

Comprehensive Program Review of Special Education

White Plains City School District

January 2025

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I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In February 2024, White Plains City School District (WPCSD) engaged with Public Consulting Group (PCG) to conduct an independent review of its special education program and services. This report describes the current state of the special education program in WPCSD and is designed to guide the district toward continuous improvement.

This study examined the following guiding research questions:

Learning Environment and Specialized Services

- To what extent is the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) employed to support students requiring academic and/or behavioral interventions?
- How is the continuum of services organized to support a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?
- Is there a consistent “golden thread,” or supporting body of evidence, that connects the student’s disability with present levels, learner characteristics, goals, progress, placement, and selected accommodations for instruction and assessment?

High Expectations

- How does WPCSD perform with regards to student outcomes and transition for students with disabilities?

Human Capital and Leadership

- How does WPCSD organize and utilize its human capital resources?
- How does WPCSD support teacher pedagogy and provide professional learning?

Systems and Structures

- Do current staffing allocation procedures and practices allow for special education staff to adequately meet the needs of students with disabilities in WPCSD?
- How does WPCSD allocate resources in a way that facilitates a maximum return on district investment? How does budget management occur? How are grant funds accessed and used?

Family and Community Engagement

- To what extent are parents of children with IEPs satisfied with their child’s educational program?
- How do community relations and customer service function for parents of students with disabilities in WPCSD?

METHODOLOGY

PCG conducted a mixed-methods study of the special education program in WPCSD. The findings and recommendations related to programs, policies, and practices resulted from a comprehensive review of several data sources. Sources included 1) Data and Document Analysis, including an Independent IEP Review; 2) Organizational Focus Groups/Interviews; 3) Staff and Parent Surveys; 4) Classroom Observations; and 5) Student Shadowing. These components were drawn from research and practice literature to inform the findings and recommendations. PCG used publicly available achievement and financial information to compare key WPCSD statistics against local, district, state, and national data. The method and sources of data were triangulated to increase the validity of the conclusions regarding program implementation, identification of gaps in services and programming, and recommendations for the continued improvement of WPCSD’s special education programs and continuum of services.

Details of each data source are included below.

Data and Document Analysis

Population Trends, Programs, and Achievement Outcomes Analysis

PCG analyzed special education population trends, programs, and achievement outcomes. Through analysis of assessment data, educational setting data, and other indicators, the team compared student identification rates and outcomes by disability, ethnicity, gender, and other demographic variables. Data included in the report also compared students with IEPs to their general education peers.

Document Review

PCG analyzed over 75 documents for information related to district and school structures, programs, policies, and practices. The documents were coded for themes that aligned with the focus group and interview findings. Documents reviewed were from the following categories:

- Organizational structure, staffing, and resource allocation
- Description of academic programs, services, interventions, and activities
- Documents regarding instruction and professional learning
- District procedures and guides
- Compliance and due process complaints
- Fiscal information, including budget documents

Independent IEP File Review

PCG conducted an independent, virtual IEP student file review. The protocol used for this review was based on PCG's Golden Thread protocol which connects the student's disability with present levels, learner characteristics, goals, progress, inclusion needs, and selected accommodations for instruction and assessment. In total, 25 student files were reviewed following this protocol, which focused on present levels, goals, services and placement, and student progress. Additional information about the structure of the Golden Thread protocol can be found later in the report.

Organizational Focus Groups and Interviews

To understand how special education programs operate within the district, organizational focus groups and interviews were designed to include a range of stakeholders. These focus groups included a variety of central office staff, school-based staff, family participants, and Board members. PCG worked closely with WPCSD to determine the best outreach and communication methods for focus groups and interview participation to ensure participation selection was voluntary and unbiased.

WPCSD staff focus groups consisted of between two and ten participants, while interviews were typically held 1:1 with study participants. Overall, there was a cross-section of staff that participated in focus groups to provide a strong sampling of staff in WPCSD from both the district level and building level. As part of this review, supervisors did not participate in the same focus groups or interview sessions with those staff members they supervised to allow all staff to speak candidly and honestly. PCG provided a sample schedule and list of positions to participate in these groups to the WPCSD leadership team to ensure all stakeholders were included. School-based focus group participants were selected at random by PCG staff after indicating an interest to participate in a focus group. Three (3) parent focus groups were also held in both virtual and in-person formats to maximize parent participation. Language translation was made available for parent focus group participants. In total, PCG held 36 focus groups with a variety of stakeholders.

Staff and Parent Surveys

An online survey process was implemented to collect data on stakeholder perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of WPCSD's special education services. PCG collaborated with WPCSD to vet survey items and disseminate two surveys: one to staff and one to parents of students with IEPs.

Survey Items

Survey items were drawn from the research and practice literature in special education and clustered to acquire data from each stakeholder group regarding the extent to which these groups perceived that

policies and practices shown in the literature support effective programming, parent involvement, and positive results for students with disabilities in WPCSD.

WPCSD reviewed the survey items to verify their relevance and to add items where appropriate. The survey incorporated five-point rating scales, yes/no questions, and included open-ended text areas. For reporting purposes, the five-point rating scale was consolidated into three categories: agree (which includes strongly agree and agree), disagree (which includes strongly disagree and disagree), and don't know or prefer not to say (where this option was provided to respondents). In some cases, survey data was broken down by the role of the respondent when there was significant variation among respondents by their role type.

Survey Process and Analysis

PCG worked collaboratively with WPCSD to facilitate a survey process that would result in the highest possible rate of return. To encourage participation, all parents of students with an IEP were informed of the survey's purpose and provided instructions for accessing it via email. WPCSD sent an email invitation to participate in the survey and reminder emails were sent to participate.

A total of 695 parents (49.8%) completed or partially completed the online survey. Of the parents that fully completed the survey, 5 parents identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 18 Asian, 36 Black/African American, 3 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 170 White, 130 Hispanic or Latino and 4 preferred not to say. A total of 767 WPCSD staff (79.8%) completed or partially completed the online staff survey, including 91 special education teachers, 216 general education teachers, 38 student support services personnel, and 19 school building administrators.

Survey responses from staff included the following roles with the percentage of staff by role that responded to the survey:

Respondents by Role	Percentage
General Education Teachers	34.1%
Special Education Teachers	14.4%
School Building Administrators	3%
Teacher Aides	9.3%
Student Support Services (Psychologist, Nurse, Counselor, BCBA, Behavior Interventionist)	6%
Related Service Providers	.5%
Specials/Electives Teacher	7.6%
Other School-Based Staff	9.9%
Prefer Not to Say	13.2%

Responses to this survey included staff from all the above-mentioned groups and provided a representative sample of staff in WPCSD.

School Visits

In October 2024, PCG visited all elementary and middle schools and one high school in WPCSD over three days, observing approximately 50 classrooms. During these visits, classes were observed for 10-30 minutes depending on the subject area and programming. To select those designated for visits, PCG requested a list of classrooms in which there were students with IEPs and the level, subject area, and placement designation. The intent was to ensure all placement settings were represented across all the district schools.

