for Research, retrieved at <http://www.rti4success.org/search?keywords=research>

It was also unclear what benchmarking and progress monitoring process was used at the secondary level for students who required reading interventions. This created an additional challenge since Lexile scores, or some other measure used to identify struggling readers at the secondary level were known, and what, if any interventions were used to support these students. This was also the case for students who had significant reading challenges, as staff were unsure of what programs were available at the middle and high school levels for students in need of explicit reading instruction. This did not mean that the district does not have interventions for reading, but there appeared to be a lack of knowledge at the building level as to what these interventions were and how teachers could receive training in order to use them in their daily instruction.

Students whose academic performance is significantly lower than their grade-level peers require intensive intervention. Research shows interventions delivered through direct instruction plus strategy instruction produce the highest effects. Such interventions include three key components:

- Explicit instruction
- Systematic instruction
- Opportunities for student response and feedback²⁰

There are several considerations when creating and providing an intensive instructional program for students with learning challenges. First, educators must consider whether instruction is responsive to the cognitive processing difficulties of the students they are working with. Many students with difficulties in reading have executive functioning or self-regulation problems that interfere with their success. Research suggests that integrating strategies that support cognitive processing through academic instruction may help students make progress.

Second, educators must consider whether they are sufficiently differentiating instructional delivery to meet the learning needs of students who typically require more explicit and systematic instruction. Third, educators must consider whether they are providing students with adequate instructional time, as many students with learning challenges require additional time with appropriate instruction, practice, and feedback. Lastly, educators must consider the extent to which the learning environment promotes opportunities to respond to an instruction aligned with students' learning needs. Smaller learning groups can foster this type of learning environment for students who are unable to make progress in reading.²¹

Based on our conversations, there is a reading and math intervention class; however, in order to qualify for entrance into that class, the student would need to have failed the New York state standardized assessment. This is the benchmark used to determine if students meet the

²⁰ Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., Murray, C. S., Roberts, G. (2012). Intensive interventions for students struggling in reading and mathematics: A practice guide. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction.

²¹ Ibid.

criteria. However, it was unclear what type of interventions educators use in this classroom and if the interventions met the criteria for explicit and systematic instruction. Furthermore, we were told that many parents of students with disabilities have opted out of the state's standardized assessment, so many of the district's most needy students may not be selected for the intervention class because they did not take the state assessment.

- Based on our review, we highlighted the areas of instruction in which we felt HUSD could improve. Specifically, regarding the literacy interventions, providing staff training and professional development, creating a strong multi-tiered system of supports for both academic and behavioral areas, and using school psychologists in a manner conducive to supporting the large population of OHI students in the district.

Finding 7d: HUSD has not adopted standards and a framework for social/emotional learning and, further, does not consistently develop and implement functional behavioral assessments and behavior intervention plans.

Based on our review of documents and interviews with staff, the district has no consistent PBIS model. Currently, only the middle school appears to be using a PBIS model with fidelity. The district provided us with a guide created for the middle school staff explaining how the PBIS model works. There was also a letter sent home to parents explaining the benefits of PBIS and how the middle school is using it to promote positive behavior throughout the school.

The elementary and high school did not have a formalized PBIS model, although they were using some components of PBIS. It is recommended that there be districtwide professional development for all staff to understand and implement a PBIS model so there is continuity and consistency across all schools. This will promote positive behavior supports and interventions for all students. It may be beneficial for the middle school staff to develop a training for all staff if their current model is working to support students.

SEL principles that work well within the framework of Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), which includes, as does MTSS, tiered support and interventions. Therefore, teaching the SEL principles of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making within SWPBIS will simply require avenues of support depending on student need.

Finding 7e: With only half of students with disabilities planning to apply to a four-year college, effective transition planning in HUSD can be improved.

When examining graduation rates, it is clear that the rates are high in HUSD for students with and without disabilities. That said, during the 2015-2016 school year, while 65% of general education students receive Regents with Advanced Designations, no students with disabilities have received Regents with Advanced Designations. In addition, during this time, most of the students without disabilities planned to go to a four-year college, while approximately half of students with disabilities planned to go to a four-year college. While this is one year's data and

a small group, there is reason to notice as special education should level the playing field between those with and without disabilities. In particular, there is a requirement and tools to support transition services, meant to help the IEP team focus the trajectory of students with disabilities starting no later than age 16. We want to encourage the district to use transition services to support graduation with advanced designations and prepare students to attend and succeed in four-year colleges.

The findings in this section lead us to recommend that the district develop high quality and inclusive instruction within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that includes academics (in particular, literacy supports) and SEL (that includes the use of FBAs and BIPs). These will be explored in more detail in the section of the report on recommendations.

IV. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Areas for Improvement

Finding 8a: HUSD is working to develop positive relationships; however, continued challenges exist in developing positive relationships between families and teachers and families and district leadership, with noticeably strained relationships between SEPTA and the Special Education Department.

The final section of this report addresses community engagement. During our time with HUSD, we spoke to numerous families regarding their experiences with HUSD and their children's special education services. Parents were very open and willing to speak to us about their experiences.

To begin, families described feeling positive about their relationship with the new director of special education. They were clearly impressed with the amount of time she gave to families, her willingness to listen and make decisions based on student need, and her general openness to change. Parents and staff also discussed the positive change in the climate and culture at CSE meetings since the current director came onboard. The positive feedback we received led us to believe HUSD was encouraging parents' participation in CSE meetings and not recommending parents forgo opportunities to which they were entitled to receive special education and related services, as stated in the original complaint filed.

While the positive relationship between families and the director was clear, it was equally clear that there remained general tensions between families and school staff and specific tensions between SEPTA and the Special Education Department. Specifically, several parents noted negative interactions with the school and often referenced a feeling of mistrust. Many parents stated it was a "constant battle" with the district, and some parents stated that they had to "take legal action" to get their child the needed supports. Other parents explained that there were excellent teachers in the district but expressed concerns that not all teachers understood how to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Many parents said that there was an "uneven" or "inconsistent" approach to special education and that the department lacked an overall systemwide approach. Most often parents cited a lack of communication between HUSD and home, with many parents explaining that they believed they were informed too late of issues going on at school.

In contrast, during our interviews with staff, many expressed concerns about constant worry they would "lose their job" and feeling pressure to make sure all parents were happy. Several staff stated that they felt intimidated about giving their professional opinion if it would cause a parent to become upset. Staff expressed concerns about staff turnover, specifically at the Central Office level, and noted constant changes with new leaders coming in and out of the

district. They explained that they felt this created a culture of uncertainty and instability throughout the district.

Overall, it was clear there were significant tensions that both the district and community would need to address to create a collaborative environment where all parties are able to focus on providing effective special education supports and services. In our overall review of the district, we believe great strides have been made towards addressing parent concerns and the district's attempt to remedy some of the reported wrongdoings of the previous director of special education. Specifically, the district staff and administrators reported they are working with parents to ensure students are appropriately classified, that predeterminations are not occurring prior to meetings, and that appropriate supports and services are provided. In cases where parents reported predeterminations had occurred, the new director of special education has addressed it in an expeditious manner.

