

# Special Education Study

## Mountain Lakes School District: Lake Drive Program

## Mountain Lakes, New Jersey

June 2022

### **American Educational Consultants**

Keith Kelly, Consultant and Project Manager

Paul DeAngelo, Consultant

Jane Dunay, Consultant

**American Educational Consultants** provides educational consultative services to school districts, school personnel, parents, and students.

### **For Information:**

American Educational Consultants  
25 Richland Dr.  
Springfield, NJ 07081

5180 River Trail  
Cleveland, OH 44124

**Phone:** 973-98EDCON (973-983-3266)

**e-mail:** [info@americanedcon.com](mailto:info@americanedcon.com)

**website:** [www.americanedcon.com/](http://www.americanedcon.com/)

Copyright © 2022 by American Educational Consultants. All rights reserved.

This report contains the results of proprietary research compiled for Mountain Lakes School District for their own full, complete, and exclusive use. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, including photocopying, or by any information storage and retrieval system without prior permission in writing from American Educational Consultants, 25 Richland Dr., Springfield, NJ 07081.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SECTION 2: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SECTION 3: ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>SECTION 4: FISCAL STEWARDSHIP AND OPERATIONS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>SECTION 5: EDUCATIONAL IMPACT</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>SECTION 6: PROGRAM COMPARISONS AND MARKETING</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>SECTION 7: CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>SECTION 8: APPENDICES</b>	<b>52</b>

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

---

Mountain Lakes City School District (MLSD) contracted with American Educational Consultants (AEC) to conduct a review of the public, tuition-based Lake Drive Program (LD) for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The AEC team conducted this study over a several week period between February 2022 and May 2022.

Educational leaders identify special education throughout the nation as an area that deserves a thorough analysis with respect to its educational programming, costs, benefits, strengths and needed areas of improvement. Much research has been done on student identification practices, the effects of labeling students, best instructional practices and academic costs/benefits of special education programming. It is known that extensive funding and energy is invested into staffing, programming, administering and defending special education services nationwide.

We know that the most significant challenge in education for all students is to provide quality and equitable instruction at reasonable costs. We know that local, regional, state and national data can inform all aspects of special education programming and determine best practices that result in reasonable costs to taxpayers and increased benefits for students.

The historic Lake Drive Program has been serving students since 1969 and offers an impressive continuum of programming and services including itinerant services to forty-five districts. Lake Drive is a public school within the MLSD that operates a specialized special education program that is tax exempt. Lake Drive operates under the fiduciary responsibility of the MLSD operating budget. The MLSD and LD advocate for legislative and administrative regulatory changes that improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families.

The Lake Drive Program has enjoyed a history of success due to community support, talented staff and excellent leadership. The positive life changing impact Lake Drive has had on hundreds of students and their families is undeniable. Recent budget related issues and public perceptions about LD have highlighted old concerns and given rise to a host of new challenges. These challenges will

require visionary leadership, detailed planning, data-driven decisions, innovative thinking, collaboration, communication and transparency.

It is commendable that Mountain Lakes School District and the Lake Drive Program continue to reflect on to what degree they are providing high quality and equitable instruction for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students at reasonable costs. It is the mission of American Educational Consultants to assist in this endeavor by providing analysis, insights and recommendations that will improve LD programming, enhance sustainability and control costs.

This report is organized into the following sections:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: Executive Summary
- Section 3: Organizational Leadership
- Section 4: Fiscal Stewardship and Operations
- Section 5: Educational Impact
- Section 6: Market Comparisons
- Section 7: Conclusion
- Section 8: Appendices

The AEC team wishes to thank the Mountain Lakes School District and Lake Drive Program leadership, staff, community, students and board of education members for their assistance and support. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting and talking with the talented staff and students of the MLSD and LD program.

## SECTION 2: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

### **Narrative**

This report provides an opportunity for review of the Lake Drive Program. The AEC team examined practices directly related to organizational leadership, finances, operations, educational programming, Deaf culture and marketing strategies. This report includes several recommendations for consideration as well as commendations for the many outstanding practices for which LD is known.

The findings and recommendations provided in this report are based on data and information received from the MLSD, LD, interviews and electronic public education information sources.

Our analyses of the quantitative and qualitative information gathered for this report suggest a conundrum for leadership regarding the sustainability and viability of the Lake Drive Program.

The conundrum is rooted in the historical meaning of LD to the MLSD competing with the current financial realities and perceptions brought on by past administrative misclassification of revenues and expenditures indicated in the June 2018 audit findings amidst declining enrollment. Interviews with administrators, staff, parents, students and community members reveal a range of intense emotions regarding these issues.

Rumors have been festering among MLSD and LD staff for several months that LD was closing within two years. Many fear that American Educational Consultants was brought in to close down the program. It should be made clear that AEC was not brought in to shut down the program.

There is significant resentment and anger that exists as a result of an alleged inappropriate comment made at a public board meeting. A community member asked the following question at the May 1, 2021 school board meeting. "Is it time to take it out back and shoot it?" This comment is thought to be referring to the Lake Drive Program. Video of the board meeting confirms the question was

asked. Almost every person and group we interviewed re-stated this comment and perceives that it has gone unaddressed. It was, however, reported that the issue was addressed at a meeting between teacher association representatives and district administration. In the view of the consulting team, it needs to be reiterated that the comment was addressed so that this issue is put to rest.

Interviews indicate a perception, among some, that LD is a drain on the MLSD budget and cannot sustain itself into the future. Some residents also believe that they pay higher taxes as a result of the MLSD operating LD. There are some who believe the program should be phased out or become a stand alone private school. At least one person, who claims to represent others, suggests the LD building be converted into a Preschool/Kindergarten facility for MLSD students only. On the other hand, many including members of the Mountain Lakes community indicate a strong interest in the sustainability and viability of LD. The AEC team cannot, without reservation, conclude if it is the voices of a few or many that have brought the notions of LD unsustainability and financial drain to the fore.

It must be unequivocally stated here that the Lake Drive Program is currently financially self-sustaining and is able to assume indirect costs of the MLSD according to our analysis of the LD budgets and interviews with the business administrator. However, the trends of improving assistive technologies, declining enrollment, increasing tuition and transportation costs require immediate attention and a long term strategy even though the current tuition rate is competitive.

All of the sending district special services directors were invited to participate in a virtual interview session. A total of four of the approximately forty-five participated. Those directors that participated in the interview stated that the current tuition rate is not a barrier to placement. This is not to say that rising tuition rates are not a concern. Directors also stated that their first option is to serve the student in their home district if feasible.

The mindset needed to develop the sustainability and viability of LD is one of total collaboration and transparency that emphasizes the financial, educational and cultural value of the program to the MLSD community as well as to the regional school districts and their parents.

The challenges lie in crafting an actionable vision/strategic plan that adjusts leadership responsibilities, improves communication, reverses some community misperceptions, aligns staffing patterns, stabilizes enrollment and solves the revenue and expenditure issues.

Lake Drive has a history of being a revenue center and despite the challenges the program continues to generate revenue. However, in order to remain a revenue center, staffing and operational costs must be adjusted accordingly if declining enrollment trends persist.

Lake Drive continues to provide students with exceptional educational experiences and is a regional leader in Deaf and Hard of Hearing education.

### **Topical Study Requests**

American Educational Consultants was asked to research, assess and make recommendations regarding the following financial, educational and marketing aspects of the Lake Drive Program. The sub-topics listed for study under each topical heading were determined by the consulting team. Specific recommendations as well as the pertinent information for which the recommendations are based can be found in Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6.

- Organizational Leadership
  - Visioning and strategic planning
  - LD organizational structure
  - By-laws and advisory bodies
  - Administrative reporting lines
  - Communication patterns
  - Collaboration and data-driven decision making
- Fiscal Stewardship and Operations
  - Staffing patterns and utilization
  - Related services utilization
  - Contracted services utilization
  - Tuition and reimbursements
  - Transportation
  - Expenditures and revenues
- Educational Impact
  - LD educational approach and program design
  - Self-contained, mainstream and itinerant settings
  - Co-curricular and extracurricular
  - Instructional delivery methods
  - Technology needs and uses

- Transition programs
- Student achievement data
- IEPs
- Professional learning
- Deaf culture
- Marketing
  - LD marketing
  - Competitive program comparisons
  - Potential reasons some parents choose programs other than LD

## **Guiding Study Questions**

The following questions guided our inquiry.

### *Organizational Leadership*

- What is the model by which LD is governed and administered? Are there bylaws? Membership fees?
- To what extent does the current MLSD leadership and LD leadership collaborate on issues of finance, educational programming, IEP development, program placement, Deaf culture and professional learning? How are these issues communicated?
- What is the level of transparency regarding current challenges?
- What are the communication patterns between the MLSD administrative team and the LD principal?
- Is the current MLSD and LD administrative structure organized to best support the needs of staff and students?
- Are the communication patterns between non-special education administration, special education administration and LD leadership effective?
- How effective is the communication between LD mainstream, self-contained and itinerant staff?
- What is the model used for sharing expertise and improving instruction?
- How effective are community and business partnerships in enhancing the educational opportunities for LD students?
- Given the nature of the LD program, how are issues of autonomy resolved and communicated?



### *Fiscal Stewardship and Operations*

- Does the current delivery model provide the appropriate instruction to students with hearing needs in a cost effective manner?
- What model might reduce costs while maintaining and improving quality programming?
- What are the community perceptions regarding the impact of LD revenues and costs?
- How are budget issues and updates communicated with staff and community?
- What are the enrollment trends?
- Are there more or less paraprofessionals, teachers, supervisors/administrators and/or support professionals than required?
- What is the most cost effective and instructionally effective staffing pattern?
- Does data substantially inform decision-making?
- How do transportation costs impact educational and after school opportunities?