PCG's School Observation protocol was designed to collect qualitative information about the school building and individual classrooms, it is not designed to evaluate teachers. It focused on several key areas: 1) Classroom Staffing, 2) Classroom Environment, 3) Specially Designed Instruction, and 4) Data Collection Methods. PCG observed all instructional/service delivery settings (e.g., consultant teacher classrooms, integrated co-teaching (ICT), specialized instruction/resource room, and special classes)

across a wide representation of grades. The overall school environment, including non-instructional spaces such as the lunchroom, office, and hallways, was also observed.

The resulting data from all school visits are categorized and aggregated to inform impressions of the special education system districtwide and indicate areas in which professional learning in special education practices may be considered. Using aggregated data across classroom level and type adheres to the agreement to not identify specific schools or staff. Furthermore, this information is used primarily as another set of data for overall triangulation.

Student Shadowing

Over the span of two days in October 2024, PCG conducted student shadowing observations. Three PCG staff members shadowed a total of eight students for across 4 schools that included elementary, middle, and high schools. The areas of observation included: Safe and Accessible Environment; Functions and Elements of Explicit Instruction; Specifically Designed Instruction. These areas are in alignment with the classroom visit protocol.

The goal of the student shadowing was two-fold:

- To document, for each student, the access they had to high quality instruction, the fidelity of IEP implementation, the continuity of services, and the overall experience as a student receiving special education services, and
- To assess the degree to which the student's schedule is followed, how the student receives his/her services, how lessons are differentiated, and how integrated the student is within the larger school environment (e.g., lunchroom, recess, elective classes).

WPCSD obtained consent forms from parents to be shadowed as part of this study. PCG selected eight students from the sample of students with IEPs that included a wide cross-section of grades/ages, gender, and disability categories. Student files included in the IEP Review conducted by PCG were excluded from the student shadowing observation list. PCG requested each student's IEP including student name, relevant demographics, disability type, services and accommodations, goals and placement. PCG also received each student's schedule and a detailed map of the school, including room numbers.

PCG Foundational Approach

PCG's approach to its work with state, county, and district organizations is as a thought partner. That is, we act as an outside agent, with an objective perspective, who works alongside educational entities to identify challenges and provide recommendations for improvement.¹ We follow a mixed-method collaborative program evaluation model that is systemic, based upon qualitative and quantitative research methods, and produces credible and valid data that proactively inform program implementation, determines gaps, and offers recommendations for the continued improvement of the system. We value the importance of developing trust, open communication, and fostering collaboration between the review team and program staff.

Our philosophy for improving student outcomes in schools and districts is driven by the U.S. Department of Education's Results Driven Accountability (RDA) structure and rooted in our Special Education Effectiveness Domains framework.

In the law, Congress states:

"Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities."²

One purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) is to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities. This is done through accountability measures

¹ Donnis-Keller, C., Meltzer, J., & Chmielewski, E. (2013, February). The Power of Collaborative Program Evaluation. https://www.publicconsultinggroup.com/media/1272/pcg_collaborative_evaluation.pdf

² *About IDEA*. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (n.d.). <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>

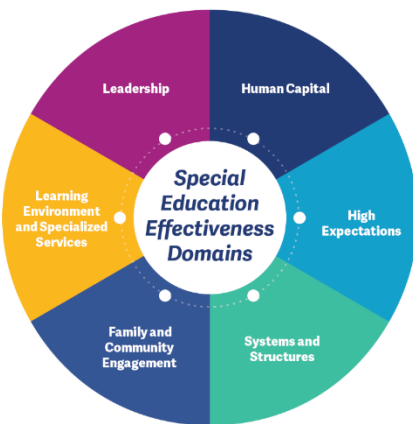
established by both the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and state special education agencies and, at times, special education case law.

While compliance indicators remain important, under the RDA framework, OSEP has sharpened its focus on what happens in the classroom to promote educational benefit and improve outcomes and results for students with disabilities.³ This change was based on data showing that the educational outcomes of America's children and youth with disabilities have not improved as expected, despite significant federal efforts to close the achievement gap. The accountability system that existed prior to the new one placed substantial emphasis on procedural compliance, but it often did not consider how requirements affected the learning outcomes of students.⁴ This shift is having a great impact in guiding priorities of special education systems nationwide, including in WPCSD. Districts nationwide are working to raise the level of and access to rigor in the classroom and generate a culture of academic optimism.⁵

The importance of these issues was highlighted by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision on March 22, 2017, in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*.⁶ In this landmark case, the Court revised its previous standard for assessing whether a school district is providing an appropriate education for students with disabilities. The ruling emphasized the need for establishing ambitious and challenging goals that enable each student to achieve both academic and functional progress and to advance from grade to grade. For students with disabilities, including those following alternate academic achievement standards, progress must be appropriate in light of their unique circumstances. The Court also clarified that yearly progress must exceed the "merely more than de minimis" standard that some lower courts had previously applied. The ruling underscored that the IDEA requires more than minimal progress. The *Endrew* decision struck a balance between the lower standard used by the 10th Circuit and other courts ("more than de minimis") and the higher standard advocated by Endrew's parents, which sought to provide students with disabilities opportunities for academic success, self-sufficiency, and meaningful societal contributions similar to those available to children without disabilities. The most significant impact of the *Endrew* decision in the classroom is seen in: (1) the design and development of rigorous Individualized Education Programs (IEPs); (2) the faithful implementation of these IEPs; and (3) increased monitoring of progress toward IEP goals.

SPECIAL EDUCATION EFFECTIVENESS DOMAINS

Building on extensive research and our collective experience and expertise serving school districts and state departments of education nationwide, PCG has developed this Special Education Effectiveness Framework to assist school districts in catalyzing conversations about, and reviewing and improving the quality of, their special education programs.⁶ It is designed to provide school district leaders with a set of practices to strengthen special education services and supports, to highlight the multidisciplinary, integrated nature of systemic improvement, and to clearly establish a pathway for districts to move toward realizing both compliance and results. An intentional focus on improving outcomes for students with disabilities leads to improved outcomes for ALL students.



When implemented with a systems-thinking approach, the six domains of our Special Education Effectiveness Framework help superintendents and district leaders improve educational and functional outcomes for students with disabilities.

³ Office of Special Education Program's Results Driven Accountability Home Page. U.S. Department of Education. (2024). <https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-offices/osers/osep/office-of-special-education-programs-results-driven-accountability-home-page>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hoy, W.K., Tarter, C.J., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. Working Paper. The Ohio State University. <http://www.waynehoy.com/school-academic-optimism/>

⁶ *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1*, 580 U.S. (2017)

The findings and recommendations provided in this report are organized around these domains and are oriented toward extending WPCSD's focus on outcomes for students with disabilities.

TERMINOLOGY

There are several terms used throughout this report that require definition and clarification within the WPCSD context.

Committee on Special Education (CSE). The CSE is a multidisciplinary team appointed by the Board of Education. The CSE is authorized to identify students in need of services by determining eligibility, developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP), placing the student in the least restrictive environment in which they can succeed and provide appropriate services to meet the child's educational needs. The team meets at least annually to review a child's IEP and determine programming from that point forward.

Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE). The CPSE is a multidisciplinary team appointed by the school board to determine eligibility and the appropriate level of services for preschool children ages 3-5 years old. The CPSE conducts meetings to develop, review, or revise the Individualized Education Program (IEP) of a preschool student with a disability.

Consultant Teacher (CT) Services. Consultant Teacher services are direct or indirect services provided by a special education teacher to assist students with disabilities in general education classes. These services are intended to support students in accessing the general education curriculum and achieving their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals.

Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT). Integrated Co-Teaching involves a general education teacher and a special education teacher working together to provide instruction to a mixed group of students with and without disabilities in a general education setting. The goal is to ensure that students with disabilities can access the general education curriculum alongside their peers.

Intellectual Disability (ID). *Intellectual disability* means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a student's educational performance.⁷ Some data sources reviewed as part of this study utilized terminology no longer recognized within the literature. All data referenced within will refer to the term "intellectual disability."

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Continuum. The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) continuum refers to the range of educational placements and services available to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The continuum ensures that students with disabilities are educated alongside their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate, with supplementary aids and services as necessary.

Placements on the LRE continuum range from general education classrooms with minimal supports to more restrictive environments such as self-contained special education classes, specialized schools, or homebound instruction. Placement decisions are based on the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are designed to provide access to the general curriculum while meeting individual learning and support needs.

Low Incidence Disabilities. Low incidence disabilities refer to a category of disabilities that affect a relatively small percentage of the population. These disabilities are characterized by their infrequent occurrence or low prevalence rates. As a result, individuals with low incidence disabilities may be relatively rare within a given population or community. Examples of low incidence disabilities include certain developmental disorders, rare genetic conditions, and severe physical or sensory

⁷ New York State Education Department's Regulations of the Commissioner of Education: Part 200. Retrieved from: <https://www.nysed.gov/special-education/section-2001-definitions>

impairments. Although the prevalence of autism has significantly increased, it is still often referred to as a low incidence disabilities.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). MTSS is a framework for delivering evidence-based academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions tailored to the needs of all students. MTSS uses a proactive, data-driven approach to identify and support students through a continuum of services organized into three tiers:

1. *Tier 1 (Universal Supports):* High-quality instruction and interventions provided to all students in the general education setting.
2. *Tier 2 (Targeted Supports):* Small-group interventions for students who need additional support beyond what is provided universally.
3. *Tier 3 (Intensive Supports):* Individualized interventions for students with significant or persistent needs.

Nondisabled Peers. This term is generally used in data tables where the original data source uses this nomenclature. At times, the terms “students without disabilities” (SWOD) or “typically developing peers” are also used.

Parents. In the context of this report, a parent is defined as natural or adoptive parents of a child, a guardian, a parent acting in the place of a parent (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare) or a surrogate parent. The term “parent” is inclusive of families as well.

Special Class. Special Classes are self-contained classrooms that exclusively serve students with disabilities who require more intensive and specialized instruction than can be provided in a general education setting.

Students Receiving Special Education Services. References are made to students receiving special education services. They will also be referred to as students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or students with disabilities (SWDs). The terms are intended to be interchangeable. This categorization does not include students with disabilities who exclusively have 504 Plans.

SAIL Program (Strategies for Adult Independent Living). These courses provide students with an understanding of how the community, the job site and the home function. It enables students to engage in activities to further their skills and knowledge to function independently at home, on the job and in the community. Administrative approval is required for admission.

Teaching Assistants/Aides. The terms Teaching Assistants and Aides are used interchangeably in the body of this report. Additionally, references are made to the role of Paraprofessionals which is equivalent to the roles of Teaching Assistants and Aides in respect to this report.

BACKGROUND ON WHITE PLAINS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Founded in 1683, White Plains is a vibrant city in Westchester County, New York. The city encompasses a wide range of beautiful parks, and its proximity to the Hudson River and Hutchinson Trail makes it a hot spot for travelers from all around New York. White Plains has a rich history rooted in the evolution of education, dating back to the early 1700s.⁸ The White Plains Central School District (WPCSD) is dedicated to delivering high-quality, exceptional education to its diverse student body.

White Plains Central School District has a clear mission which is to: “educate and inspire all students while nurturing their dreams, so they learn continually, think critically, pursue their aspirations and contribute to a diverse and dynamic world.”⁹ Recognizing the uniqueness of each student, WPCSD is committed to offering a comprehensive range of educational and extracurricular programs. The District places a strong emphasis on fostering relationships with parents and the community, making civic engagement and partnerships integral to its success. Currently, WPCSD serves over 7,000 students and supports a community of more than 57,000 residents.

According to the 2022-2023 School Report Card provided by the NYSED, WPCSD has a diverse student population, with 51 percent male and 49 percent female students. Hispanic students represent the largest demographic at 59 percent, followed by 22 percent White students and 11 percent Black students. Multi-racial and Asian students account for less than 6 percent of the population. Notably, more than half of the District’s students (56%) are economically disadvantaged with 2 percent facing homelessness. Additionally, 18 percent of the student body are English Language Learners, whereas students with disabilities make up 17 percent. In 2022-2023, WPCSD reported a commendable 90 percent four-year graduate rate. In the previous school year, 85.2 percent of students with disabilities graduated, exceeding the state target of 72 percent or higher.¹⁰

WPCSD encompasses five elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. Referring to the 2022-2023 School Report card, WPCSD has 19 school counselors, 598 teachers, 10 social workers, and 8 principals. Teacher attendance rate is 96 percent with turnover being 8 percent for all teachers.

Each year, the WPCSD school district partners with volunteer stakeholders including parents, teachers, administrators, and community members, for a comprehensive strategic planning session. The WPCSD district website outlines the process as, “identifying the district’s strengths along with any areas that may be potentially strengthened” resulting in “the annual refinement of a new plan focused on student achievement and access.”¹¹ Annual approval of the revised plan is conducted by the Board of Education.

The WPCSD Strategic Plan 2024-2026 identified its guiding Vision, Mission, and Priorities as:¹²

“Vision: We aspire to unlock the infinite and unique potential of each student, every day.”

“Mission: Education and inspire all students while nurturing their dreams, so they can continually think critically, pursue their aspirations, and contribute to a diverse, and dynamic world.”

“Priorities: 1) Educate: Ensure engaging and innovative learning experiences; 2) Support: Provide necessary structures and resources; and 3) Partner: Collaborate with students, families, and community.”

Seven Core Beliefs drive the implementation of WPCSD’s Strategic Plan. The district believes that:¹³

1. All people have intrinsic value,
2. Celebrating and embracing diversity enrich life,
3. All people can learn, grow, and contribute,
4. Every choice matters, and that people are responsible for their choices,

⁸ History of White Plains. (n.d). City of White Plains. <https://www.cityofwhiteplains.com/469/History-of-White-Plains>

⁹ Strategic Plan. (n.d). White Plains Public Schools. <https://www.whiteplainspublicschools.org/about/strategic-plan>

¹⁰ White Plains City School District Data. (n.d). data.nysed.gov. <https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?instid=800000034913>

¹¹ WPCSD school district website (2024). Retrieved from: <https://www.whiteplainspublicschools.org/about/strategic-plan>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

5. Respect, honesty, and trust empower,
6. When people serve the community, both the individuals and the community benefit, and
7. High expectations promote high achievement.