HUSD is also working to ensure all independent evaluators have a voice at the table and feel welcome at meetings, including encouraging parent and staff feedback at CSE meetings. This is clearly evidenced by the current director's availability to parents and willingness to be the first line of contact when concerns arise. While we recommend the district develop a protocol for communicating with the director, we believe that families appreciate and understand the efforts that have been made. This includes scheduling opportunities for parents to learn more about the special education process and morning coffee meetings, where parents have the chance to connect with staff and administration around special education issues.

HUSD is also working diligently to guarantee services are delivered per students' IEPs, and if services are missed, then students are provided compensatory services for missed sessions. This was evidenced by the new system that was put in place to track all related services, and specifically speech and language. The Special Education Department also created a letter that parents would receive when services were missed to notify parents of missed services and the district's plan to make up these services at a later date.

Finding 8b: Families of students with disabilities expressed concerns with district practices, including communication between school and home, training and professional development for staff, missed services in IEPs, and transition services for secondary students with disabilities.

Taking into account the positive steps HUSD has taken, it is our belief that many of the issues concerning special education and HUSD are rooted in a historical distrust of the district's intentions and delivery of services for students with disabilities. Through our interviews, data reviews, and discussions with parents and community members after the class action lawsuit was filed, we understood that there were ongoing concerns that some staff in leadership could derail the work that had been done by the current administration. This requires immediate attention from HUSD to build strong relationships between the schools and community. In our interviews with parents and staff, we noted a prevalent theme of blaming each other regarding

service delivery, eligibility determinations, and overall supports for students with disabilities across the district.

Specifically, SEPTA, the parent-led organization for students with disabilities in the district, conducted a parent survey in June 2016. The overall response to the survey was high, which provided us with rich data regarding parents' perceptions of the Special Education Program in HUSD in 2016. Overall, 89% of parents that responded to the survey felt positive changes had been made since the new director of special education came onboard and other staffing changes were made. Specific positive changes noted include the following:

- **IEPs:** Across schools, parents felt that IEPs were well-written and in terms they could understand.
- **Principals:** Nearly half of the respondents (42%) felt the principals support special education for their child, which was especially strong at the middle and high schools.

There were also clear areas of concern that we found noteworthy:

- **Communication:** 50% of parents viewed communication between school and home favorably, 21% fell into the neutral category and 19% reported not favorable. Specifically, most of the respondents believe that communication is parent-driven and does not occur on a regular basis unless initiated by the parent. Respondents also felt there were no case managers to give them one point of contact to regularly communicate with about their child's progress.
- **Information:** 40% of the parents viewed the information they received from the CSE favorably, while 36% reported not favorable. Specifically, it was noted that schools should do a better job of helping parents understand their children's needs and progress in school, as well as, provide additional resources or information as at-home supports for parents.
- **Training and professional development:** Fewer than half of all parents felt their child's current teacher understood their child's needs. This included both general and special education teachers. Open-ended responses from respondents noted both teachers and teachers' aides would benefit from additional training, specifically in dyslexia, ADHD, autism, and auditory processing disabilities.
- **Missed services:** 40.5% of parents reported their child had missed special education services at least once per month or were unclear of services their child may have missed. Additionally, 32% of respondents reported that the district never or only sometimes provides the services mandated in the IEP or 504 plan to their child.
- **Transition services:** Fewer parents responded regarding transition services; however, of the small sample of parents that did respond, 32% reported that the

school does not provide information about agencies that can assist their child in transition services.

SEPTA reported additional downward trends from the 2013 survey that was conducted. Most notably were the following:

- **Teachers:** In 2013, 58% of parents felt teachers were willing to discuss their child's needs; however, in 2016, only 49% of parents felt teachers were willing to discuss their child's needs.
- **ICT classroom:** In 2013, 78% of parents were pleased with the structure of the ICT classroom, and 68% found this classroom to provide benefits to their child. However, in 2016, 51% of parents were pleased with the structure of the ICT classroom, and 47% felt it provided a benefit to their child.
- **Special area teachers:** In 2013, 43% of parents felt special area teachers (e.g., art, music, PE) understood their child's needs; however, in 2016, only 13% of parents felt special area teachers understood their child's needs.

The findings in this section lead us to recommend that the district continue to build positive relationships and communication strategies between HUSD and the community. These will be explored in more detail in the section of the report on recommendations.

Conclusion

Hastings-on-Hudson's special education services have significant areas of strength. The current director of Special Education has created an overall positive climate and culture. The district has identified gaps in their continuum of special education services and is developing programs, services and supports to meet needs of students. The district's rate of students classified with a disability is aligned with the national average and importantly, students, both with and without disabilities are outperforming their counterparts in New York State, as measured by standardized assessments.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Create structures at the Central Office level that promote greater collaboration among those responsible for the teaching and learning of all students.

Recommendation 1a: Structure the three cabinet members—the Superintendent, director of special education, and the director of curriculum and instruction—to promote greater collaboration among all responsible for the teaching and learning of all students and develop a multi-tiered system of supports.

In Hastings-on-Hudson Union Free School District (HUSD), we found that the Central Office consisted of three main cabinet members, as seen in Exhibit 1: the superintendent, the director of curriculum and instruction, and the director of special education. Even though the director of special education is part of the district leadership team, based on our review, it was unclear how each of these roles interact to support best practices for students with disabilities. In our discussions with staff, we discovered that while some collaborative practices exist within the Central Office team, they are informal. Specifically, it was not clear how the director of special education and the director of curriculum and instruction collaborated as part of this team to drive instruction for all students, and it appeared these two departments operated in silos, as opposed to collaboratively to support all students in both general education and special education. In creating a core instructional team at the Central Office level, it is important that all curricular decisions come from a collaborative effort between the director of special education and the director of curriculum and instruction. There should be a clear vision and mission developed by the three cabinet members and shared collectively with all faculty and staff within HUSD.

There have been challenges for HUSD in creating formalized structures in Central Office due to the high turnover rate of the director of curriculum and instruction. It is challenging to create consistent structures at the Central Office level when there is constant turnover in high-level positions. At the time of the writing, the current director of curriculum and instruction has resigned. This will be the fourth director of curriculum and instruction to leave the district within the last seven years. A further investigation into why this is happening is warranted. It takes considerable time to find appropriate replacements for high-level district positions and additional time to become familiar with the district. The high turnover for this position could be interrupting systemic efforts to develop collaborative structures to support all students.

We suggest a clear intersection of the roles of the superintendent, the director of special education and the director of curriculum and instruction with the task of developing a collective vision for instructional practices across the district. We recommend the district formalize their collaborative structures with regular meetings and the task of creating an instructional vision. These meetings could include both a record of minutes and action steps for the Central Office team to establish accountability and consistency among the team. We further recommend a

separate meeting for the director of curriculum and instruction and the director of special education to discuss specific instructional practices and identify tiered supports for all students. The work of this team could include such tasks as creating tools as well as a schedule of collaborative walkthroughs of buildings to identify additional areas that require coaching and support with regards to instructional practice.