### *Educational Impact*

- Does the current delivery model ensure the desired instructional results?
- What is the range of services offered?
- Do IEPs meet compliance standards and serve as an instructional roadmap?
- What are the comorbidity rates of LD students?
- What are the opportunities for growth with respect to inclusionary practices? What is the most effective balance of self-contained and mainstream programming for each student?
- What role does the general education teacher have in the delivery of effective instruction for LD students? Do co-teaching models exist?
- Is there a need to develop the cultural competence of the staff? What is done to enhance the understanding of Deaf culture?
- What are the systemic procedures and practices for collegial discussion regarding professional learning and effective practices?
- What are the professional learning opportunities for growth?
- Are assistive and instructional technologies used to help students access the curriculum and learn in the classroom?

- Are there general education, business and community partnerships that enhance classroom instruction?

### *Program Comparisons and Marketing Strategies*

- How does the program compare to regional programs for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing?
- What are the current marketing strategies?
- What are the opportunities for improved marketing?
- What do New Jersey school districts know about LD? How do they make their decisions to send their students to LD?
- What is the value add of LD to the MLSD?
- What is the level of parent and community involvement in LD?
- What are the parent and community perceptions of LD?
- Why do parents choose or not choose LD for their children?
- What parent education programs exist?

### **Qualitative and Quantitative Information Gathering and Analysis**

The AEC team specifically performed the following for this study:

- Reviewed 3-5 years of district and LD financial, staffing and enrollment data including ease of access and use of data to drive decisions.
- Reviewed Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (CAFR).
- Conducted a market analysis comparing several programs for their costs, services, supports, technology, philosophies and instructional approaches.
- Reviewed sample IEPs of LD students.
- Reviewed the processes used to determine eligibility and placement of students enrolled in the Lake Drive Program.
- Reviewed the LD intake process.
- Conducted structured focus group interviews with administrators, teachers, support staff, related service providers, parents, students and ML residents. Focus group times were sent with open invitations to participate.
  - Four administrators
  - Forty-two certified LD staff
  - Six classified LD staff
  - Two certified staff not assigned to LD
  - Three directors of special education from sending districts

- o Four case managers from sending districts
- o Ten Mountain Lakes residents
- o Five LD parents
- o Eight LD students
- o Four emails sent from individual stakeholders (two residents and two staff)
- Conducted structured interviews with special education directors and case managers from sending districts.
- Conducted structured interviews with LD students.
- Visited LD classrooms and programs.
- Determined if LD utilizes systemic, research-based progress monitoring practices with fidelity.
- Discussed curriculum and instruction with staff.
- Assessed administrative support and levels of collaboration.
- Assessed access to professional learning opportunities.
- Conducted a review of communication protocols between the LD, families and extended service providers.

### **Lake Drive Program Commendations**

The consulting team analyzed data, conducted interviews and observed many effective educational practices while visiting LD. The parents and educators we interviewed from sending districts spoke very highly of the Lake Drive staff and program. They spoke specifically about the quality of the instruction, the staff and student relationships, the frequent communication and the willingness of the LD staff to go above and beyond.

The LD staff is collegial, supportive of one another and respectful of each other's expertise and roles. The consulting team was impressed by the level of positive interaction staff had with one another during the interviews. Several staff made the point to recognize the work ethic, experience and passion of the LD principal. All love their jobs and are grateful for the opportunity to work at LD and the MLSD. The MLSD and the LD community should be proud of the following commendations.

- The New Jersey Department of Education has recognized LD as a center for excellence in educating students who are Deaf and Hard ofHearing.

- There is a long history of community, school board, staff and administrative support for LD.
- There is a deep belief in the mission and philosophy of LD.
- Staff pride themselves in the Lake Drive Program.
- Staff care deeply for their students and demonstrate expertise and passion for their work.
- Students respect and appreciate their teachers and support staff. The excellent teacher-student relationships are the basis of the positive learning culture of the program.
- A vast majority of staff are eager and willing to make the improvements necessary to grow, improve and sustain the program.
- Self-contained, mainstream and itinerant programming are offered.
- There is a broad philosophic educational approach used to educate students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- There is an impressive range of support services including counseling and mental health.
- All LD staff members have sign language skills to directly communicate with students
- Assistive technologies and typical instructional technologies are used to help students succeed.
- Lake Drive students have participated in district concerts, theater productions, H&SA programs, received scholarships and have been the beneficiaries of MLEF grants.
- There is a state-of-the-art emergency and crisis notification system designed for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- Students have access to art, music and physical education.
- The Ivy Hall Preschool offers full day and half day programs and includes typical peers.
- The Total Communication Preschool offers more intensive instruction for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students who have additional special needs.
- Sending districts can contract some evaluation and diagnostic services.
- Many view LD as adding educational and financial value to the MLSD brand.
- Paraprofessionals are skilled and valued members of the team.
- Classroom staffing levels are more than adequate.
- The IEPs are adequate and serve as roadmaps for learning.
- Lake Drive has a partnership with Easterseals and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) for transitioning students to career pathways.

- Litigation issues are minimal.
- Medicaid reimbursements are maximized.
- The commission of this study is an indication of strong leadership and visionary thinking regarding the future of LD.

## SECTION 3: ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

---

### **Narrative**

The Lake Drive Program (LD) is a center-based program serving a total of eighty-three students PK-12. Forty-six of these students attend the Lake Drive School in grades PK-7. Thirty-seven students are being served at either Wildwood Elementary, Briarcliff Middle or Mountain Lakes High School depending on their grade level. Enrollment numbers fluctuate throughout the school year. The information provided to us shows that LD staff consists of fifty-four full time staff, twenty-five part time staff and one contracted consultant. These numbers include the certified, non-certified and four teachers who provide itinerant services to approximately ninety students in forty-five districts. The Lake Drive Program is under the auspices of the Mountain Lakes School District. Below are the titles of the professionals that make up the LD staff.

- Principal
- Administrative Assistant
- Teachers of the Deaf (including preschool, art, music, PE and itinerant)
- Paraprofessionals
- Custodians
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- School Psychologist
- Educational Audiologist
- Contracted LDTC with Teacher of the Deaf Certification
- Nurse
- Consultant-Psychologist
- Social Worker
- Speech and Language Specialists
- Educational Interpreters
- Transition Counselor

Since the 2016-2017 school year, LD enrollment has declined from one hundred nineteen students to currently serving eighty-three students. It was reported that several years ago, LD enrolled approximately two hundred students.

Lake Drive is not governed by a set of bylaws and does not utilize an advisory board made up of representatives from sending districts, community representatives, business partners and other experts in the field. There are no membership fees. There is no formal parent organization designated to the Lake Drive Program.

The Mountain Lakes School District organizational chart indicates that the LD principal reports directly to the superintendent as do the principals from Briarcliff, Wildwood and MLHS.

The interview data suggests that the program's current level of autonomy is a concern on several levels and has been exacerbated by the issues of decreasing enrollment and financial challenges.

Lake Drive staff not within the LD building feel disconnected. The reasons cited were lack of communication, support and collaboration regarding overall program issues. Some mainstream LD staff also expressed the desire for more connection to the instructional work and staff activities going on in the buildings to which they are assigned. It was reported that LD mainstream staff have little to no involvement in building professional learning and instructional design activities. Co-teaching with general education teachers is not practiced in a way that would be considered best practice. Finally, there is little or no collaboration with the ML Special Services Department regarding professional learning, instruction, related services, staffing, marketing or budgeting. There is a feeling among some that there is an implicit message of separation and isolation that is being perpetuated. If indeed the messaging of separation exists, and is in part preventing collaboration and communication needed for growth and improvement, then it needs to be addressed.

Complicating these issues are perceptions related to LD's connection to the Mountain Lakes School District. We found that some view the program as autonomous and a stand alone program, while others view it as a part of the MLSD.

Those who view LD as part of the MLSD cited legal, financial and historical reasons knowing that the program's roots are grounded in an innovative alternative to placing students who are Deaf in residential schools. Several LD staff, parents and community residents see value in including LD students in mainstream classes and activities. There is also the feeling among many that the fine reputation of LD adds to the stellar reputation of the MLSD because of what the talented LD staff does to prepare its students for success.

Those who view LD as a stand alone school cited reasons that are related to budgetary, instructional and collegial practices. The majority of the students that LD serves do not receive their education in the elementary and middle schools. Most are self-contained in the LD building, rarely mixing with hearing students and students who live in the MLSD. It was pointed out that LD activities and events are not listed on the MLSD calendar. It is the perception of some that only LD staff are to intervene when issues of concern arise with mainstream LD students. Lake Drive students rarely participate in after school MLSD sports and activities. And, there is a perception that some mainstream staff do not take ownership of LD students because they come from other districts and bring with them a myriad of challenges. Finally, there is a strong opinion among many that LD revenues should not be used for MLSD expenditures.

Many stakeholders stated that the Lake Drive principal possesses a strong work ethic, passion, sharp intellect and experience. However, the principal is serving as the instructional leader, promoter, scheduler, keeper and processor of a large volume of operational data and more, leaving little time for reflection and planning for current and future needs of staff and students. It was reported that the Special Services department has no involvement in assisting with program, operational, instructional or marketing research and development, despite the willingness to collaborate. This model of leadership is not sustainable given the recent reductions of LD supervisory and administrative assistance support. Collaborative leadership is essential in order to intensify the focus on program development and promotion.