The District's Strategic Plan serves as a pivotal foundation for the adoption of high-leverage, evidence-based practices that yield positive outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.

KEY FINDINGS

Throughout the course of this report, PCG has analyzed the complex, often interconnected root causes that have impacted the achievement of students with disabilities and highlighted areas in which the district either needs to accelerate its efforts or change course. PCG's focus for this report is to help WPCSD leverage the district's strengths to enhance academic and functional outcomes for students with disabilities.

WPCSD has placed an emphasis on inclusive practices that are well complimented with staff who are passionate about serving students with disabilities and their families. The district has embraced the adoption of interventions and varying specially designed instructional models to address existing performance gaps for students with disabilities. District leadership and the Board have expressed an openness to continuing to adopt practices that promote growth for all students, including students with disabilities. Although WPCSD recognizes the need to strengthen systems to ensure success for students with disabilities, it faces challenges in five key areas. These areas are supported by evidence throughout this report and serve as the basis for the recommendations provided at the end of this report.

1) *Special Education is a Service, Not a Place*

The Office of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services has a vision that emphasizes inclusion and the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. As noted on the Office's webpage:

Our office provides programs and services for students ages 3 - 21. We strive to build an inclusive school setting where students with learning differences receive their specialized instruction, to the extent possible, alongside their general education peers. Collaboration with district staff, parents and community ensures quality programs and services.

WPCSD's special education leadership has made significant strides in expanding opportunities for students with disabilities to learn in more inclusive settings. Over the past decade, there has been a notable shift from a model where students with moderate to significant disabilities often spent the majority of their time in more restrictive environments. The District's LRE continuum, in years past, emphasized program-specific placements, primarily within self-contained classrooms. There has been a transition toward greater inclusion which some participants in this study have interpreted as leaning heavily toward a "full inclusion model." It is important to note that WPCSD has not adopted a "full inclusion model", where all students with disabilities are served in the general education setting, as described in the literature.¹⁴ Not all staff who participated in this study demonstrated agreement with the transition towards more inclusive practices. Several study participants advocated for a return to a more self-contained model, similar to that implemented in previous years, believing it better meets the needs of some students.

The chart below highlights how WPCSD has evolved to promote inclusive practices for students with disabilities from the 2014-2015 school year to the 2021-2022 school year. Each educational setting, measured by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), demonstrates tremendous improvements. Additionally, the number of students with disabilities who were being served in out-of-district placements decreased by almost 50 percent from 95 to 45 students. WPCSD made considerable investments in expanding the LRE continuum through the creation of 35 integrated co-teaching classrooms. These efforts are commendable.

¹⁴ "Core Principles: Full Inclusion of All Students with Learning Disabilities." Retrieved from: <https://ldaamerica.org/core-principles-full-inclusion-of-all-students-with-learning-disabilities/>

EXHIBIT 1. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT SETTING EVOLUTION IN WPCSD

Least Restrictive Environment Setting Evolution¹⁵		
	2014-2015 SY (Place)	2021-2022 SY (Service)
80% or higher	44.2%*	72%
40-79%	28.9%	23.1%
Less than 40%	18.2%	5.6%
Separate Setting	5.7%	4.1%
Other Setting(s)	3%	3.6%
# of Students Out of District	95	45
# of Self-Contained (Elementary-12:1:2) Classrooms	6	3
# of Self-Contained (Autism, Intellectual Disability, Multiple Disabilities) Classrooms	8	13
# of ICT Elementary Classrooms	0	18
# of ICT Secondary Classrooms	0	17 (Multiple sections)

High retention rates of teaching staff in WPCSD are a valuable asset to the District providing continuity and deep institutional knowledge. For some long-time staff who are accustomed to previous programming models, such as more program-specific, self-contained classrooms, the transition to more inclusive practices has been an adjustment. The changes implemented, as outlined above, align with current best practices and federal regulations under IDEA. Some participants expressed apprehension about what they perceived as an overreliance on Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) and Consultant Teacher (CT) settings as well as a lack of collaboration and clarity in placement decision-making processes.

District leadership has emphasized that decisions regarding student placement are guided by IDEA regulations and the New York State “Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities” which prioritize data-driven decision-making when considering LRE for students with disabilities. Leadership has also highlighted that self-contained programming remains available for students whose needs cannot be met in more inclusive settings indicating that “full inclusion” is not the District’s intention. The recent investment in opening additional special classes affirms the District’s priority of offering a robust continuum of services designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Despite these assurances, some staff have expressed the feeling that their input, even when supported by data, does not always influence placement decisions. This has led to a perception among some that students with disabilities remain in inclusive settings even when more restrictive environments might be appropriate. Addressing these concerns through transparent communication and reinforcing collaborative practices can help bridge the gap between staff perceptions and District policies, fostering greater trust and alignment across all stakeholders.

The District has demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting inclusive practices, as evidenced by the increased percentage of students with disabilities spending 80% or more of their day in general education settings. This growth, reflected in District data, highlights significant progress toward inclusion but also requires a carefully planned, strategic approach to sustain and expand these efforts.

To promote consistency and compliance, WPCSD has established standardized procedures for evaluations, eligibility determinations, and the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Participants in this study with a strong background in legal interpretation of IDEA noted that procedural errors are rare in the District, highlighting its commitment to diligently following these standards.

¹⁵ Board of Education Meeting Presentation by the Dept of Special Education and Pupil Services, September 2024

The District has established responsibilities for key Committee on Special Education (CSE) processes to be primarily led by teachers serving on special assignments. The teachers serving in this capacity work closely with district level peers (e.g., Instructional Coaches) and special education leaders in the Office of Special Education & Pupil Personnel Services. While this approach ensures procedural fidelity, it has also contributed to perceptions among some that decision-making lacks school-based nuance. This structure has led some stakeholders to articulate a disconnect between the District's inclusive intentions involving all stakeholders and what is perceived to be a centralized decision-making structure.

Study participants expressed varying levels of agreement on the oversight of special education in WPCSD, particularly placement decisions. The division in perspectives was apparent in survey responses:

- **Perceptions about the statement, “Placements for students with disabilities are based on student need and not by disability category and/or other demographic factors”** vary across stakeholder groups: 55 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAs), 46 percent of school building administrators, 40 percent of related service providers, 39 of special educators, and 31 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, “Students with IEPs in my school(s) receive instruction and services in general education classes to the maximum extent possible”** are largely positive across stakeholder groups: 91 percent of school building administrators, 89 percent of related service providers, 86 percent of special educators, and 74 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, “General education teachers are provided adequate training in effectively supporting the needs of students with IEPs”** vary across stakeholder groups: 30 percent of related service providers, 27 percent of school building administrators, 25 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAs), 21 percent of special educators, and 18 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, “The special education program/services at my school(s) are of high quality”** vary across stakeholder groups: 82 percent of school building administrators, 70 percent of related service providers, 64 percent of special educators, 55 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAs), 38 percent of teaching assistants, and 37 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, “My district has an overall vision that explicitly addresses the needs of students with disabilities”** vary across stakeholder groups: 80 percent of school building administrators, 58 percent of related service providers, 46 percent of special educators, 33 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAs), and 29 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, “My district has established goals and an action plan for improving outcomes for students with disabilities”** vary across stakeholder groups: 70 percent of school building administrators, 50 percent of related service providers, 43 percent of special educators, 29 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAs), and 22 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, “My district offers a continuum of services to meet the needs of all students with IEPs”** vary across stakeholder groups: 82 percent of school building administrators, 67 percent of Related Service Providers, 55 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 52 percent of special educators, and 40 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**

The snapshot of survey responses highlights the polarity in perspectives amongst school-based staff. Similar themes of feedback were also provided by central office leaders; however, their collective perspective could be characterized as more positive. The differences between school-based staff and district leadership is likely to impact how individuals, by role, perceive the provision of special education and related services for students with disabilities.