Recommendation 1b: Structure the Special Education Department to promote more effective and efficient supports to schools. Specifically:

- *Develop a clear districtwide vision for special education.*
- *Define the role of the director of special education to focus on districtwide vision and systems, professional development, and troubleshooting complex issues (including IEPs).*
- *Define the roles and responsibilities of special education staff (e.g., supervisor, team leaders, school psychologists, related service providers, clerks).*

As described above, the district needs a vision for what they want special education services to accomplish. It is our recommendation that the district go through a process in which there is a collaborative effort to develop this vision that includes internal stakeholders across the district and is clearly messaged to external stakeholders across the community.

In terms of staffing the department, the Special Education Department appears to be a resource-rich organizational structure with a focus on student outcomes. We do not recommend significant changes to the organizational structure, but we do recommend a critical analysis of the roles and responsibilities of each position. To begin, it appears that under the current structure the director of special education spends a significant amount of time attending CSE meetings, as well as writing and reviewing IEPs. While this is more common in smaller districts, the director's time must be focused on improving special education services for the district, and she should be available to attend any meeting that requires input from a top-level official.

Specifically, the director of special education is responsible for chairing all meetings for students enrolled in grade 5 and above, including out-of-district and parentally placed students. The supervisor of special education is responsible for chairing meetings for early intervention services, pre-K students, and all students up to grade 4. Both the director of special education and the supervisor of special education are equally responsible for chairing CSE meetings and writing all IEPs in the district. As stated, the director of special education should be available to attend any CSE meeting that requires a director's input and oversight, but she should not be needed for all meetings. One model HUSD could consider is having annual CSE meetings chaired by staff at the building level, while initial and reevaluation meetings are chaired by the supervisor of special education. Our recommendation is to closely examine and redefine roles in the Special Education Department to maximize resources and allow the director of special education to focus on systemic practices, as opposed to writing IEPs and attending the Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings.

Additionally, a critical examination of the role and responsibilities of the supervisor of special education will allow the director of special education to collaborate more effectively with the director of curriculum and instruction, as discussed previously. This collaborative partnership will allow both directors to make decisions about curriculum and instruction and create consistent messaging across the district regarding best practice. This collaboration is critical in developing appropriate interventions to support all students. We recommend the Central Office team focus on developing a strong instructional core, centered on quality instruction and tiered interventions to benefit all students. We encourage a shift towards a focus on instruction and intervention, which may reduce the need for referrals to special education across the district.

Overall, district staff were proud of their attention to compliance and felt they had made improvements in this regard since the new director of special education came on board. However, continued struggles were noted with regards to the delivery of related services, particularly speech and language services. It was reported there were continued challenges in maintaining the large caseload of students requiring speech services and ensuring these services were delivered consistently. Specifically, it seemed the reporting process for tracking the delivery of related services was confusing and cumbersome. Some staff stated that they spent exorbitant time doing paperwork to track whether students received special education services. Staff said this practice took away from critical time they could use to deliver direct services to students. We recommend the district review the current process and determine if there is a way to streamline how related services are tracked and monitored. This will allow related service staff more time to provide direct services and monitor progress, as opposed to spending more time completing paperwork, which does not provide any benefit to students' learning.

Recommendation 2: Create systems that support effective management of special education supports and services.

Recommendation 2a: Develop a human capital strategy to provide appropriate staffing where needed, training, and professional development districtwide.

Based on our review of related service staff, we noticed there were several part-time staff that were contracted employees. The district may want to look at each of these roles and contracts and determine if it would make more sense to hire one full-time employee (FTE) as a district employee in specific areas. This is especially apparent in the Occupational Therapy Department and speech and language. If the district is having trouble meeting the demand for speech and language services, it would make more sense to turn the 0.6 FTE into a full-time role. It is recommended the district do a cost analysis of how much they spend in compensatory services, as opposed to converting the part-time role into a full-time role.

Furthermore, considering the high rate of special education teachers, educational assistants, and related service providers, interviewees also consistently cited the challenges in providing direct services to students with disabilities and ensuring that caseloads were managed appropriately. To appropriately manage special education caseloads in HUSD, we recommend the following human capital strategy:

- **Assess certain roles and responsibilities.** We strongly encourage HUSD leadership to use staff more flexibly and innovatively. Based on the recommendations provided above, we have included some additional recommendations for special education staff. During our review, we uncovered some additional roles that might not be maximizing their potential. We suggest conducting a deeper analysis into these roles and assessing if there are additional roles to examine:
 - a. *Special education teachers:* It appears that special education teachers have very small caseloads compared to other districts. It is unclear how the days of each of these teachers are structured and how much time they devote to direct service of students. While acknowledging that teaching is the most important focus for special educators, we recommend one potential option would be to have special education teachers run the annual IEP meetings for their caseloads of 8–10 students. This will create one point of contact for general education teachers and parents and allow these general education teachers to fully understand the IEP that is written for the student. This would also allow the director of special education and the supervisor of special education more time to focus on instructional practices, as they would chair the initial and reevaluation meetings for students. If this option is not feasible, we encourage a deep analysis of the role and consideration of using these special education teachers more flexibly to support the IEP process, specifically IEP development and compliance.
 - b. *School psychologists:* Based on our review, it seemed school psychologists had the largest caseloads and a significant amount of responsibility with regards to chairing 504 meetings, assessing students, and paperwork. This was in addition to being a member of any pre-referral meetings and data collection. It is recommended the district review the roles and responsibilities of the school psychologists and determine if there is a more efficient way to structure their time to directly support students and develop a strong positive behavior and interventions (PBIS) model across the district.
 - c. *Educational assistants:* As discussed earlier, there should be a review of HUSD's disproportionate reliance on educational assistants compared to special educators and how these staff are used.
 - d. *Coverage:* HUSD leadership must ensure that students with disabilities have access to instruction by ceasing the practice of pulling out special education

teachers and/or educational assistants to cover general education teacher absences and establishing a pipeline of substitute teachers to cover teacher absences. If there is not a districtwide process for tracking how often teachers are pulled, it is recommended this system be put in place. To address the shortage of substitute teachers, one option is to recruit graduates from local colleges to apply for potential substitute positions.

- **Evaluate the current professional development model and innovate where needed.** Based on interviews with HUSD staff and parents, there is evidence that the current PD model of single-day trainings does not provide teachers with the needed supports nor provide actionable classroom practices. Furthermore, the PD has not proven effective in preparing and supporting teachers in understanding how to work with a variety of students with disabilities in both inclusive and separate settings. It is recommended that moving forward, HUSD do the following:
 - Reevaluate existing professional learning supports and programs.
 - Identify developmental experiences that are fewer in scope and go deeper on these topics, with specific strategies to support students with disabilities across settings.
 - Add follow-through at the school and classroom level to support implementation.
 - Plan with outcomes in mind, not just outputs.
 - Differentiate PD so there are opportunities for a variety of educators and tailored specifically to areas of need.