The emerging questions of collaboration, communication, support and oversight highlight the need for a leadership and oversight plan that sharpens the educational program identity, increases cost effectiveness, improves operating efficiencies, enhances communications and allows for a culture of creative and innovative ideas.



## Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant to strengthen the organizational leadership and support systems of LD. It is understood that not all of the recommendations can be implemented in the exact manner for which they are suggested.

- Consider an administrative team book study using the book, Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts. by Brene Brown.
- Form a visioning committee charged with crafting an actionable five year strategic plan specifically for LD. Members of the committee may include; sending district representation, MLSD district administrator, LD principal, MLSD principal representative, LD teacher, MLSD teacher, community partners, parents and students.
  - Use the Lake Drive Mission Statement to begin the work.
  - It is beyond the scope of this study to make strategic planning recommendations regarding the MLSD. However, AEC recommends that the work of crafting a strategic plan for LD be done as part of the MLSD strategic planning process.
  - Consider the following pillars for improvement when strategic planning:
    - Growing Leadership and Professional Capacity
    - Fiscal Stewardship and Operations
    - Student Learning, Achievement and Social/Emotional Growth
    - Community Relations, Family Partnerships and Marketing
- Conduct a feasibility analysis that examines the leadership structure of LD and the MLSD Special Services department for the purpose of increasing operational efficiencies, enhancing programming, bolstering marketing and reducing administrative costs.
- It is imperative at this time that communication regarding all matters concerning LD be enhanced. The superintendent, business administrator and LD principal should meet monthly. Meeting agendas should be developed in advance. The purposes of the meetings are to discuss the needs and status of leadership, finances, staffing, educational

programming, professional learning and marketing. Other district and building administrators should be invited as needed.

- Form a task force charged with crafting a set of bylaws to be approved by all necessary parties. Task-force membership may include; representatives from sending districts, LD principal and an MLSD district administrator. The MLSD attorney should provide guidance and counsel. Bylaws provide a set of governing standards and conditions for the MLSD and inform sending districts.
- Form an advisory board for LD composed of sending-district representation, MLSD district administration, LD principal, MLSD principal representative, LD teacher, community member, parent and student. Meetings would take place quarterly for the purpose of discussing budget transparency, capital needs, marketing, inclusion and supportive business and community partnerships.
- Form a dedicated parent organization of Lake Drive Program for the purposes of support and insight.
- Implement an enhanced collaborative model for deciding on macro needs related to budgeting, purchasing, staffing and capital improvements. In this model, the LD principal would provide recommendations based on documented data to the district office team for final decisions. This model requires the principal to continue to manage the details of the LD budget and make decisions on the needs of the program. Expenditure decisions must be aligned with the LD (MLSD) strategic plan. All LD staff should be given an overview of this process.
- Schedule quarterly administrative team macro budget update meetings or schedule in time for budget updates into each of the administrative team meetings. There should be complete transparency of each of the school budgets among the administrative team.
  - It may be helpful to follow up quarterly with each principal to discuss their specific budgets.
- Continue to educate the community about the MLSD and LD budgets and the impact on each of the schools.

- Begin each public and administrative team budget presentation with a brief review of the district strategic plan. Demonstrating budget alignment with the vision, mission and goals of the MLSD promotes understanding and transparency. This practice provides reason and answers the “Why” questions.
- Achieve systemic alignment of administrative, principal, department chairpersons and content leaders evaluation goals with the goals of the MLSD strategic plan and the goals of each school building.
- Consider the support roles that the director of Special Services and the curriculum director play in supporting LD. These leaders may be able to play a collaborative role in assisting with aligning professional learning, mainstream support, inclusion, data-driven decision making, curriculum design, staffing redundancies, IEP processes and data processing.
- Develop and publish an LD organizational chart that visually conveys the LD leadership structure by illustrating the reporting lines, roles, responsibilities, and relationships between individuals and program components.
- Review and make the necessary revisions and updates to all LD job descriptions.
- Provide the technical training necessary for adjusting to the loss of key LD staff.
- Develop an LD handbook that specifies clearly written operational guidelines and special education processes.

## SECTION 4: FISCAL STEWARDSHIP AND OPERATIONS

---

### **Narrative**

American Educational Consultants performed an analysis on the Lake Drive Program to estimate the full cost and sustainability to Mountain Lakes School District taxpayers, not only so that these costs were accurately compared, but also so that appropriate tuition rates can be determined.

It should be noted that AEC limited its analysis of costs to the Lake Drive Program, which serves only a small portion of students with disabilities. These students represent those with the most significant, complex disabilities.

The AEC team reviewed several financial documents and reports including a series of Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (now known as ACFR, Annual Comprehensive Financial Report), Certified Tuition Rates, School Register Summary, LD master schedules, and ESEA, IDEA, and ESSERs funding.

The Lake Drive Program is financially self-sustaining at this time. However, long term sustainability is concerning given the trend of declining enrollment and increasing tuition costs. Current tuition rates are competitive but future increases in tuition rates are a concern to sending districts and may add to the problem of a downward trend in enrollment. The table below represents the current tuition rates of the competitive programs most like LD.

**Table 1: Comparable Tuition Rates**

Lake Drive Program	\$84,475.00
Bergen County	\$89,460.00
Marie H. Katzenbach	\$85,139.00
Summit Speech School	\$64,050.00

It should be noted that a recent uptick in enrollment has been reported. It is difficult to determine if the uptick is a post-pandemic spike or if the downward trend is reversing. More specific data is needed and should be tracked over time.

In 2018 there was an audit finding regarding tentative tuition charges and actual certified tuition charges for the 2016-2017 school year. The Audit Manager Report concluded that actual costs were more than estimated costs and the board made adjustments to bill sending districts for excess charges. The report pointed out that the board of education has a responsibility to determine that expenditures and contract commitments are in line with State statute.

The district replaced their business administrator and hired a new superintendent for the 2020-2021 school year. Prior to this, interims were used for both positions. In addition, the board of education has changed and the organizational chart of direct reporting has also changed from year to year.

It has been reported that tuition revenues and expenditures were wrongly reported in the ACFR. The district was ultimately driving up their tuition costs for reimbursement resulting in a change in auditing firms in order to validate mistakes made by the prior business administrator and administration. We also found that LD had full autonomy for the billing practices, possibly contributing to the financial problem. The MLSD administration took over the billing process for the 2020-2021 school year.

The LD budget was reduced by \$1.2M for the 2021-2022 school year to offset the overall MLSD \$2.4M shortfall.

The AEC team has concluded that the Lake Drive Program continues to be revenue neutral and is able to sustain itself. There is a false narrative that continues to circulate throughout the community claiming LD is a drain on the MLSD budget.

It is imperative that there is a full understanding of the financial and educational relationship of the MLSD and LD programs. The current board of education, finance committee, superintendent and business administrator are diligently working to solve the financial issues that affect the MLSD and LD.

The consulting team viewed the video of the May 1, 2021 board of education meeting at which the superintendent and several board members voiced their support and hope for LD. It is clear that the superintendent and the business administrator continue to value LD and the services it provides students and their

families. They are examining a range of MLSD financial issues brought on by prior fiscal practices that have been exacerbated by the timing of declining LD enrollment. Time and collaboration are needed to sort out the issues, solve the challenges and put practices into place that will end the annual circular pattern of budgetary concerns.

The interview process revealed strong negative emotions from some residents, parents and staff regarding the use of LD revenues for broader financial purposes within the MLSD. Many LD staff, some residents and some parents perceive that LD does not have a separate budget as it once did, adding to the discontent. It needs to be communicated that LD does indeed have its own detailed budget. Some interviewees continue to perpetuate the narrative that the board's finance committee does not exist, explaining that it was once disbanded under previous leadership. It should be stated here that the finance committee does exist and is invested in working with the administration to solve the current cyclical financial issues.

It also needs to be understood that the MLSD allocation charges for indirect costs is a common and legitimate practice for school districts with revenue generating programs. The overall fiscal relationship between school districts and program revenue centers are often complementary and sustaining.

Resolving the financial challenges be them real or perceived, will in part, depend on consistency of leadership, a long term financial plan, effective oversight, accountability, communication and transparency.

### **Programming Expenditures and Revenues**

Local school districts often turn to state approved programs for the disabled when they have students who need intensive, highly specialized services. These services, including therapies, counseling, medical support, behavior intervention, assistive technologies and specialized equipment are prescribed and detailed by the sending district in each student's individual education plan. They are highly specialized and costly.

As stated, overall there are a total of approximately eighty-three LD students being served in the LD building, Wildwood Elementary, Briarcliff Middle and MLHS. This number does not include those students being served through

itinerant services. There are eighty full and part time staff including four itinerant teachers.

Sending districts pay an additional premium of approximately \$36K for 1:1 paraprofessionals. LD classroom paraprofessionals are paid on the MLSD scale. Teachers and related service providers are paid on scale by the MLSD.

For years, it has been assumed that the cost of serving students with disabilities in the Lake Drive Program is greater than the cost of serving similar students in self-contained MLSD programs. The assumption was based on published tuition rates. However, these tuition rates cannot be easily compared. Lake Drive tuition rates include all costs. Mountain Lakes School District tuition rates exclude pension, social security, health benefits on retirement, facilities construction and associated debt service. These costs are paid by state and/or county tax dollars, not MLSD taxpayers. Mountain Lakes School District, therefore, reports tuition rates that are lower than the full actual cost to taxpayers in Mountain Lakes and the sending districts.