Most parents of students with IEPs in WPCSD who participated in the study shared positive feedback on their experiences of special education in the district. High percentages of parents indicated receiving timely feedback on concerns (86%) and forming positive relationships with their child's teacher(s) (85%). A small number of study participants shared that a divide exists between school-based staff in WPCSD and central office leadership. While it did not emerge as a key finding, it is important to note there is a perception of this among some parents.

Special education is not a place, but a service designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities whether in inclusive classrooms, resource settings, or other appropriate environments. Much of the data analyzed reflects an outdated emphasis on determining where to place students, rather than focusing on how to provide the services and supports needed to thrive within the least restrictive environment. This perspective is not supported by research, which underscores the importance of delivering special education services in a manner that promotes access to the general education curriculum and inclusive practices.

To address these challenges, the District must develop and implement clear frameworks for placement decisions that prioritize collaboration during CSE meetings and align with current best practices. Equally important is fostering a cultural shift among school-based staff to embrace the understanding that special education is a flexible and dynamic service, not confined to a specific setting, but tailored to meet each student's individual needs.

2) *Enhancing General and Special Education Collaboration through Principal Voice*

Principals play a pivotal role in creating inclusive school communities, and research on school reform highlights effective strategies they can use to drive this change. Specifically, principals who focus on fostering an inclusive vision, building the capacity of school staff through professional development, and creating collaborative work environments are better positioned to support instructional accommodations, modifications, and progress monitoring.¹⁶ These efforts are essential for ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, have equitable access to meaningful educational opportunities.

According to Hoppey and McLeskey:

*Principals of inclusive schools should be those with the skills, knowledge, and qualities to deliver effective leadership. Without the leadership and support of the principal, schools would struggle to meet the challenging requirements of providing varied services that meet the needs of diverse student populations. Therefore, principals must be aware of the requirements of inclusive schools, which should be effectively established to support teachers and the larger school community.*¹⁷

The responsibility of fostering an inclusive school community does not solely rely on a school-based administrator; however, their leadership is instrumental in the success of inclusive practices within their buildings. Some study participants described the execution of inclusive practices as varying from campus to campus.

School-based staff survey participants shared their perspectives of inclusion on their campus:

- **Perceptions about the statement, "Students with disabilities at my school(s) are treated with respect by staff and students"** were consistently mostly positive across all stakeholders: 100

¹⁶ Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Crockett, J. B. (2017). Principal leadership: Moving toward inclusive and high-achieving schools for students with disabilities (Document No. IC-8). Retrieved from University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center website: <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>

¹⁷ Hoppey, D., and McLeskey, J. A. (2013). A case study of principal leadership in an effective inclusive school. *J. Spec. Educ.* 46, 245–256. doi: 10.1177/0022466910390507

percent of school building administrators, 95 percent of general educators, 93 percent of teaching assistants, 90 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAs), 86 percent of special educators, and 67 percent of related service providers **agree with this statement**.

- **Perceptions about the statement**, “*My school(s) provides an inclusive environment for students with disabilities*” were consistently mostly positive across all stakeholders: 100 percent of school building administrators, 89 percent of special educators, 87 percent of general educators, 85 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAs), 79 percent of teaching assistants, and 78 percent of related service providers **agree with this statement**.

Feeling accountable for the academic success and social emotional well-being of all students is the hallmark of district level and school-based leadership. It is important to note that according to focus group and interview participants principals and assistant principals are advocating for both the needs of students with disabilities and the staff serving them. Staff survey data referenced above affirms that WPCSD staff believe students with disabilities are treated with respect and schools are fostering an inclusive environment. The spirit of inclusion is present in buildings; however, the execution of inclusionary practices varies by building according to study participants. There is great potential for campus-based leaders in WPCSD to foster truly inclusive communities for all students and to leverage their influence to bridge the communication divide.

There is a perceived gap in communication and collaboration between District-level special education leadership and building-level staff, which has created challenges in fostering a unified and supportive working environment. Data from focus groups and surveys highlight that some staff members feel their voices are not fully heard, and there are concerns about potential repercussions for advocating for students' needs. While these perceptions reflect underlying concerns, it is important to acknowledge the significant strides District leadership has made in implementing necessary changes and improvements to support students with disabilities, particularly around inclusive practices. Changes of this scale can often be met with resistance, as staff may feel uncertain or apprehensive about new processes or shifts in expectations and seek support in making sure these changes have positive impacts for students.

The District leadership has established a clear vision for enhancing special education services and an inclusive practices implementation framework. These changes demonstrate a commitment to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. However, as with any systemwide transformation, it is natural for staff to experience some level of uncertainty or discomfort, particularly if they feel disconnected from the decision-making process. This divide between District leadership and building-level staff can hinder collaboration and reduce the effectiveness of new initiatives. It is essential to recognize that the success of these changes depends on the active involvement of all stakeholders, particularly those who work directly with students on a daily basis. All district leadership have a shared responsibility in the execution of special education services as students with disabilities are general education students first.

The process of change must include staff as partners in shaping and implementing solutions, rather than simply receiving directives. By bringing building-level staff to the table, leadership can ensure that their input and expertise are valued, which in turn will strengthen the collective commitment to shared goals. When staff feel empowered to contribute and collaborate, the overall working environment improves, making it easier to implement effective strategies for students with disabilities.

Moving forward requires a concerted effort from both District leadership, within and outside of special education, and building-level staff to work together cohesively. Leadership must continue to set the direction for the District and ensure that staff are included in the process, making them active participants in decision-making. This collaborative approach will help to create a culture where all staff feel valued and engaged, contributing to a positive and effective learning environment for students with disabilities.

3) Addressing Challenging Behavior and the Impact on Instruction

WPCSD continues to innovate programmatically to support students struggling with behavioral challenges. Onsite observational data did not highlight any observable concerns in this area. Excellent behavior management techniques and strong classroom management practices were observed in many

classrooms visited. Both school-based staff and district leadership have acknowledged an increase in mental health concerns resulting in challenging behavior and have stressed the importance of allocating more resources for counseling across all schools, including elementary. The analysis of documentation submitted by the District provided insight into their responsiveness to the needs in this area.