Recommendation 2b: Create a standard operating procedures manual (SOPM) for special education to ensure clarity and consistency of special education processes.

During our review, it became clear there was confusion regarding the various roles and responsibilities, as well as, overall processes in the Special Education Department. Staff explained that they did not know who to go to in their department or what specific protocols existed in the district. Many stated that this was due to the high turnover of Central Office staff over the last five years. We recommend HUSD develop an SOPM that is accessible to all staff to encourage consistent practices and a shared understanding across the district. It is also recommended the district create a parent-friendly version of the programs and services available so parents and stakeholders have a clearer understanding of what the district has available. This feedback was also given from SEPTA as an effort to increase communication between the district and the community.

Additionally, in our interviews, participants made references to procedures (e.g., MTSS process across each school, special education caseloads, determining the maximum number of students in a class) varying from school to school, and it became evident that each school has a separate

process, which staff and parents found confusing. To ensure a clear and consistent understanding of policy and procedure to reduce variability across schools, we recommend the SOPM include the following:

- Policies and processes, such as criteria for special education eligibility and related services and the steps required to determine eligibility.
- Templates and forms, such as MTSS forms, so when a student moves from one school to another, the same information is captured, used, and shared by all staff. This practice will create a shared language and is also an efficient use of time in that one template is used by all schools, instead of three different templates.
- A clear continuum of services with descriptions of special education programs and use of consistent supports and services across all three schools.
- The parent-friendly version should give a description of the MTSS process and program descriptions if their student is found eligible. This will allow parents to have a clear understanding of the referral and eligibility determination process. This should also include how parents can access information about their student online since the district uses an online software system to track student progress.

In summary, an SOPM will increase consistency of practice across schools, ensuring all students receive high-quality instruction and access to the least restrictive environment, and educators will not need to reinvent or guess on policy because it will be clearly and thoroughly stated in one place. We advise training be developed to go along with the SOPM so staff understand its contents. If HUSD staff would like to see examples of special education SOPMs, following are links to two SOPMs, which represent a large and small school district, as well as different approaches on how comprehensive or concise an SOPM can effectively be: [New York City SE SOPM](#), [Bridgeport SE SOPM](#).

Recommendation 2c: Improve the use of data collection systems and create alignment between all district data collection systems.

We recommend the district take a critical look at the different software systems used to collect data and monitor progress in the district and decide on how to create a fluid system that is effective and efficient. This recommendation is necessary to alleviate the concerns about inaccurate data collection at the district level and confusion by parents on which software systems have students' grades and homework information. Per our discussion with the district, we were told they were in the process of combining the two software systems used to collect student data (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, special education status, ELL status) in order for these two systems to update simultaneously and allow for accurate data collection on student demographics. We further recommend HUSD look at the software used to communicate with parents and determine how to best use these systems so parents can use them appropriately.

Recommendation 3: Examine evaluation procedures and continuously monitor the number of students determined eligible for special education services and 504 accommodations under Other Health Impairment (OHI) and Specific Learning Disability (SLD) disability categories.

Classifying a student with a disability is a very significant undertaking. Appropriate diagnoses can lead to needed protections and special education supports and services. However, diagnoses can also have negative consequences, such as lowered standards and stigmatization. A district should exercise caution when identifying and labeling students with a disability. Our recommendation is focused on an overrepresentation of students in the OHI category and an underrepresentation of students in the SLD category. Specifically, we suggest that the district take a deep look at the evaluation procedures and assure that they are aligned with best practices. We also suggest that the district work to align their classification rates with national rates and create a schedule of data examination to monitor the data.

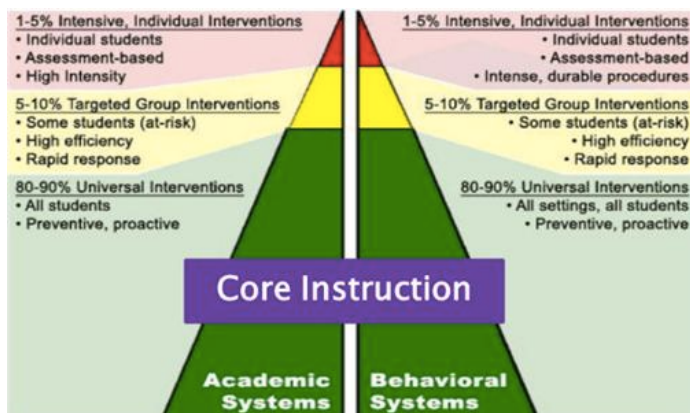
Recommendation 4: Continue building in-district supports and services to support students who are currently educated in self-contained classes or out-of-school districts.

Given the high number of students who are placed in out-of-district schools, we recommend HUSD continue to evaluate their current services and programs and develop a plan to bring students back in the district with comparable services and programs. Out-of-district schools for students with disabilities are considered one of the most restrictive settings, and these should be used as a last resort for the neediest population of students. HUSD has a high number of students with OHI (e.g., ADHD) placed in out-of-district schools. Nationally, most students who fall within the OHI category are not educated in out-of-district schools. We recommend HUSD take a critical look at what out-of-district programs are offering for supports and services for students with OHI and work towards developing a comparable program in the district so parents feel comfortable having their children return to the district to receive these supports and services. Part of our recommendation includes using the school psychologists to help develop supports to improve students' executive functioning, organization, and self-regulation skills.

Recommendation 5: Develop high-quality and inclusive instruction within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

As described, in an MTSS model, all students must have high-quality instruction (Tier 1). There will be a small group of students who need a bit more support, and they might receive skill building in a small group (Tier 2). After high-quality instructional and supplemental supports have been tried, there will be a smaller group of students who need a bit more intensive supplemental supports (Tier 3). These multi-tiered supports should be offered to all students for all academic subjects and social-emotional supports. Exhibit 17 shows a visual representation of an MTSS model.

Exhibit 17: Multi-Tiered System of Supports




It is important also to understand that Tier 1 instruction should be based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a framework that can be used to develop high-quality, flexible learning environments that address the needs of all students and help all students achieve to high standards. UDL helps educators by suggesting flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that empower them to address student variability while maintaining high-achievement standards for all students through multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement.²² Exhibit 18 shows a visual representation of the UDL framework.

We want to be clear that UDL is not a special education initiative—it is an instructional framework. We strongly recommend that general and special education teachers base their instructional practices on the UDL framework, so all curricula are designed to meet the needs of ALL learners. We recommend that UDL be an integral part of the districtwide MTSS plan.