Using data available from NJDOE and MLSD, AEC reviewed the statewide average actual cost, per pupil, of services in the following programs:

- Lake Drive Program self-contained settings
- Approved private schools for the disabled
- County-based special services school districts
- Local districts' self-contained classes in a receiving relationship with other local districts

Mountain Lakes hired an outside consultant company, Wiss Consultants, to calculate the tuition rates for Lake Drive School for the future. The use of Wiss Consultants gave the NJDOE financial offices a sense of validity for the Lake Drive Program.

The AEC team analysis reveals that, when a student with disabilities in LD needs intensive, specialized services in a self-contained setting, the full cost to taxpayers is actually **lower** than when provided by a local public school district or a county special services school district. Actual costs in public school settings, when all sources are considered, are considerably higher than published rates, and exceed the cost of comparable programs offered by Lake Drive Schools.

The certified 2021/2022 tuition rate for the Lake Drive Program is \$85,475 per student which is \$11K higher than last year according to an outside agency. Mountain Lakes School District bills the sending districts one rate and then rebills (+ or - ) once they receive the certified tuition rate. The trend has been increased billing to the sending schools each year

The projected tuition rate for the 2022/2023 school year is expected to increase again causing the business administrator to call sending districts because of the potential negative reaction to the increases. Tuition increases must be controlled in order to decrease the risk of losing students. See Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Certified Tuition Rates Compared**

<b>Mountain Lakes School District</b>						
<i>Certified Tuition Rates</i>	<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
Kindergarten	13,426	14,599	14,811	NA	NA	NA
Grades 1-5	13,964	15,816	18,037	NA	NA	NA
Grades 6-8	14,399	14,706	18,822	NA	NA	NA
Grades 9-12	18,443	17,503	16,872	NA	NA	NA
<b>Mountain Lakes Enrollment/ADM</b>	1,532	1,574	1,549	1,478	NA	NA
<b>Per Audit (unaudited)</b>	1,531	1,587	1,454	1,478	NA	NA
<b>Lake Drive Program</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
<i>Auditory Impairments - Certified</i>	68,811	66,159	66,009	85,475	NA	NA
<b>Estimated Tuition Rate - Wildwood</b>	63,500	64,200	65,000	70,200	72,037	80,000
<b>Estimated Tuition Rate - Briarcliff</b>	65,000	65,950	67,000	72,360	72,037	80,000
<b>Estimated Tuition Rate - High School</b>	67,000	68,200	69,000	74,520	72,037	80,000
<b>Billing Difference for Sending Districts</b>	5,311	1,959	1,009	15,275	NA	NA
<b>Per Audit (unaudited)</b>	115	103	98	91	NA	NA
<b>Bergen County Special Services</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
Auditory Impairments (HIP/SHIP)	-	-	-	-	78,660	-
<b>Marie H. Katzenbach School For the Deaf</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>2018-2019</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
Auditory Impairments (HIP/SHIP)	-	-	-	-	-	85,139
<b>Lake Drive Maintenance Repairs</b>	141,627	221,149	216,316	81,991	NA	NA



NA= Tuition Rates are certified by the NJDOE based on Prior Year Audited Financial Information

Tuition Receivables = Tuition charges were established by the BOE based on estimated costs. The charges are subject to adjustment when the final costs have been determined.

Tuition Payable = Tuition charges for the fiscal years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 were based on rates established by the receiving district. These rates are subject to change when the actual costs have been determined.

ADM= Average Daily Membership

**Table 3: Mountain Lakes Boro Advertised Enrollments**

Pupil Enrollment Categories	10-15-2019 Actual	10-15-2020 Actual	10-15-2021 Estimate
On Roll Regular Full-Time	1,200.0	1,174.0	1,165.0
On Roll Regular Shared-Time		2.0	2.0
On Roll Special Ed Full-Time	247.0	233.0	226.0
On Roll Special Ed Shared-Time	8.0	5.0	5.0
On Roll Subtotal	1,455.0	1,414.0	1,398.0
In Private School Placements	10.0	11.0	17.0
Sent to Other Districts Special Ed	2.0	2.0	2.0
Received	376.0	359.5	340.5

The AEC team reviewed the actual cost of the Lake Drive Program receiving students from other districts. Some districts operate self-contained special education classes which serve not only students with disabilities in that district, but also receive students from other districts on a tuition basis. To determine the statewide average tuition in such a setting, AEC examined the tentative tuition

rates reported to the NJDOE. A statewide average tuition, per pupil, can be calculated based on receiving school relationships for approximately students placed in public school, self contained special education classes. This produced a statewide average cost per pupil.

When all costs to taxpayers are considered, e.g., pension, social security, retirement healthcare benefits, the actual statewide average cost per pupil for a traditional 10-month academic calendar in a public receiving program can be estimated.

Regardless of where a student with significant disabilities is placed, specialized transportation services beyond that which is offered for general education students on regular bus routes will likely be required. It is acknowledged that specialized transportation costs associated with any out-of-district program can be high. Further study of this is warranted.

Table 4 below indicates that there are a total of fifteen staff serving thirty-six students in grades K-7. This is an adult to student ratio of 2.4 to1. NJDOE allows for a class size of 9-12 students when a paraprofessional is present. Each classroom must be taught by a certified teacher of the Deaf. Age range in any given classroom cannot exceed four years.

Lake Drive class sizes in grades K-7 average 7.2 students. Significantly under the maximum. There is at least one paraprofessional in each classroom. There are two or more paraprofessionals in four of the five classrooms. Six of the paraprofessionals are 1:1 because of comorbidity, such as emotional disabilities. LD has three dedicated teachers for art, music and PE. Students are pulled out of their self-contained classrooms for specials and most related services. Pulling students out for related services lowers the class size for a period of time.

**Table 4: Lake Drive School Building Enrollment and Staffing K-7 by Classroom Grade Level**

Grade(s)		K-2	2-3	5	5-7	6-7
Students		8	8	5	7	8
Teachers of the Deaf		1	1	1	1	1
Classroom Paraprofessionals		1	1	1	0	0
1:1 Paraprofessionals		1	1	0	2	3

The data in Table 4 suggest that there are cost savings opportunities with regards to the number of certified teachers and paraprofessionals needed under law to serve thirty-six students. It was reported by sending-district representatives that competing programs in the region undercut each other with respect to tuition costs in order to attract and sustain enrollment. Strategically reducing the number of staff without sacrificing quality will help to contain rising tuition costs, sustain enrollment and strengthen the competitive standing of LD. It is the utilization of talented staff, not necessarily the number of staff, that determines quality. These are difficult decisions that impact people’s lives. Therefore, attrition strategies and careful examination of workloads and expertise should be the preferred method, if in fact a further reduction in staff is necessary.

The Ivy Hall Preschool and Total Communication programs are located in the LD building. The LD principal oversees both programs.

The current enrollment in the Ivy Hall Preschool is forty-eight students. Four of those students are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The remainder of the students are typical peers or have other classifications. Ivy Hall is staffed with four teachers, four classroom paraprofessionals and two 1:1 paraprofessionals. This staffing pattern is reasonable given state guidelines.

The current enrollment in the Total Communication Preschool is eight students. This program is staffed with one teacher, one paraprofessional and one 1:1 paraprofessional. This staffing pattern is reasonable given state guidelines.

Teachers are dual certified in early childhood education and deaf education. There are four designated classrooms. It was reported that students of staff do not pay tuition causing questions of equity. There is the potential for the preschool to become a revenue center by growing its services. The potential lies in eliminating wait lists, expanding the types of disabilities for which students are enrolled, providing developmental interventions and collaborating with the MLSD Special Services department to provide unique services to LD students. This approach may help to maintain and increase enrollment in the LD program.

**Table 5: Ivy Hall Preschool (4/25/2022)**

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Classroom Para</i>	<i>Students (parent paid tuition)</i>	<i>Students (ML, SPED)</i>	<i>Students (LD/deaf)</i>	<i>TOTAL STUDENTS</i>	<i>1:1 Para</i>
1	1	11	2	2	15	
1	1	12	3	0	15	1 - ML Para
1	1	7	2	2	11	1 - ML Para
1 (half day)	1	7	0	0	7 HALF DAY	

**Table 6: Total Communication Preschool (4/25/2022)**

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Classroom Para</i>			<i>Students (LD/deaf)</i>	<i>TOTAL STUDENTS</i>	<i>1:1 Para</i>
1	1			8	8	1 - LD Para

It was found that there are two or more related service providers such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists and school psychologists in a given building on any given day. This kind of a staffing pattern may present an opportunity to decrease redundancy of services that may save costs.

Special education directors from three neighboring school districts reported that they contract with outside vendors for educational audiology and teacher of the deaf services. This information indicates an opportunity for LD to provide these services by expanding the role of the audiologist thus generating revenue.

The interview data indicates a potential for revenue growth regarding itinerant services. It was reported that LD itinerant teachers have observed vendors from other agencies providing the same or similar services. Travel time is not billable and for some teachers travel can exceed three hours to serve one or two students. IEP service minutes are often less than what is actually provided. Services provided are often outside the area of expertise or training taking away from instructional time.

The Lake Drive facility is one hundred four years old with an audiology suite that contains a sound booth. The facility is equipped with a gymnasium, art room, dedicated OT/PT space and air conditioning in all classrooms. The facility is also equipped with Alertus visual alert safety system designed especially for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Student provided hearing assistance technologies (HAT) require updating.

During the on-site visit of LD it was observed that at least one smart board was not functioning properly and the audiology testing instruments are old and failing and need updating. It was also observed that many MLSD students have continuous access to 1:1 laptops. LD students did not appear to have the same

access to this type of technology. We were not able to ascertain if this was a function of readiness or budgeting.