The District proactively conducted an audit of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) readiness in WPCSD through CASEL and has adopted Responsive Classroom for SEL support across schools. Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based approach to teaching that focuses on integrating social and emotional learning with academic instruction. It emphasizes creating a positive classroom environment through practices such as morning meetings, collaborative problem-solving, and proactive classroom management. By fostering a strong sense of community and promoting student engagement, Responsive Classroom aims to support students' social, emotional, and academic development.¹⁸ A series of PD offerings and resources around behavior management, mindfulness, trauma informed practices and other behavioral focused learning opportunities have been offered in WPCSD to support teachers with developing the skills needed to help students struggling with behavior. Additionally, WPCSD leadership created a tiered system of support for behavior as part of their MTSS framework.

WPCSD school-based staff, and leadership, acknowledged concerns with the increase of challenging behavior in the classroom and the District's approach to addressing challenging behavior. WPCSD staff survey results indicate:

- **Perceptions about the statement, "My school uses positive behavior and intervention supports to support student behavior as part of a multi-tiered system of support"** vary across stakeholder groups: 100 percent of school building administrators, 60 percent of Related Service Providers, 50 percent of special educators, 48 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), and 46 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, "There is a well-articulated approach and support in my school(s) to address the behavioral needs of students with disabilities"** vary by stakeholders: 73 percent of school building administrators, 25 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 21 percent of special educators, 10 percent of Related Service Providers, and 6 percent of general educators **agree with this statement. Overall, 17 percent of all WPCSD agree with this statement.**

All staff must be equipped to support students with behavioral challenges and to recognize that behavior is a form of communication for all students. To achieve this, training on behavioral support strategies should be embedded within the district's tiered system of support, ensuring that both general education and special education leadership and staff are actively involved in fostering inclusive practices. Staff have emphasized the importance of clear and consistent guidelines on acceptable behaviors and how they should be addressed without compromising instructional time. Many have expressed a need for further clarity on what is considered "allowable" when managing behaviors that impact the learning environment. Feedback from focus groups and surveys suggests that some staff are struggling to implement existing behavior management protocols and supports effectively.

The District's current behavioral support model includes a Behaviorist who collaborates with school teams addressing challenging student behavior. In this consultative role, the Behaviorist provides strategies, interventions, and guidance on data collection and analysis while intervening directly with challenging behaviors when needed. Since the 2015-2016 school year, WPCSD has developed clear protocols and structures for the Behaviorist's role and continues to refine these supports to adapt to changing needs. Regular professional development on behavioral strategies, including Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training, is consistently offered to staff.

Behaviorists primarily operate on a consultative basis, offering one-on-one guidance and coaching to educators and Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) staff, including school social workers, school psychologists, and building-level support teams. They model strategies to help school teams support

¹⁸ Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Sawyer, B. E. (2004). Primary grade teachers' self-reported practices and beliefs about responsive classroom. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104(4), 321-341. <https://doi.org/10.1086/499761>

students with challenging behaviors, guide PPS staff in conducting Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs), analyze data, and develop Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). Behaviorists also collaborate directly with classroom teachers by modeling BIP implementation, demonstrating interventions, and providing feedback. While this approach offers valuable hands-on learning, some staff have expressed a desire for more in-classroom collaboration with Behaviorists. Staff felt this would allow them to observe and practice replicating these strategies and foster greater ownership of behavioral supports in their own classrooms. Behaviorists in WPCSD do provide this support, however, it is important to note that the role of the behaviorist is to consult and support school teams with the day-to-day implementation of any behavior strategies, interventions and BIPs while building the capacity of teachers and PPS staff on campuses to play this role when the behaviorist is not present.

The District's staffing model, which includes school psychologists, social workers, and other campus-based staff, provides wraparound support to address the needs of both students and staff. To enhance this model, Behaviorists should continue to build PPS staff capacity in a way that allows them to focus on demonstrating strategies multiple times as needed, ensuring fidelity of implementation and offering opportunities for adjustment to the behavior intervention plan when staff encounter challenges. The goal of these practices should be to increase the skill set of teachers' responsibility to manage, support and intervene with challenging behaviors. This approach would help educators develop the skills and confidence needed to independently manage challenging behaviors, while continuing to have direct Behaviorist support for persistent issues.

Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all staff who support students with challenging behaviors could address staff perceptions and align efforts. Revisiting established structures and responsibilities can further ensure shared ownership of student behavior management. A phased approach may be necessary to implement this shift effectively, beginning with intensive modeling and support from PPS staff, followed by collaborative practice, and eventually independent application by classroom staff. This progression would allow educators time to build capacity and establish consistent, effective practices. Ultimately, this approach could address staff concerns, create a unified system of behavioral support, and strengthen the District's ability to meet the individualized needs of its students.

An analysis of WPCSD discipline data from the 22-23SY indicated a total of 168 student suspensions. Suspension data referenced within is representative of "out of school" suspensions ranging from 1-10 days. Students with IEPs represented slightly less than half (41.1% or 69 students) of all students suspended during the 22-23SY. WPCSD's district-wide identification rate of students with disabilities is 17 percent. Students with IEPs were suspended at a higher rate than anticipated given the total percentage of students with IEPs in the district. Further discussion and analysis of suspension by subgroups will be discussed later in this report.

Addressing behavioral challenges in schools requires a shift away from punitive measures, such as suspensions and expulsions, which research consistently shows are ineffective in resolving the root causes of such behaviors.¹⁹ Punitive approaches can exacerbate issues, leading to repeated misbehavior, disengagement from learning, and diminished self-esteem.²⁰ These effects are particularly pronounced for students with disabilities, whose behaviors often stem from unmet needs or difficulties with communication, self-regulation, or processing environmental demands.

Instead, proactive and restorative approaches that focus on teaching and reinforcing appropriate behaviors, addressing underlying causes, and fostering relationships within the school community are far more effective. Embedding these practices into a district-wide tiered system of support ensures that all staff have the skills and tools needed to address behavioral challenges equitably. A key component of this work is ensuring that all staff—general and special education alike—are trained to recognize behavior

¹⁹ Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2016). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 26(4), 325-353.

²⁰ Losen, D. J., & Gillespie, J. (2012). *Opportunities suspended: The disparate impact of disciplinary exclusion from school*. The Civil Rights Project, University of California, Los Angeles.

as a form of communication and are equipped to support students with and without disabilities in inclusive environments.

As the District advances its inclusive practices, it is essential to prioritize support over punishment. This shift not only reduces the risk of disproportionate disciplinary actions for students with disabilities but also fosters an environment where all students feel valued and respected. Professional development and coaching opportunities have been provided to help staff manage challenging behaviors effectively while maintaining a safe and productive classroom. These supports, such as access to behavioral specialists, are designed to empower educators to implement strategies, not for direct intervention with students. However, feedback suggests a need for further communication, training, and clarity to ensure staff feel adequately supported in working with students with behavioral challenges.

A critical next step is ensuring that data collection activities related to behavior are implemented with fidelity and clearly aligned with their intended purpose. The District emphasizes that data collection should inform programming and interventions, not serve as a mechanism for moving students with disabilities from less restrictive to more restrictive settings. Providing clarity on the purpose and outcomes of these activities as part of behavioral support and coaching will strengthen WPCSD's capacity to create inclusive environments that meet the needs of all students.