²² CAST, retrieved from <http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.VrFHz1KrbUk>


Exhibit 18: Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines




Provide Multiple Means of Engagement
Purposeful, motivated learners

- Provide options for self-regulation
 - + Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation
 - + Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies
 - + Develop self-assessment and reflection
- Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence
 - + Heighten salience of goals and objectives
 - + Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge
 - + Foster collaboration and community
 - + Increase mastery-oriented feedback
- Provide options for recruiting interest
 - + Optimize individual choice and autonomy
 - + Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity
 - + Minimize threats and distractions



Provide Multiple Means of Representation
Resourceful, knowledgeable learners

- Provide options for comprehension
 - + Activate or supply background knowledge
 - + Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships
 - + Guide information processing, visualization, and manipulation
 - + Maximize transfer and generalization
- Provide options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols
 - + Clarify vocabulary and symbols
 - + Clarify syntax and structure
 - + Support decoding text, mathematical notation, and symbols
 - + Promote understanding across languages
 - + Illustrate through multiple media
- Provide options for perception
 - + Offer ways of customizing the display of information
 - + Offer alternatives for auditory information
 - + Offer alternatives for visual information



Provide Multiple Means of Action & Expression
Strategic, goal-directed learners

- Provide options for executive functions
 - + Guide appropriate goal-setting
 - + Support planning and strategy development
 - + Enhance capacity for monitoring progress
- Provide options for expression and communication
 - + Use multiple media for communication
 - + Use multiple tools for construction and composition
 - + Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance
- Provide options for physical action
 - + Vary the methods for response and navigation
 - + Optimize access to tools and assistive technologies

Source URL: http://www.udcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines_theorypractice

Recommendation 5a: Establish a districtwide MTSS framework and implementation plan.

We recommend HUSD develop a written structure and protocol for all three schools to guide its implementation of a comprehensive MTSS for improved academic achievement and positive behavior supports. As this is a general education initiative, we suggest that the Director of Curriculum and Instruction manage the development proses, with input from the Director of Special Education. Schools should then oversee and implement. Currently there are no consistent districtwide practices for the implementation of MTSS. It is recommended the district develop a three-year implementation plan for a districtwide MTSS framework to guide both academic and social emotional instruction that (1) is inclusive of all grade levels and of students of all abilities, including students with disabilities and ELL students and (2) addresses culturally appropriate instruction. As part of this process, refer to the [Center on Response to Intervention, Response To Intervention - Guidance For New York State School Districts](#), as well as other states and districts leading this effort.

When developing the three-year plan, HUSD should include school-based community participants who are knowledgeable about MTSS and who represent different interests and expertise. They should also consider giving students a voice regarding this process. We

recommend the district establish a mechanism for participants to provide input and feedback during the development and implementation phase for MTSS. We encourage the district to consider the following activities:

- **Universal design for learning (UDL):** Embed instruction aligned with the Common Core within the UDL approach. UDL enables all students to access curricula regardless of their abilities and needs by providing multiple forms of representation, expression, and engagement. For example, through UDL, students struggling to read grade-level text can access the same information through an audio version of the material.
- **Effective core academic and behavior instruction, interventions, and supports:** Develop effective instructional strategies aligned with the CCSS and research-based interventions for literacy and behavior.
- **Out-of-school suspensions:** Review the district's current suspension data for out-of-school suspensions and consider ways to support students in school when disciplinary infractions occur to maximize the student's time on learning.
- **Data tools and FBAs/BIPs:** Establish common universal screening and progress monitoring tools²³ for academic achievement that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for different grade levels and curricular areas. Establish effective use of functional behavior assessments (FBAs) and behavior intervention plans (BIPs), including an expansion of the personnel pool to be trained, and make time available to engage with students in these activities.
- **Human resources:** Consider personnel currently in schools and how to maximize their involvement with students of all abilities.
- **Structures:** Develop structures needed to support interventions: model schedules to accommodate and enhance flexible student groupings, effectively use time during afterschool hours with teachers or during the summer, etc.
- **Written guidance:** Create guidance and an implementation plan for the MTSS plan. Include information regarding how MTSS implementation will be defined and measured. Develop a toolkit to support MTSS implementation and include research-based information relevant to each of the MTSS components.

²³ See the National Center on Intensive Intervention for juried information about academic progress monitoring tools at <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/progress-monitoring>. See the Center on Responses to Intervention for progress monitoring resources at <http://www.rti4success.org/essential-components-rti/progress-monitoring>

- **Professional development:** Plan professional development to build the knowledge and skills necessary to develop districtwide MTSS.
- **Evaluation:** Create a plan to evaluate the effectiveness and results of the district's MTSS plan.

Recommendation 5b: Focus special education services on reducing the gap between students with and without disabilities in HUSD.

Special education is meant to support students' success in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. Special education is not meant to eliminate disability, but rather, minimize the impact of a disability and maximize opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in general education in their natural community (Hehir, 2005). Special education is a set of protections and services meant to support this goal. As a reminder, the provision of these services in the students' least restrictive environment is important, as the more time spent in a general education classroom, the better the outcomes.²⁴

As HUSD develops their MTSS model, special education services should be included as a part of the system, and students with disabilities should be able to move seamlessly between tiers.

Recommendation 5c: Provide students with evidence-based tiered literacy supports at all grade levels.

Student success in school hinges in large part on the acquisition of proficient literacy skills. We also assume that (1) reading difficulties account in part for the large percentage of students classified as having a disability in HUSD and (2) addressing literacy can also address the issue of an overrepresentation of students with disabilities in the district. Therefore, we recommend that HUSD focus on developing literacy skills for all students. In addition, the plan for teaching literacy skills should be embedded in the overarching MTSS plan for the district.

After grade 4, students are reading to learn, unlike the lower grades where students are learning to read. If a student does not have proficient literacy skills, they need to be taught to read, as the previous recommendation addressed. Equally important, however, is that no matter what their reading level, students have access to grade-level curriculum. UDL is a framework that can be used to develop high-quality, flexible learning environments that address the needs of all students and help all students achieve to high standards. UDL helps educators by suggesting flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that empower them to address student variability while maintaining high-achievement standards for all students through multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement.

²⁴ Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006

We recommend HUSD focus on developing literacy skills for all students as part of an embedded component in the overarching MTSS plan for the district. In addition, we recommend the district review which special education teachers have training in delivering reading interventions, particularly at the middle and high school levels, and identify teachers that would benefit from professional development geared towards literacy interventions for students at all grade levels.

Literacy instruction must include an evidence-based Tier 1 program that provides explicit and systematic instruction to ensure students reach reading levels that meet or exceed grade-level standards. In addition, HUSD needs to provide supplemental literacy supports to augment Tier 1 instruction and have staff trained in supplemental literacy programs to provide these Tier 2 and 3 interventions.

To provide guidance on developing tiered literacy supports, we share the findings of the National Reading Panel; namely, that effective reading instruction addresses five critical areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.²⁵ Effective teachers address these areas through curriculum materials, pedagogical approaches, and evidence-based reading strategies.²⁶

When planning specialized reading instruction in literacy for students, educators must provide more sustained guided and independent engagement in literacy activities (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, and listening) across multiple contexts. Specialized reading instruction should occur through systematically designed lessons that can be used with small groups or individuals who need intensive support to meet grade-level expectations. The National Research Council (NRC) identifies five research-based hallmarks of effective instruction in reading²⁷:

1. Effective reading teachers teach skills, strategies, and concepts.
2. Effective teachers recognize that one size doesn't fit all and are ready to adapt instruction—both content and methods.
3. Students should not have to infer what they are supposed to learn.
4. Students need to be taught what to do when they get to a “hard word.”
5. Effective teachers adjust their teaching as needed to try to accelerate student progress.