Lake Drive students placed in buildings other than the LD building need to be transported to LD for annual hearing evaluations. Transportation has not been available for at least the 2021-22 school year reportedly due to a lack of finances and drivers resulting in a lack of testing services.

Mountain Lakes School District students do not utilize the LD educational audiologist at LDS. Hearing testing for students who fail school hearing screening, exhibit hearing problems, or have known hearing loss rarely receive services at LDS.

## **Recommendations**

### *Budget and Staffing*

- Continue to develop separate and consistent financial budgets for Mountain Lakes School District and Lake Drive School with full transparency.
- Develop a quarterly Lunch and Learn budget program for residents.
- Consider conducting a comprehensive and detailed independent financial audit of the Lake Drive Program. Continue to conduct final LD revenue calculations and estimates in the business office.
- Develop written staffing parameters and processes based on NJDOE guidelines, enrollment trend data, class sizes, past practices and comorbidity rates to be used as guide for staffing decisions.
  - LD staffing parameters should be consistent with the written staffing parameters and processes of the MLSD.
  - Develop and share the staffing parameters and processes with LD staff. This may be best done in a staff meeting while addressing the issues of sustainability and viability.
  - Examine opportunities for reducing staff with low class sizes. For example, one 5th grade classroom has 5 students, 1 teacher and 1 paraprofessional. Another classroom has a total of 7 students in grades 5-7 with 1 teacher and 2 paraprofessionals.
- Develop a 5 year plan that projects attrition of staff. This should be an ongoing practice across the district and work in concert with budget

projections. An attrition strategy informed by enrollment trends should be the first option if reductions of staff are warranted.

- Implement the practice of examining the reassignment of all qualified personnel when a position becomes vacant or there is a shift in need.
- Examine potential redundancy of related services staffing patterns for LD students at Briarcliff, Wildwood and MLHS.
- Develop written guidelines for hiring and assigning paraprofessionals (See Appendix— for suggestions)
- Develop a five year technology replacement cycle with estimated costs and budget strategy for LD.
  - Use of ESSERs funding would be an effective one time expenditure.
- Examine service contracts and age appropriate assistive technologies and equipment.
  - Obtain information and recommendations from the audiologist regarding updates and replacements.
- Examine the potential of shared services with other DHH programs and schools.
- Work with the sending district CST team to determine the best way to include transportation for before and after school, club, sports inclusion.
- Analyze staff schedules to evaluate direct student contact time, planning time and time devoted to other school duties for efficiency and best use.

### *Revenue Sources*

- Explore the addition of a Grant Writer for the Mountain Lakes School District. The person would pay for themselves utilizing the indirect cost rates for each grant to pay for their services. Currently the Mountain Lakes School District has ESSERs funds, ESEA funding, Title I - \$14,000, Title II - \$10,757, Title III - \$1,201, Title IV \$10,000 and IDEA Basic \$305,589 and IDEA Preschool \$7,604. Consider structuring the compensation schedule based on secured revenues.
- Consider increasing the educational itinerant services program to regional school districts.
- Consider increasing itinerant audiological and speech-language services to regional school districts.
- Explore expanding the Ivy Hall Preschool program.

- Collaborate with Special Services to provide unique services to LD students.
  - Collaborate with Special Services to enroll three and four year olds that do not meet current enrollment criteria.
  - Base teacher certification requirements on student needs data.
  - Provide developmental intervention services.
  - Provide greater flexibility in the number of tuition-paid service hours.
  - Examine the costs of providing free preschool instruction to select clients.
- Clarify and market the identity of the auditory component of the LD program.
    - Examine the market for potential enrollment.
  - Consider utilizing audiology services for all MLSD students and staff.
  - Examine itinerant services billing details and protocols for potential revenue opportunities. For example, travel time for staff.
  - Consider fees for Child Study and IEP consultation to sending districts.
  - Connect with the Mountain Lakes Education Foundation to provide student based funding opportunities.
  - Seek out educational, cultural and financial partnerships with businesses, companies and corporations that have a mission for serving students who are DHH as part of their business and community service model.
  - Consider the possibility of developing a LD Foundation by reaching out to individuals, corporations and companies with a mission for supporting programs for DHH.
    - Foundation dollars raised can be earmarked for tangible program needs and upgrades.



## SECTION 5 : EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

---

### **Narrative**

The LD parents and case managers we interviewed for this report are highly complimentary of the Lake Drive Program, as are many Mountain Lakes residents. It is important to share some of their statements here because even though there are improvements to be made, they reinforce the educational and cultural value that LD brings to the MLSD. All should be proud of the positive impact LD had on students and their families.

“Lake Drive has not only given my child hope but has given our family hope.”

“Lake Drive staff knows my child and his every need.”

“We are so appreciative of the MLSD and Lake Drive for the education my child receives.”

“Our daughter feels part of the Mountain Lakes Schools. She is accepted by other students and her teachers are great.”

“The communication with our child’s teachers is fantastic. We always know what is going on.”

“We are grateful that the MLSD has this option for my child. I don’t know where we would be without it.”

“Thank you , Thank you, Thank you!”

The Lake Drive Program provides a comprehensive and well established educational programming for regional students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Impressively, LD is providing a wide range of special services and programs executed by highly qualified teachers, paraprofessionals and specialists in Deaf education. Lake Drive offers early intervention, self-contained,

mainstream and itinerant programming and strives to meet the needs of each student and the sending school districts.

The current educational, programming and instructional practices have suited Lake Drive for many years. Talented leaders and staff work hard within the current model to deliver their very best to students.

At the heart of any program is what happens in the classroom between educators, parents and community partners. These relationships, within any program where the mission is clear and the culture is one of continuous innovation, growth and improvement, are not only essential to sustainability but to the development of the whole child.

Technology, the ubiquity of information and the fast growing body of research on how we learn require all school districts to have the ability to adapt, adjust and pivot to the needs of the learner and to the communities they serve. American Educational Consultants has found substantive educational opportunities for growth and improvement within the Lake Drive Program. To be clear, this is not to say that LD staff do not give their all everyday. In fact, many of the LD staff we talked with, recognize the importance of making improvements to LD.

## **Educational Programming**

The Lake Drive Program consists of the following educational components.

- The Sound Start Babies Program provides early intervention services and is housed in the Lake Drive School facility.
- The Ivy Hill Preschool provides programming for typical peers and students with disabilities including hearing loss.
- Self-contained programming for students in grades K-7 is offered in the Lake Drive facility. Students receive art, music, physical education instruction and all related services within the Lake Drive School building setting.
- Eligible students receive mainstream educational support services while attending Mountain Lakes Schools. Lake Drive high school students who attend Mountain Lakes High School have the opportunity to participate in a shared time program at the Morris County Vocational School and participate in internships within the MLSD and community.
- Itinerant services that include testing, evaluation, specialized instruction, professional learning, related services and mainstream support.

- A range of related services including audiology, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, interpreting, paraprofessional assistance, social work and counseling.

The Lake Drive mental health team conducts the LD intake process. The intake process takes between sixty and ninety minutes. It includes the review of files and test data, meetings with the parent, student, principal and staff and an informal educational assessment with a LD teacher. It is a good opportunity for parents, students and staff to begin building relationships and learn more about LD. It is rare, but LD does not accept all referrals. The mental health team is cited as an element of the program that is unique to LD and helps set it apart from other programs in New Jersey.

There was concern expressed by some staff and parents that the current intake philosophy is program centered and not student centered. It was reported that a student's match to the program seemed to take more priority than matching the program to the student's needs. This is a difficult balance to achieve for any program given the typical imposed financial and programmatic parameters. The LD leadership and staff strive to achieve this balance. The impact of not achieving the balance could be a missed opportunity to enroll new students. However, new enrollment does not always equate to financial stability. Therefore, it is important to examine the cost benefit of providing services when enrolling new students especially when new enrollment impacts staffing.

Essentially, there are two distinct preschool programs. Both the Ivy Hall Preschool program and the Total Communication program are highly thought of by many who have had children in the program. Teachers are dual certified in early childhood and deaf education. This is a real strength but questions have been raised about the dual certification requirement given the few Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in the Ivy Hall preschool. The certification requirement for all preschool teachers may, in part, be restricting the potential growth of the program by not being able to serve students with other classifications, as is exemplified in many public preschools around the country. This kind of model warrants further investigation and may benefit both the MLSD and the LD program. One interviewee stated that she knew of four students who left the program because of inflexibility in programming. Consultants were not able to confirm this statement.

Well developed transition programs are needed. According to staff, students and parents the emerging transition-to-career program is not adequate and needs considerable further development. Likewise, staff and parents spoke often for the need of a life skills program. It was reported by staff and students that there is no formal program that transitions students from the self contained program to the mainstream program. Transition programs assist students with achieving success and are an attractive program component to sending districts and parents.

Education is provided in a diversity of language systems using that which is most closely matched to each individual student. There is a growing percentage of students whose native language is Spanish according to LD staff. LD is approximately forty-three percent Hispanic/Latino. According to staff, the percentage of students whose native language is Spanish is increasing. It was reported that there are no ELL services for those students whose native language is something other than English. Language barriers are detrimental to a student's academic, intellectual and emotional growth.

According to staff from sending districts, the auditory/oral programming is not fully known to regional school districts and sending districts. Interviewees from the sending districts stated that LD is a program to which they send their students to learn sign language. Some LD staff and sending district representatives expressed that the auditory/oral component of the program needs development as it represents the future of deaf education.