4) Eligibility and Academic Performance of English Language Learners (ELLs) with IEPs

A key finding of this study is the belief that English Language Learners (ELL) students may be under-identified for special education and related services. This issue stems from several critical factors noted in our data analysis of focus groups and surveys, including delays in referrals for evaluation at school-based Individual Support Team (IST) meetings, insufficient access to appropriate interventions addressing both academic needs and language acquisition, placement decisions along the continuum of services, misalignment between the volume of services on IEPs and student needs, and limited parent access to translated IEPs.

Most of these factors fall within the scope of general education rather than special education. The referral process for special education begins in general education, and it is essential that tiered interventions, including academic and behavioral supports, be implemented and documented within the MTSS framework before making a referral to special education. For ELL students, this process should include a focus on data collection and analysis to ensure that challenges are not related to language acquisition, cultural differences, or gaps in education, rather than a disability.

District-level leadership has an opportunity to collaborate with building leaders to ensure that the academic, social, and behavioral needs of ELL students are effectively addressed within general education. Strengthening initiatives within general education, such as MTSS and ESOL services, can help ensure that ELL students receive appropriate support early on, reducing the likelihood of misidentification or delays in accessing necessary services. This collaborative approach reinforces the importance of equitable practices and ensures that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

While some staff believe that ELL students are under-identified for special education services, the quantitative data analyzed for this study does not support that perception. Feedback from focus groups and surveys indicates that staff perceive a significant gap between the number of ELL students they feel should be referred for special education and the number currently receiving those services. Survey responses align with focus group feedback, highlighting staff concerns about meeting the needs of students who are both ELL and identified for special education:

- **Perceptions about the statement, "Services for English Learner students with disabilities at my school(s) are meeting student needs" vary by stakeholder: 15 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 27 percent of school building administrators, 0 percent of Related Service Providers, 19 percent of special educators, 28 percent of teaching assistants, and 13 percent of general educators agree with this statement. Overall, less than 20 percent (18%) of all WPCSD staff survey respondents agree with this statement.**

While ELL students make up 19 percent of the total student body in WPCSD, they account for 28 percent of students with IEPs, compared to 10 percent in New York state and approximately 2 percent nationally.²¹ Nationally, the number of dually identified students—those who are both ELLs and have disabilities—increased by 30 percent from the 2011-12 to 2019-20 school years,²² while New York state saw a 6.7 percent increase during the same period.²³ Results from the 2022-23 New York State English as a Second Language Assessment Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) showed English proficiency levels ranging from 2 percent in 1st grade to 22 percent in 6th grade.^{24,25} These trends reflect the ongoing challenge in WPCSD, as in New York state and across the nation, of balancing accurate identification of ELL students for special education services while ensuring equitable access to and progress within the general education curriculum.

The New York State Education Department's (NYSED) Blueprint for English Language Learner (ELL) Success provides a framework for ensuring equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities for ELLs, including those with disabilities. The Blueprint emphasizes culturally responsive practices and accurate identification procedures to distinguish between language acquisition challenges and potential disabilities. Misidentification of ELLs as students with disabilities—or overlooking their needs entirely—can impede their academic progress. To mitigate this, NYSED highlights the importance of comprehensive assessments that include evaluations in the student's home language, culturally and linguistically appropriate tools, and collaboration between ESL and special education professionals.²⁶ By ensuring all staff, including general education staff, understand this Blueprint, WPCSD can provide tailored supports that address both language development and individual learning needs, aligning with federal mandates under IDEA and ESSA to ensure non-discriminatory practices.

Increased clarity around WPCSD's shared vision related to serving ELL students, including ELL students with IEPs, is critical. Strengthening intervention practices prior to referrals for special education, through an MTSS framework, can positively impact ELL students. It is critical that building-level leaders and school-based ELL instructors prioritize clarifying expectations for general and special education initiatives. Specifically, guidance should be provided on the intersection of second language acquisition and expected academic gains for students with minimal formal school exposure and/or gaps within a student's first language development.

5) Increasing Academic Rigor for Students with Disabilities

The persistent achievement gaps between WPCSD students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers signal a need for intensified academic rigor and enhanced instructional supports at the Tier 1 level. Survey data indicates that District staff value high expectations for SWDs, with 67 percent agreeing their school effectively communicates this importance, 64 percent believing leadership holds high expectations, and 74 percent affirming that staff themselves maintain high expectations. However, the gap between these perceptions and student outcomes points to a critical need to align these expectations with actionable strategies to drive improvement.

Approximately, 72 percent of school-age students with disabilities in WPCSD are educated in the general education setting more than 80 percent of the time. Longitudinal data from 2020-21SY through 2022-23SY indicated WPCSD school-age students with disabilities were educated increasingly more often in an inclusive general education setting.²⁷ Since 2020-21, the percentage of students with disabilities in the general education setting more than 80 percent of the time increased by approximately 13 percentage

²¹ "OSEP Fast Facts: Students with Disabilities who are English Learners (ELs) Served under IDEA" 2022. Retrieved from: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/osep-fast-facts-students-with-disabilities-english-learners>

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Data retrieved from NYSED website: <https://data.nysed.gov/>

²⁵ U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection," 2012-13. <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/71ca7d0c-a161-4abe-9e2b-4e68ffb1061a/resource/be8653e8-3c4f-476e-bf57-db028c9cad97/download/bchildcountandedenvironments2012.csv>

²⁶ New York State Education Department. (2014). *Blueprint for English language learner (ELL) success*. Retrieved from <http://www.nysed.gov>

²⁷ State and District data obtained from Special Education School District Data Profile available at: <http://data.nysed.gov/lists.php?type=district>. LRE data unavailable for 2019-20.

points. For the past three years of data analyzed, WPCSD met the state target for educating students less than 40 percent of the time in the general education setting and in separate settings.

Students with disabilities in WPCSD continue to demonstrate lower academic outcomes compared to their non-disabled peers in both the District and statewide averages for students with disabilities. These disparities suggest that placement in general education settings, with access to varying degrees of high-quality differentiated instruction, is insufficient for driving academic progress. While standardized tests are only one measure of success, they provide valuable insights into areas requiring improvement to close achievement gaps. Based on the data analyzed across several years, it appears WPCSD is moving in the right direction by developing inclusive educational services that allow students to access grade-level curriculum. By continuing to align high expectations with high-quality core instruction and targeted supports, WPCSD can sustain its commitment to improving outcomes for all students with disabilities.

High school students with disabilities consistently performed higher on the Regents exams compared to the performance of 4th and 8th grade WPCSD students with IEPs. In 2018-2019SY, WPCSD high school students with IEPs demonstrated proficiency at 81 percent and non-disabled peers demonstrated proficiency at 94 percent on the ELA Regents exam. Non-disabled WPCSD high school students performed remarkably well on the ELA Regents exam with levels of proficiency ranging from 93 to 97 percent from 2017-2018SY to 2022-2023SY. High school students with and without IEPs in WPCSD demonstrated astounding performance, each year, on this exam. It is worthwhile for WPCSD curriculum and instructional leaders to dive deeper into the high-leverage practices being implemented in high school ELA classes to replicate where possible.