Further, Nonie Lesaux of the Harvard Graduate School of Education has researched and provided recommendations for educators working to promote literacy development and reading instruction for students. Lesaux promotes comprehensive reading assessment practices that discern potential sources of reading difficulties in both skills-based competencies (the skills needed to sound out and recognize words) and knowledge-based competencies (the

²⁵ A closer look at the five components of effective reading instruction: A review of scientifically based reading research for teachers (2004). Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED512569.pdf>

²⁶ Allington & Johnson, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Duffy, 1997; Pressley, et al., 2001.

²⁷ Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

conceptual and vocabulary knowledge needed to comprehend a text's meaning)²⁸. While schools have focused on teaching skills-based reading competencies, less progress has been made in teaching knowledge-based competencies that are essential in supporting reading comprehension in middle and high school.

Recommendation 5d: Implement districtwide SEL curriculum. This should include consistent suspension practices across the district and consistent processes for conducting Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).

Based on our review of documents and interviews with staff there is no consistent PBIS model for the district. Currently, only the middle school appears to be using a PBIS model with fidelity. The district provided us with a guide created for the middle school staff explaining how the PBIS model works. There was also a letter sent home to parents explaining the benefits of PBIS and how the middle school is using it to promote positive behavior throughout the school.

The elementary school and high school did not have a formalized PBIS model although they were using some components of PBIS. It is recommended there be a districtwide professional development for all staff to understand and implement a PBIS model so there is continuity and consistency across all schools. This will promote positive behavior supports and interventions for all students. It may be beneficial for the middle school staff to develop a training for all staff if their current model is working to support students.

We recommend that HUSD develop a districtwide, researched-based, social-emotional learning curriculum (SEL) integrated with positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS)²⁹. Further, we recommend that this plan be included in the districtwide MTSS plan. We suggest that the plan include the following:

- Schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) to increase teacher efficacy, reduce disciplinary incidents, and improve classroom and school climates. The PBIS website contains a great deal of information and tools: <http://www.pbis.org/>.

²⁸ Murane, R., Sawhill, I., & Snow, C. (2012). Literacy challenges for the twenty-first century: Introducing the issue. *The Future of Children. Princeton-Brookings*, 22(2), 3-17.

²⁹ The following are 11 components to a seamless integration of SEL and PBIS provided by Bradshaw et al.,” 1) commitment to a coordinated implementation of PBIS + SEL with consistent language and practices used throughout the district; 2) staff buy-in for PBIS and SEL that includes ongoing professional development and training of specific strategies; 3) engage stakeholders to form a PBIS and SEL integration steering committee; 4) develop a shared vision to implement an integrated PBIS + SEL approach at the school; 5) school-wide assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to integrated PBIS + SEL implementation; 6) review and selection of SEL programming and formulation of decision making guidelines about referral; 7) create an action plan for integration, based on the assessment which includes alignment of purpose, goals, benchmarks, and a common timeline; 8) professional development activities for staff; 9) integrated PBIS + SEL model launch; 10) on-going technical assistance at district and state levels; and 11) evaluate and refine for continuous improvement.

- Evidence-based SEL competencies to strengthen social support networks and improve academic performance. Consider adhering to the CASEL principles:
 - Self-awareness
 - Self-management
 - Social awareness
 - Relationship skills
 - Responsible decision making
- Collaboration with community providers on coordinated services to enhance or reinforce SEL competencies.
- Facilitated home-school collaboration.
- Required systemwide de-escalation and crisis training for all staff and principals.

In addition to supporting students socially, emotionally, and behaviorally, an integrated PBIS + SEL model will also support students diagnosed with ADHD. As referenced earlier, HUSD has a high number of students diagnosed with Other Health Impairments (OHI). Creating a model that helps students self-regulate and manage their own behaviors may help reduce referrals to special education for students who have been diagnosed with ADHD, as these skills directly correlate to executive functioning skills, which are often lagging in students with ADHD.

To provide guidance with decision making, we share research from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which has determined that SEL programming in schools can have a positive impact on students' academic performance. Social and emotional learning is "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions³⁰."

Implementation of SEL in schools provides a safe learning environment in which all students can learn. Research also demonstrates that promoting students' social and emotional development is effective in reducing the likelihood of risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, dropping out). Key findings on effective SEL in schools provides evidence of the following:

- **Improved academic achievement:** Students involved in SEL programming experienced significantly greater academic achievement than students who did not receive SEL.

³⁰ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2015). Social and emotional learning competencies. Retrieved from <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies>

- **Improved school attitudes and behaviors:** SEL instilled greater motivation to learn, a deeper commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, better classroom behavior, and improved attendance and graduation rates.
- **Fewer negative behaviors:** Among students receiving SEL instruction, disruptive class behavior, noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals decreased significantly.
- **Reduced emotional distress:** Reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, or social withdrawal significantly decreased among students receiving SEL instruction.³¹

SEL principles that work well within the framework of SWPBIS, which states, as does MTSS, that there be tiered support and interventions. Therefore, teaching the SEL principles of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making within SWPBIS will simply require avenues of support depending on student need.

Recommendation 5e: Develop measures to support students with disabilities in attending four-year colleges.

One requirement in IDEA is to provide students 16 years old, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, with transition services, that is, a “coordinated set of activities...to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities... [These] activities [are] based on each student's needs, taking into account the student's strengths, preferences and interests, and includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.”³² HUSD begins these services for students when they are 15, earlier than required, which is beneficial to students. We encourage HUSD to use the transition requirements to help students with disabilities plan to graduate with advanced degrees and attend four-year colleges.

Recommendation 6: Build positive relationships and communication strategies between HUSD and the community.

Recommendation 6a: Build positive relationships between HUSD and the community by continuing to facilitate open discussion, parent meetings, and professional development for HUSD staff regarding best practices for communicating with families.

It is clear that there is a need for building relationships between HUSD and the community. In order for this to be a success, all parties must be willing to engage in a collaborative process. We

³¹ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. “Guidelines on implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula.”

³² Education of Individuals with Disabilities, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401(34). Retrieved from <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p,,root,dynamic,TopicalBrief,17,.html>

realize that this is an adaptive need, rather than a technical need, and therefore, there is no simple solution. We provide here suggestions that the district might consider using as a guiding framework for making systemic change. In *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (Bolman & Deal, 1997),³³ authors Bolman and Deal suggest that effective and sustainable cultural and structural change occurs when leaders address several fronts, or what they call *frames*, concurrently. Following is a summary of each of these four frames—symbolic, structural, political, and human resource.