Lake Drive has a team of itinerant teachers of the Deaf that provide direct support and intervention to students with hearing loss who remain in their home school district. These contracted services are available on a weekly or monthly basis, as well as consultative support throughout the school year. The team is also available to provide in-service training for general education professionals working with students with hearing loss. These services are under utilized and may be able to be expanded (See Section Four: Fiscal Stewardship and Operations for recommendations).

Staff reported that direct instructional time provided by itinerant teachers is lost due to completing tasks that are typically done by an educational audiologist. Click on the following link for audiologist scope of practice.

[scope-of-practice.pdf \(edaud.org\)](#)

Lake Drive offers contracted evaluation services to sending districts. The team is composed of certified child study team professionals who have extensive knowledge about deafness and its educational impact and experience working

with students with hearing loss. AEC suggests that these services may be underutilized and may be able to be expanded. (See Section Four: Fiscal Stewardship and Operations for recommendations).

Interviews with staff indicate that several LD teachers have no set curriculum. Some LD teachers expressed considerable concern regarding this issue, explaining that they do their best with out-dated textbooks and materials they themselves design. A well developed curriculum that is collaboratively adjusted and executed is crucial to a student's academic success.

Also, concerning is that several LD teachers assigned to mainstream buildings expressed that there is little or no interaction with mainstream content area teams and departments for the purpose of developing curriculum, crafting lessons and discussing instructional strategies.

American Educational Consultants requested state achievement test scores but it was explained that the sending districts administered the tests. It was also explained that many of the LD students are exempt and those who take the state achievement test do not do well. The LD staff has access to each student's scores if the test was taken. We were not able to determine the extent to which a student's state test scores are used to inform instruction.

The AEC team interviewed seven students who were of middle school and high school age. Five students were in the mainstream and two students were in the self contained placement. All felt disconnected to mainstream students. Some of the LD students have Mountain Lake friends but they perceive the culture as not always friendly and accepting of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students from modest means. Students also explained that the distance to their homes makes it difficult to socialize with their Mountain Lakes friends after school. Most wish they could participate in after-school activities and are frustrated that a lack of after-school transportation services from their sending districts limits after-school involvement in activities. Lake Drive does not take students on field trips according to some of the staff we interviewed. It was also reported by staff that transportation was limited due to lack of finances, drivers and unrepaired buses. If so, it is plausible that this circumstance is limiting the opportunity for field trips.

Transportation has not been available for at least the 2021-22 school year reportedly due to a lack of finances and drivers resulting in a lack of testing services.

Despite these issues, all of the students we talked with love their teachers and are grateful to receive their education in Mountain Lakes where they can communicate using sign language with many and varied teachers and peers

Many of those interviewed, spoke of the added value LD students bring to the culture of the MLSD. Moving forward, it is important that the MLSD and LD leadership collaborate on finding solutions to increase the engagement of LD students in MLSD activities and make Deaf culture part of the fabric of the school system. Greater inclusion will enhance the attractiveness of LD to districts and parents who are shopping for the best program.

### **Professional Learning**

Lake Drive staff participates in the professional learning programs offered by the MLSD. Recent topics have included: safe schools, dyslexia, Project Based Learning, mental health, behavioral challenges, instruction to increase achievement, equality, social awareness and Bedrock Literacy Curriculum for students who are DHH. These topics are aligned with the MLSD Long Range Education Plan. However, there is overwhelming consensus among those interviewed that there is a significant need for customized professional learning for LD staff.

There is a feeling of isolation among many of the LD teachers assigned to mainstream buildings. Some feel isolated from the mainstream staff as well as the staff that works in the LD building. There is no co-teaching model that consists of a mainstream teacher and a LD teacher that is executed using co-teaching model best practices according to the staff we interviewed.

Well developed professional learning programs allow educators and support staff to share and learn from one another. The AEC team found no evidence of a structured professional learning community.

### **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)**

A deep examination into the processes of Individualized Education Program (IEP) development is beyond the scope of this study. However, the consulting

team conducted a review of fifteen sample IEPs of elementary, middle and high school LD students.

Our purpose of the review was not an audit or analysis of goal writing, student progress measures, or student performance and achievement. It was to be sure each student was receiving a free, appropriate public education as described in New Jersey special education regulations. Our goal was to confirm that IEPs are used as a source of critical student information, instructional roadmaps and a method for monitoring progress.

AEC found that elements in some of the IEPs were lacking or unclear which would restrict the reader from capturing a clear picture of the student, including for example a description of the disability, technology used by a student to access the curriculum, the communication system used by the student, the impact of the disability on school progress. No one IEP lacked all these items.

Lake Drive is a receiving program for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. All students who attend LD have been classified by their sending district. The IEP document is completed at the home district and provided to LD to execute. The New Jersey Department of Education does not have a universal IEP writer so the IEP formats from the sending school districts can look different. An updated audiology report is submitted annually to the sending district.

Lake Drive teachers and related service staff provide the PLAAFP (Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance), goals and objectives, the NJ Communication Plan, testing accommodations, instructional accommodations and service recommendations. The sending district then inserts this information into the district generated skeleton of the IEP. The IEP process is one of collaboration with the sending districts. Lake Drive staff work with sending district case managers throughout the development of the IEP. Tri-annual evaluations are reportedly waived for most students. Sending district representatives report that the LD staff is professional and collaborative when adding to the IEP process.

Lake Drive students meet eligibility for specialized instruction in the area of "*Auditorily Impaired*". Students present with a range of hearing loss and myriad hearing assistive technologies. Students come with their own hearing aids/cochlear implants/bone anchored hearing aids that are managed by the family and agency audiologist. Personal and classroom DM (FM) systems are provided for the school day to optimize hearing devices to achieve auditory

access within the classroom and throughout the school building. Some students present with comorbid conditions. Students receive related services as indicated in the IEPs. Related services stated on the IEPs include speech-language therapy, occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), nurse, 1:1 paraprofessional, transportation and interpreter. Audiological services are reported to be provided to all students for at least an annual evaluation, hearing assistance technology (HAT) fitting, training and maintenance of devices. Audiology, however, was not listed as a related service on any of the IEPs examined.

Individualized Education Program formats do not appear to be standardized among sending districts. While this would be extremely difficult to resolve, it does present a challenge for LD staff in locating certain items within the body of the IEPs and creating the necessity to attach reports and documents to the IEP. It is helpful to write IEPs in a manner that assists the unfamiliar reader in gaining a clear picture of the whole child.

Individualized Education Programs indicate that most students of the same age receive the same level of speech-language therapy, for the same number of sessions and length of session. This practice makes it appear that therapy is driven by program needs, not individual student needs.

Teachers of the Deaf, SLPs and the educational audiologist are responsible for providing training to staff regarding each students' educational needs and hearing device management; however, this is not listed under "Support for School Personnel" within any of the IEPs sampled.

Assistive technologies are not consistently reported in the same sections of the IEPs. The assistive technology box is not checked on many of the IEPs. The hearing status discussions are not consistently presented in the same section of the IEPs.

The reasons for determining the need for classroom and 1:1 paraprofessionals are not clear in the IEPs we reviewed. Likewise, the need for educational interpreters is not articulated in the IEPs.

Extended School Year services are written into the IEP for all students.



The omission of salient academic and related services information (for instance a statement regarding level and type of hearing loss, hearing technologies used by student, other related services needed by the student such as hearing testing or hearing technology repair, interpreting, paraprofessional assistance etc.) could result in reduced services and supports for a student in the event the student moves from LD School to another placement.

The omission of salient academic and related services information could leave LD School and ML school district vulnerable if an educational or related service or technology that was provided by not documented was disputed at a later date.

The inclusion of descriptive information regarding the use or lack of use of hearing devices supports the student and district in these ways:

- By differentiating the responsible party in the event of loss, damage, need to reprogram a device.
- By stating what the school district must provide and maintain to access auditory components of the curriculum.
- By stating that no amplification is accepted by a student with the support of the family.

Information in IEPs is used by the State to account for students in a district that receive specially designed instruction and related services. If these do not appear on the IEP, the school district may not receive credit for providing these services and supports. This could have financial and accountability ramifications.

## **Recommendations**

### *Educational Programming*

- Revisit and discuss the intake philosophy and determine if the balance to which programming is determined meets both student needs and program parameters.
- Reconsider the preschool teacher certification requirements. Maintain an appropriate level of the deaf education qualifications based on enrollment data and the opportunity to expand preschool services and flexibility.

- Design and implement student transition programs with a customized component for DHH students.
  - Self contained to Mainstream
  - Transition to Work in grades 7-12
  - Life Skills
- Investigate methods for providing students English Language Learning Services whose native language is not English.
- Conduct an audit of all LD curriculums and instructional practices for the purpose of evaluating:
  - Alignment with mainstream curriculums.
  - Update needed textbooks, instructional digital resources, hands-on instructional materials and technological devices that aid instruction.
  - Use of instructional methods that are varied and engaging.
  - Use of co-teaching models.
- Include LD students in clubs and activities that occur during the school day.

### *Professional Learning*

- Assess the professional learning needs of all LD staff.
- Design and implement a personalized professional learning program for LD staff.
- Implement the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model.
  - Engage staff in a book study using the book: Cultures Built to Last: Systemic PLC's at Work by Richard DuFour and Michael Fulan
  - Train staff on use of the model.
  - Build time into the work day for PLC's.
  - Organize groups within and across grade levels.
  - Involve mainstream staff when appropriate.

### *Deaf Culture*

- Include Deaf culture education in MLSD student assemblies.
- Educate the student body on Deaf culture through student run publications and social media outlets.
- Include Lake Drive students in mentor programs.