Symbolic – Values and Culture

Leadership focused on the symbolic approach looks to values and culture. The symbolic value of a vision suggesting that students with disabilities can meet high expectations can help guide people to believe in raising the bar for students with disabilities. Adopting symbolic language, such as the saying “special education is a service, not a place,” can help to shift thinking about what special education services are and how they can be provided. Providing instructional professional development within an MTSS framework shows that the district embraces an “all means all” philosophy. Using students’ native language shows students that their culture is important.

In terms of improving relationships between HUSD and the community, one suggestion is to disseminate the parent survey data to all staff in the district as part of professional development. This will ensure all staff are aware of parent concerns and can create a collaborative environment for determining ways to address the concerns outlined above. Symbolism is powerful; however, on its own, it is not effective.

Structural – Organization and Policies

Leadership focused on the structural approach looks to the district’s organization and policies, the structural elements within the district as well as how these structural elements are implemented. Changing institutional structures is effective when goals are clear, the relationships of cause and effect are understood, and there is little uncertainty or ambiguity. Creating a standard operating procedure manual, as one example, can guide systemic changes in special education as well as provide an accountability tool. Training staff on policies concerning appropriate evaluations procedures can help decrease any inappropriate classifications.

In terms of improving relationships between HUSD and the community, the district may also want to consider creating a teacher group that can work with SEPTA and meet on a quarterly basis to support their efforts and bridge the communication gap. This will lead to a proactive effort on the district’s end for remedying the current climate that exists from the class action

³³ Bolman, L., and Deal, T. (1997). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

lawsuit filed against the district. A vision and policies are more powerful together than alone, however, not effective without examining the district's political structure.

Political – Power Structure

Leadership focused on the political approach examines the power structures within the district and with external stakeholders. Looking within, is special education included in district leadership so that any reform efforts are not siloed? Are there chasms between the administration and teaching staff that need to be addressed? How does the district develop partnerships with local community organizations, universities, and their local police? Can the district partner with universities and outside agencies? Does the district work together with community leaders to help develop and support culturally relevant strategic plans? How can students have a voice in the district? Understanding and attending to the political context allows acceptance of the vision and policies. That said, all of this is not possible without people to do the work.

Human Resource – People

Leadership focused on the human resource frame focuses on people. This approach emphasizes support, empowerment, staff development, and responsiveness to employee needs. Do the staff understand what they are being asked to do and why? Are they being given technical assistance to improve their craft? Do they have time within the school day to collaborate with their colleagues? How are staff evaluated?

Systemic reform can take place by attending to the needs of the people doing the work, attending to the power structure where the work will occur, creating policies and organizational structures that support the work, and most important of all, knowing the vision and the goals of the work.

In terms of improving relationships between HUSD and the community, HUSD may want to employ the *Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education*³⁴. Created by the Institute of Education Science, this toolkit has proven useful for developing professional development around communication. Specifically, Part 3 of the toolkit focuses on building trusting relationships with families through effective communication, and it provides a series of activities that all staff can participate in, including the following:

- Cross-cultural communication in a school community – Strategies and a tool to assist educators to examine their current use of cross-cultural communication and consider ways they might improve it.
- Preparing educators for two-way communication with families – This activity includes ideas for listening to the “parent voice” and understanding the ways in which families can work together to support children’s learning.

³⁴ See Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education for a complete toolkit for professional development at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4509>

Put more simply, leadership focused on systemic reform requires attention to all four of these areas—the symbolic, the structural, the political, and the human resource frames.

While we recognize it will take some time to rebuild trust between schools and the community, these are steps we recommend the district take to demonstrate their willingness to create a culture where parents feel welcome and staff feel comfortable engaging in conversations with parents to support student growth and achievement.

Recommendation 6b: Build effective communication strategies between HUSD and the community with a focus on district practices that include a communication protocol guidance on the role of the case managers.

Overall, 89% of parents that responded to the survey felt positive changes had been made since the new director of special education came on board and other staffing changes were made. However, it is recommended the district collaborate with SEPTA and other parent organizations to continue to work on building strong parent-teacher communication. One suggestion from SEPTA was to create a communication protocol that would define the timing and content of communication between a child’s team and their parents. Parents felt it would be helpful for this communication protocol to include any special education services their child missed.

Another suggestion is to provide guidance on the role of the case managers to students with disabilities. This can be directly tied to the communication protocol that parents suggested. Many districts assign case managers to students with disabilities. A case manager is a licensed special education teacher or related service provider and is responsible for coordinating instruction and related services for a student. The case manager serves as the primary contact for the parent. With regards to communication, the case manager could be responsible for the following:

- Establishing ongoing communication with parents for student progress and/or concerns.
- Establishing ongoing communication with general education teachers and others involved with the student.
- Documenting parent communication plan and establishes a system of documentation of contacts.
- Maintaining the special education file in a neat and chronological order.
- Disseminates IEP information to general education teachers and relevant service providers.
- Collaborating with each general education teacher and service provider regarding student’s progress and needs.

These are a few recommendations for the job responsibilities under case managers; however, we recommend the district develop a case manager role that suits the district's needs and current staffing resources available.

CONCLUSION

The Hastings on Hudson union free school district (HUSD), requested that the urban special education leadership collaborative (Collaborative) conduct a comprehensive review of programs and services offered by the school district to students with disabilities. this request was made in effort to begin to rebuild community relationships between HUSD and the community. The collaborative focused on four areas: district organizations and structures that support student learning, demographics and special education eligibility, high quality instruction within a tiered system of supports and community engagement. We collected district data and had focus groups and interviews with close to 40 staff and community members. We found significant issues, and we also found significant strengths along with a willingness on the part of the district to work on the areas of improvement. we believe this report and the accompanying presentation can support the work of the district and look forward to witnessing greatness in the Hastings on Hudson union free school district.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Core Team Members

Lauren Katzman, EdD. is the Executive Director of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative. Prior to this work, she served as the Assistant to the Superintendent for Special Education Services for the Newark Public Schools and the Executive director of special education in the New York City Department of Education. In both of these positions, she developed and led significant reform efforts, increasing academic achievement, inclusive educational and experiential options, reliable data management, and statutory/regulatory compliance. She worked to develop strong interdisciplinary partnerships between districts, states, universities, advocacy groups, and communities to build the foundation for deep and sustaining systemic reforms. Prior to these two high-level and demanding school district leadership positions, Dr. Katzman served as Associate Professor of Special Education at Boston University and co-authored the book *Effective Inclusive Schools: Effective Inclusive Schools: Designing Successful Schoolwide Programs* with Dr. Thomas Hehir, former Director of the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. She was also a special education teacher for 14 years in St. Louis, New Jersey, and New York City and has conducted program evaluations of the special education services for the District of Columbia Public Schools, the state of Massachusetts, Ithaca Public Schools, and the New York City Department of Education.