- Celebrate students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing by including them in MLSD award recognition programs.
- Create a partnership between MLHS and local TV media to produce a story about LD.
- Create a group or club that brings Hearing and Deaf students together for the purpose of gaining greater understanding through discussions and projects.

### *IEPs*

- Consider developing an IEP format that can be provided to sending districts so that IEP uniformity is achieved and LD staff can more readily access important information.
- Given the area of eligibility is “*Auditorily Impaired*”, the IEP would be more informative to an unfamiliar reader if the leading paragraph described the hearing loss, hearing history, technology used and student compliance with technology.
- Consider including the annual report with audiogram within the introduction of the body of the IEP to support the placement in a program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- Include educational audiologist as a related service provider on LD students’ and itinerant students’ IEPs. This would provide accountability for direct services.
- Develop protocols for the educational audiologist’s attendance at IEP meetings given assistive hearing technology fittings and training responsibilities.
- Examine the reasons for the same level of speech-language therapy provided for same aged students. Discuss the following:
  - The number of students in group therapy.
  - Achieving goals and objectives with a monthly treatment plan provided by the SLP to the teacher or paraprofessional to capture some of the language goals.
  - The impact on time pulled out of the classroom.
  - The reporting of progress monitoring.
  - Adjustments that are needed when a goal looks the same for consecutive years with minimal progress.

- The reasons for all students of the same age receiving the same level of services.
- The teachers of the Deaf, SLPs and the educational audiologist that are responsible for training staff regarding students' educational needs and hearing device management should be listed under the IEP section *Support for School Personnel*.
- The assistive technology box should be checked on page 1 in the IEP information box for all students that utilize hearing or captioning technologies.
- List HAT details under the description of assistive technologies in the IEP. For example, it should be stated that the student comes to school daily with her/his own CI or HA and the device is maintained by the family. Listing details will help protect LD from financial responsibility if there is loss or damage to technology managed by the family.
- State the specific conditions warranting the need of 1:1 paraprofessionals in each student's IEP.
- State the specific conditions for the assignment of educational interpreters in each student's IEP.
- State the specific conditions warranting the need for Extended School Year in each student's IEP.
- Closely progress-monitor student mastery of IEP goals in out-of-district placements to ensure students are receiving appropriate services.
- Formally track the number of students not accepted into LD. Document the reasons for which a student is not accepted into the program. Use this information to inform enrollment decisions.

## SECTION 6: PROGRAM COMPARISONS AND MARKETING

---

### **Narrative**

Lake Drive is a specialized program that attempts to attract clients from mostly the northern region of New Jersey. In today's specialized educational market parents shop for the program that best fits their child's needs. This fact coupled with the rapid advancement of hearing technologies and rising costs makes the development of a long term marketing plan critical.

While LD is a strong program with talented staff, the Lake Drive Program must continue to evolve, adapt and adjust to the needs of sending districts, parents and the needs of potential new students. Lake Drive can no longer rest on its past reputation. A marketing strategy that is in concert with made improvements is needed to sustain and increase enrollment.

The current marketing strategies include word of mouth, website information, emails, and some social media presence. Information about LD can be found on the NJDOE website. Special education directors from neighboring school districts indicate that detailed information about LD is not readily available.

The current marketing strategies are outdated, limited and essentially ineffective. There is a significant opportunity to employ marketing strategies that will not only keep the community informed but will potentially attract school districts and retain current districts. There are several areas for which marketing can be improved.

### **Program Comparisons**

The consulting team conducted an analysis of regional programs that serve students that are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. We compared the service components of LD to eight regional programs that serve Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. The information for these comparisons was gathered from public electronic sources and phone calls to the programs. Not all programs responded to our phone message requests.

The service and program components we chose to compare represent best practice in the field of educating students who are DHH. The purposes of the program comparisons are to:

- Provide stakeholders with a comparative overview of programs for the students who are DHH.
- Gather information for use in marketing the Lake Drive Program.
- Discover potential growth and development opportunities.
- Examine potential LD program and service adjustments within the scope of the existing marketplace.
- Indicate top competitors.

The Lake Drive Program compares favorably to all others offering a range of services that provide students and their families diagnostic, educational and support programs. **Click on the link below to access the program comparison spreadsheet.** Lake Drive is more comprehensive in its services and programs than all eight of the programs to which we compared LD. The AEC team's analysis supports that the strongest competitors are Bergen, Summit Speech School and Katzenbach NJ School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Most notably, LD sets itself apart by providing:

- A total communication, listening and spoken language philosophy
- A center-based program
- A range of related services for ages 3-21
- Classroom instruction in grades PK-12
- Inclusion in general education classrooms
- Itinerant services
- An on-site team of mental health specialists

All but one of the comparisons are day programs. Seven of the eight programs are public. All of the programs have certified teachers of the Deaf and offer audiological, speech-language, physical and occupational therapy, interpreters and psychological services.

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1RGMg9pDyBOrFLcQLdWr76QuhFSfRwQTgMzx82rk\\_irY/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1RGMg9pDyBOrFLcQLdWr76QuhFSfRwQTgMzx82rk_irY/edit?usp=sharing)

## Lake Drive Website

The LD website needs updating and should provide more detailed information with regards to the following.

These pages under the **Academic Programs** tab have little or no information.

- Early Elementary Foundations
- Middle School
- Early Intervention
- Pre School

These pages under the **Services** tab have little or no information.

- Itinerant
- Mental Health
- Occupational Therapy
- Speech and Language

This page under the **Resource** tab has no information.

- Staff Resources

These tabs list no information.

- **Sound Start Babies Foundation** (there is reference to this program under the Early Intervention tab).
- Ivy Hall Preschool

Other.

- A terrific video demonstrating LD staff care for students when the program was closed due to the pandemic is still the prominent video on the website.
- There are no LD events listed on the school calendars.

## **Social Media**

A social media search of the Lake Drive Program revealed a Facebook and Instagram presence. The Facebook page is updated and effectively promotes the activities of the program, staff and students. However, when clicking on the Facebook icon shown on the front page of LD website it loads the Mountain Lakes School District Facebook page. LD Instagram account has 110 followers and updated posts promoting the great things that go on at LD. We could find no Twitter account activity especially created for LD. These tools can be effective in communicating needed information and engaging parents and the community with stories and messages that show the great things that staff and students are doing.

## **Marketing Presentations**

We received no information regarding a team of staff hosting or traveling to school districts for the purpose of marketing, attracting enrollment and providing updates.

## **Recommendations**

### *Administrative*

- Consider designating a Mountain Lakes School District administrator to oversee LD website and work with the necessary parties to provide timely and updated information.
- Develop a set of uniform requirements for populating LD website. For example, all Services pages should list the contact information for reaching key staff.
- Eliminate redundancies in information and under which heading the information resides.
- Add LD events and activities to the MLSD calendar.
- List LD events on the LD calendar.
- Develop a partnership with Sound Start for Babies and the Mountain Lakes Education Foundation.



- Promote the specific activities in which LD students are included in the Mountain Lakes School District Programs.

### *Social Media*

- Continue developing the annual student project that requires students at Mountain Lakes High School to produce videos regarding the extraordinary programming at LD. Videos should be placed on the website and other media outlets.
- Link the LD Facebook account to LD website and district website.
- Create a Twitter account and link it to the LD and district website.
- Create an LD Twitter account that can be used to communicate important information and share moments and activities that promote the program.
- Consider allowing select LD staff to use Twitter for the purpose of sharing stories and experiences that promote LD.

### *Presentations*

- Meet with sending districts and articulate the plan for addressing rising tuition rates.
- Produce a digital promotional brochure that describes the depth and breadth of the Lake Drive Program. Link it to websites, social media outlets and email to sending districts, potential clients, healthcare providers, residents and parents.
- Consider forming a traveling presentation team that would showcase LD to current and potential sending districts on an annual basis.
- Host an LD on-site showcase event for current and potential sending districts on an annual basis during the school day.
- Host an LD showcase event specifically for the Mountain Lakes community.
- Use testimonials from healthcare professionals in all promotional materials.
- Send LD staff ambassadors to information-sharing meetings for children with hearing loss hosted by other agencies such as hospitals, audiology practices, pediatrician offices.

## SECTION 7: CONCLUSION

---

### **Narrative**

The Lake Drive Program has served students well for many years. For many, LD is a source of pride and part of the fabric of the Mountain Lakes School District. It is considered one of the most comprehensive programs for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the region. The LD staff is professional, talented and cares deeply for their students and for the success of the program. Many residents, parents and representatives from sending districts speak highly of the staff and program.

The Mountain Lakes School District is the fiduciary and administrative agent of the Lake Drive Program. Staff and students share facilities and other resources. Lake Drive has its own budget to the same extent as do the MLSD elementary, middle and high school. Lake Drive is a tuition based program, therefore it is a reasonable practice for MLSD to charge for indirect costs. The financial, operational and educational relationship between MLSD and LD is mutually beneficial but must be strengthened in order to sustain and grow the relationship.

The narrative that LD is a drain on the MLSD budget and that MLSD is diminishing the quality of the program and wants to shut it down is simply false, in the opinion of AEC. The consulting team has observed and heard support for LD from the school board and the administration. There are, however, philosophical and operational differences on how the program is to be sustained.

Some view LD as a stand-alone and others view it as a valuable and enriching part of the school district. District leadership must continue to make clear its support for LD. It is strongly encouraged that the administration and LD leadership engage in substantive conversations regarding the decisions that need to be made concerning the sustainability and growth of the Lake Drive Program.