Jennifer Baribeau, Ph.D., currently serves as the Special Education Supervisor for Springfield Public Schools, the second largest urban district in the state of Massachusetts. Prior to this work, Dr. Baribeau was the Interim Director of Special Education for Holyoke Public Schools and previously Director of Student Support Services for a start-up charter school. In these various leadership roles, Dr. Baribeau led program management and reform and developed policies and practices to support special education students at the district level. She has a B.S. in Business Management and received her M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Massachusetts. She previously served on a task force working towards developing best practices for assessing and identifying English Language Learners with disabilities and served on the board for the Massachusetts Council for Exceptional Children. Prior to her leadership roles in special education, Dr. Baribeau managed several grant-funded projects for gang-involved and emotionally disturbed youth in Massachusetts and co-taught graduate courses on curriculum development using project-based learning for students with disabilities. Her current research is focused on issues with enrollment, placement and compliance in special education for both traditional public schools and charter schools.

Stephanie Downey Toledo is a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Prior to coming to Harvard, Stephanie was the Deputy Chief Executive Officer for the Division of

Students with Disabilities & English Language Leaders at the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE). In this role, Stephanie was responsible for the implementation of New York City's reform to special education across all 1,700 schools. Stephanie is a special educator, bilingual speech and language pathologist and has taught graduate courses on serving school-age students with disabilities with a focus on bilingual issues at Columbia University. Stephanie has a B.A. in Psychology from George Washington University, a Masters in Special Education from Loyola Marymount, and a Masters in Speech Language Pathology from Teacher's College at Columbia University.

Alexis Morgan has spent the past 10 years advocating for students with disabilities. She began her career as a special education teacher, before joining the New Jersey Department of Education as a State Interventionist/Special Education Specialist. Most recently she served in the role of Executive Director of Instructional Supports for the Office of Special Education for The Newark Public Schools in Newark, NJ where she lead a reform to decrease the number of students in separate settings. Alexis believes that because some students have a different starting place in life, it is up to school leaders and education policy makers to ensure that educators achieve equity before they can strive for equality. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate at Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Caroline E. Parker, EdD. is the Director of Research in the Leadership for Learning Innovation unit of the Learning and Teaching Division at Education Development Center. Her work focuses on applied research and evaluation to improve programs and policies for students with disabilities and English learners. She is PI of the evaluation of the Think College Transition Model Project, an innovative dual enrollment program for students with intellectual disabilities, funded by the Investing in Innovation (i3) program. She also led the evaluation of Connecticut's *Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Algebra I Curriculum*. As the co-PI of the NSF's STEM Learning and Research Center (STELAR) at EDC, she is working with a team to deepen the impact of the national ITEST program through technical support, dissemination, and broadening participation to better prepare a diverse, skilled, and innovative STEM workforce. She is also co-PI of the NSF-funded Technology Observation Protocol-Science (TOP-Science) project, which is designing and piloting a classroom observation protocol to measure the impact of innovative technology integration on high school science teaching. In her capacity as Researcher for the REL Northeast & Islands' English Language Learners Alliance, Parker has published four studies looking at academic achievement of English learners. Parker received a BA in English literature from Williams College, an MEd from Framingham State College, and Ed.M. and EdD. degrees from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Appendix B. List of Documents and Data Reviewed

The following documents were reviewed:

QUANTITATIVE INFORMATION

General Demographics. Total number of all enrolled students

- By grade level
- By race/ethnicity
- By SES
- By ELL status

Total number of students with IEPs

- by disability area
- by disability area and grade level
- by disability area and race/ethnicity
- by disability area and SES
- by disability area and ELL status

Out-of-school suspensions - For students with and without IEPs.

- Total number/percent of students with and without IEPs receiving out of school suspension of one day or more by school
 - o By grade level
 - o By race
 - o By gender
 - o By ELL status
 - o By SES

Academic performance. For all students with IEPs assessed, percentage meeting/exceeding proficient standard in reading and math performance for the last five school years.

Educational settings. Number of students with IEPs in various educational settings as reported to the state (i.e., in general education classroom 80% or more of the time, between 40-80% of the time, and less than 40% of the time):

- By grade
- By primary disability area
- By primary disability area and race/ethnicity
- By primary disability area and ELL status

Number of students with IEPs placed by the district in separate schools, nonpublic schools and residential facilities:

- By grade
- By primary disability area

- By primary disability area and race/ethnicity
- By primary disability area and ELL status

Graduation rate. Rate for all students and for students without IEPs and for students with IEPs for last 5 years

- By race
- By gender
- By ELL status
- By SES

Drop-out rate. Rate for all students and for students without IEPs and for students with IEPs for last 5 years.

- By race
- By gender
- By ELL status
- By SES

Self-contained programs

For each “specialized” program” for students with IEPs, show the name and the number of programs in each school. Please sort schools by grade level groupings.

Staffing. Number of FTE staff (including contractual) in the following areas:

- Special education teacher
- Paraprofessional for students with IEPs
- Psychologists
- Speech/language Pathologists
- Social Workers
- Nurses
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- Other (as appropriate)

Appendix C. List of Positions of Persons Participating in Focus Groups or Interviewed

The following individuals were interviewed:

- Superintendent
- Parents
- District Treasurer
- Director of Special Education
- Supervisor of Special Education
- SEPTA Board Members
- Principals
- Assistant Principals
- Special Education Teachers
- Related Service Providers
- Central Office Secretaries

Appendix D. Data

As stated, in collecting data for this report, HUSD staff were open to fulfilling all requests, however, there were significant challenges in the data submitted. In general, we found errors and confusion in data labeling (e.g. dates, race, educational placement) and a lack of communication between the district's student information and special education software systems. Specifically, we were provided with conflicting information from the two data management systems in the district that created challenges in verifying its accuracy and uncertainty as to who was responsible for different pieces of data.

One area of confusion was found in unclear labeling. In the special education system, the labels "home school," and "recommended school," we found, did not actually delineate which school the student actually attended, but rather, the information discussed in the special education process. To mitigate this issue, we attempted to merge data from the special education system and the district's student information system. At this point, there was confusion as to whether "2015" indicated the 2015–2016 school year or the 2014–2015 school year. When asked, we were provided with two different answers. When we did merge the systems, we found discrepancies with the racial identification of students. For example, in one year, the year "2015," 41 students who were identified as White on the special education report were identified as either Asian, Black, Hispanic or Multiracial on the district's general report. In the year "2016" this number was 42. Additionally, the merged files indicated that in the year "2015," 16 students with disabilities were in the special education data set, but not in the general demographic data set. For the year "2016", 15 students with disabilities were indicated in the special education data set, but not in the general demographic data set. Furthermore, in the year "2015," 31 students in the special education dataset were labeled regular education in the general demographic data set. Finally, 55 students in the general demographic dataset are labeled as "special education" but do not appear in the special education data set.

Generally, we found 1) errors/confusion in labeling of data (specifically dates/years, students identifying info, racial background, educational placement), 2) a lack of communication between general education data and special education data.

We want to be clear that the district is very aware of these issues and has been working throughout the school year to address.