Declining enrollment in LD coupled with a recent district financial shortfall has presented many challenges and caused emotions to run high. The financial shortfall is being resolved without harming LD. Leadership, staff and community

must now come together to solve the challenges related to finance, leadership, collaboration, professional learning, operational efficiencies, curriculum and culture that are cited throughout this report.

There is common ground among administrators, staff, parents and residents on what needs to be done to get started on the work of improving and sustaining LD. The talent and the will exists to craft a comprehensive and actionable strategic plan that will bridge the gaps and create a world class and sustainable service model for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

### ***Getting Started***

Below is a list of recommended actions that should be taken to begin resolving the challenges and issues outlined in this report. Taking action is not necessarily a linear process. One action is often dependent or linked to another and can take place simultaneously. Getting bogged down in status quo thinking will stifle the process. A growth mindset is needed. At times, it is appropriate to fly the plane as you build it.

This list is meant to only encourage getting started on the process of improvement. It does not represent the compression recommendations outlined in this report. Some of these actions are in process to a lesser or greater degree.

- Support
  - School board members and administration continue to publicly articulate support for the Lake Drive Program.
  - District leadership makes routine visits to the LD building and classrooms throughout the district.
- Collaboration
  - Form a stakeholder LD visioning and strategic planning team
    - Provide specific objectives and the financial parameters needed to do the work.
    - The team makes recommendations not final decisions.
  - Explore the possible educational synergies between the special services department and LD.
- Budget
  - Conduct a comprehensive financial audit of LD.
  - Continue to publicly articulate the resolutions to the shortfall.

- Meet with the administrative team and present a macro status of the budget.
- Meet with principals to review their building budgets and discuss expenditure priorities.
- Assess and improve processes for determining LD enrollment projections.
- Staffing
  - Craft LD staffing parameters based on NJDOE guidelines, enrollment, student needs, budgetary constraints and attrition projections.
    - Staff student ratio
    - Utilization of all paraprofessionals
  - Conduct an analysis of potential redundancies of related services throughout the district.
- Culture
  - Examine methods for providing LD students transportation home from after school activities.
  - Explore and implement ideas for bringing Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Hearing students together on a regular basis.
- Professional Learning
  - Conduct a LD needs assessment.
  - Engage LD staff in a book study on PLC's.
  - Train LD staff in the PLC model.
- Marketing
  - Update the LD website.
  - Plan a LD showcase event (s).
  - Design a LD electronic brochure that can be widely distributed.
  - Widen the LD social media presence.

## SECTION 8: APPENDICES

---

### **Appendix A: Acronym Key**

AEC: American Educational Consultants  
ACFR: Annual Comprehensive Financial Report  
CAFR: Comprehensive Annual Financial Report  
CI: Cochlear Implant  
DHH: Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
DM: Digital Modulation  
FM: Frequency Modulation  
HA: Hearing Aid  
HAT: Hearing Assistance Technology  
IEP: Individual Education Program  
LD: Lake Drive Program  
MLSD: Mountain Lakes School District  
MLHS: Mountain Lakes High School  
NJ: New Jersey  
NJDOE: New Jersey Department of Education  
OT: Occupational Therapist  
PK: Pre-Kindergarten  
PLAAFP:  
PLC: Professional Learning Community  
PT: Physical Therapist  
SLP: Speech-Language Pathologist

## **Appendix B: Guidelines for 1:1 Student Aide**

### **Guidelines for Determining a Student with a Disability's Need for a 1:1 Aide**

The purpose of this following information is to provide guidance to assist IEP teams in determining a student with a disability's need for a 1:1 aide. A recommendation for an individual aide is a significant programmatic decision and one that should only be made after a comprehensive discussion of other options considered, and clear documentation as to why those options are not appropriate. While some students may temporarily need the support of a 1:1 aide to receive a free appropriate public education, for other students the assignment of a 1:1 aide may be unnecessarily and inappropriately restrictive.

A goal for all students with disabilities is to promote and maximize independence. IEP teams are responsible for developing and implementing individualized education programs that promote such independence. When a team determines that a student needs a 1:1 aide, it should always be considered a time-limited recommendation and specific conditions/goals must be established to fade the use of the 1:1 aide.

1:1 aides should not be used as a substitute for certified, qualified teachers for an individual student or as a substitute for an appropriately developed and implemented behavioral intervention plan or as the primary staff member responsible for implementation of a behavioral intervention plan. While a teaching assistant may assist in related instructional work, primary instruction should be provided to the student by a certified teacher. A teacher aide may assist in the implementation of a behavioral intervention plan, but should not provide instructional services to the student.

### **Considerations for Determining if a Student Needs a 1:1 Aide**

Each decision to recommend a 1:1 aide must weigh the factors of both (1) the student's individual needs and (2) the available supports in the setting where the student's IEP will be implemented. There are a number of important

considerations that must be made by the team in regard to each of these factors. These include, but are not limited to, consideration of each of the following:

- The student's individual instructional, physical and/or health needs that require additional adult assistance.
- The skills and goals the student is planned to achieve that will reduce or eliminate the need for the 1:1 aide.
- The specific role (e.g., instructional, assistance with personal hygiene) that the aide will provide for the student.
- Other natural supports, accommodations and/or services that could support the student to meet these needs (e.g., behavioral intervention plan; environmental accommodations or modifications; changes in scheduling; instructional materials in alternate formats; assistive technology devices; peer-to-peer supports).
- The extent (e.g., portions of the school day) or circumstances (e.g., for transitions from class to class) the student would need the assistance of a 1:1 aide.
- The potential benefits from assignment of the 1:1 aide and how these will be measured to determine continuation of the recommendation.
- The potential negative impact of assignment of a 1:1 aide for the student (e.g., self-image, isolation and/or development of independence).

#### **Roles and Responsibilities of the 1:1 Aide**

When the decision is made that a student requires a 1:1 aide, school personnel must:

- Consider the qualifications of the individual (i.e., teaching assistant or teacher aide) that would be necessary to meet the needs of the student
- Establish a plan to monitor the student's progress toward the goals to be addressed by the assignment of the 1:1 aide and the student's continuing need for the 1:1 aide
- Consider, as appropriate, a plan for progressively reducing the support provided to the student and his or her dependence on an aide over time
- Plan for substitutes to serve as the student's 1:1 aide to cover staff absences in order to ensure the student receives the recommended IEP services of the 1:1 aide
- Ensure that the 1:1 aide has access to a copy of the student's IEP, has been informed of his or her responsibilities for IEP implementation for the student and has received the professional

development and supervision necessary to carry out these responsibilities.

Once a team recommends a 1:1 aide for an individual student, the staff person is expected to be in close proximity to and working with that student throughout the assigned period.

### **Checklist to Determine a Student's Need For a 1:1 Aide Health/Personal Care**

- Student requires non-medical specialized health care support (e.g., feeding, assistance with braces or prosthesis).
- Student requires positioning or bracing multiple times daily.
- Student requires health-related interventions multiple times daily.
- Student requires direct assistance with most personal care.

#### **Behavior**

- Student presents with serious behavior problems with ongoing (daily) incidents of injurious behaviors to self and/or others or student runs away.
- Student has a functional behavioral assessment and a behavioral intervention plan that is implemented with fidelity.

#### **Instruction**

- Student cannot participate in a group without frequent verbal and/or physical prompting to stay on task and follow directions.

#### **Inclusion in General Education Classes**

- Student needs an adult in constant close proximity for direct instruction.
- Student requires individualized assistance to transition to and from class more than 80 percent of the time.
- Student needs an adult in close proximity to supervise social interactions with peers at all times.

### **1:1 Aide Planning Considerations and Recommendations**

What are the needs of the student which necessitate the assignment of a 1:1 aide?	
What skills and goals must the student achieve to reduce or eliminate the need for a 1:1 aide?	



What are the potential benefits of the assignment of a 1:1 aide?	
What is the potential negative impact of assignment of a 1:1 aide?	
What role will 1:1 aide fulfill (e.g., instructional; behavior support; personal hygiene assistance)?	
For what specific activities (e.g., toileting) and/or times of day (e.g., transition to and from the bus) is the aide needed?	
What qualifications of the individual (i.e., teaching assistant or teacher aide) is necessary to meet the needs of the student?	
What is the plan to monitor the student's progress toward the goals to be addressed by the assignment of the 1:1 aide and the student's continuing need for the 1:1 aide?	
What is the plan for progressively reducing the support provided to the student and his or her dependence on an aide over time?	
If student's 1:1 aide is absent, who will cover in order to ensure the student receives the recommended IEP services of the 1:1 aide or how will substitute staff support be arranged?	
Who/how will 1:1 aide have access to a copy of the student's IEP, and be informed of his or her responsibilities for IEP implementation for the student?	
What, if any professional development and supervision will aide need to carry out these responsibilities?	

## Appendix C: Resources

### *Books*

- Cultures Built to Last: Systemic PLC's at Work, Richard DuFour, Michael Fulan, Solution Trees Press: 2013
- Everyday Courage for School Leaders, Cathay Lasiter, Corwin Press, 2017
- Leading Change, John P. Kotter, Harvard Business Review Press, 2012
- Leading the Inclusive School: Access and Success for All Students, Villa, Richard A. and Thousand, Jaqueline, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2017
- Professional Learning Communities at Work, Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker, National Educational Service, 1998
- Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard, Chip Heath and Dan Heath, Currency Books, 2010

### *Websites*

- Educational Audiologist: <http://edaud.org/pdf/scope-of-practice.pdf>
- NJDOE : <https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/deaf/>