A correlation between having greater access to effective instructional models and specialized core content has been established for WPCSD students with IEPs. An analysis of access to instructional models across grade bands was conducted as part of this study. Elementary students with IEPs are primarily served through the CT model, ICT model, and special classes. High school students are more likely to be served through the ICT models and receive services in subject area special classes. If general education classrooms lack robust Tier 1 practices students with disabilities are more likely to disengage or fail to access the grade-level content required for academic growth.²⁸ Research also highlights that insufficient teacher preparation and limited professional development in inclusive practices can exacerbate these inequities, further hindering the academic success of students with disabilities.²⁹ The quality of Tier 1 instruction is critical, especially in the elementary setting with three primary service delivery models, recognizing special education is only as strong as the general education foundation supporting it.

High-quality core instruction is foundational to the success of all students, including those with disabilities. For students with disabilities to benefit fully from inclusive settings, general education teachers must be equipped to implement instructional practices that are accessible, differentiated, and grounded in the principles of UDL.³⁰ Research consistently shows that inclusive education leads to better outcomes for all students when general education classrooms foster high expectations, effective collaboration between general and special education staff, and intentional use of evidence-based practices.³¹ However, the success of Tier 1 instruction is contingent on the capacity of general education systems to meet the diverse needs of their learners.

Inclusion extends beyond physical presence; it encompasses equitable participation and access to rigorous learning opportunities. To close the outcome gap for students with disabilities, WPCSD must prioritize strengthening Tier 1 general education instruction as the foundation of inclusive practices. This ensures that all students, including those with disabilities, have the opportunity to thrive within the general education environment.

The presence of instructional coaches in WPCSD offers a valuable resource for promoting the consistent implementation of high-leverage practices (HLPs) and evidence-based practices (EBPs). These coaches

²⁸ Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Vaughn, S. (2010). *Response to intervention: A framework for reading educators*. International Reading Association.

²⁹ Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Vaughn, S. (2010). *Response to intervention: A framework for reading educators*. International Reading Association.

³⁰ CAST. (2018). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. Retrieved from <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>

³¹ Hehir, T., Schifter, L. A., Grindal, T., Ng, M., & Eidelman, H. (2016). *A summary of the evidence on inclusive education*. Abt Associates. Retrieved from <https://www.abtassociates.com>

play a critical role in supporting staff and fostering high-quality special education practices. Currently, instructional coaching in WPCSD is a voluntary process focused on preparing teachers, rather than providing direct intervention for students. While some focus group participants expressed a preference for direct student intervention, such an approach addresses immediate concerns but does not build the long-term capacity of instructional staff to meet the diverse and evolving needs of their students. Engaging fully in the existing professional development opportunities offered by the District allows staff to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to implement effective inclusive practices. By doing so, WPCSD can enhance the quality of instruction and improve outcomes for all students.

II. STATE PERFORMANCE PLAN (SPP) AND WPCSD'S RESULTS DRIVEN ACCOUNTABILITY

The essential question we answer in this chapter is:



How does WPCSD perform on student outcomes and transition for students with disabilities?

Below are the overarching strengths and opportunities within the data reviewed on WPCSD's State Performance Plan (SPP) and Results Driven Accountability.

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood (EC) Educational Environment. There are improvements in the percentage of students in regular early childhood classes from 2022 to 2023. • Educational Environment. In 2023, 72 percent of students spend 80 percent or more of their school day in general education. WPCSD continues to steadily increase this percentage. • High School ELA Regents Outcomes. All WPCSD students consistently outperform the state averages for students with and without disabilities on the high school ELA Regents exam. Students with disabilities demonstrated double-digit levels of proficiency on the ELA Regents exam prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. • High School Algebra I Regents Outcomes. WPCSD students consistently outperformed the state averages for students with disabilities in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. Despite instructional impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic, WPCSD high school students demonstrated perseverance in a 5 percentage point increase in 2021-2022SY. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement Gap. There continues to be a substantial achievement gap for students with disabilities compared to all students in the district across all subject areas on statewide assessments. • Eligibility for Free or Reduced Lunch for Students with IEPs. In WPCSD, approximately 70 percent of students with IEPs qualify for free or reduced lunch compared to approximately 53 percent of non-disabled peers. The trend continues when disaggregating suspension data. Of the 69 students with IEPs suspended during the 22-23SY, 54 students or 78.26 percent, qualified for free or reduced lunch in WPCSD. • Four- Year Graduation Rates for Students with Disabilities. Students with disabilities are 23 percentage points below all students in the district for four-year graduation rates. • Early Childhood (EC) Educational Environment. The percentage of preschool students with disabilities in regular early childhood classes steadily decreased from 2021-2022SY to the 2022-2023SY. • Grade 4 and 8 ELA & Math Outcomes. Students with disabilities consistently performed lower than the NY state average of students with disabilities in all 4th and 8th grade ELA and Math assessments from 2017-2018 to 2022-2023SYs except for 8th grade Math in 2018-2019.

	The achievement gap percentage is substantial between students with and without disabilities in WPCSD on both the ELA and Math state-wide assessments in grade 4 and 8.
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The New York State Department of Education (NYSED), Office of Special Education Support is required by the United States Department of Education (USDE), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to make determinations annually regarding the performance of students with disabilities for each local preschool and special education program using one of the following four determination categories: “Meets Requirements,” “Needs Assistance,” “Needs Intervention,” or “Needs Substantial Intervention.”^{32 33} The Office of Special Education uses a determination rubric for indicators to evaluate the performance of each local education agency (LEA) in meeting the State’s identified targets. The indicators evaluated are represented in the graphic within.

The analysis below provides WPCSD with data trends that can be used in a formative and directional capacity. A variety of data sources were used to compile the charts in this chapter. They include:

- IDEA Part B Indicators**
- **Indicator 1:** Graduation Rate
 - **Indicator 2:** Dropout Rate
 - **Indicator 3:** Assessment (Participation and Performance)
 - **Indicator 4:** Rates of Suspension
 - **Indicator 5:** Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Age 6-21
 - **Indicator 6:** Preschool LRE, Age 3-5
 - **Indicator 7:** Preschool Outcomes
 - **Indicator 8:** Parent Involvement
 - **Indicators 9, 10:** Disproportionate Representation Due to Inappropriate Identification
 - **Indicator 11:** Timely Initial Evaluations
 - **Indicator 12:** Early Childhood Transition
 - **Indicator 13:** Secondary Transition
 - **Indicator 14:** Post-School Outcomes
 - **Indicators 15, 16:** Dispute Resolution
 - **Indicator 17:** State Systemic Improvement Plan

- Data snapshot from the 2023-24 school year provided by the district, including student-level data for students with IEPs.
- National data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics Digest of Education Statistics
- State data and longitudinal data obtained from the New York State’s Department of Education’s Data Reporting Platform ³⁴
- Additional disability incidence rate data for New York and the Nation obtained from the US Department of Education’s IDEA State Data Collection webpage³⁵
- Disaggregated assessment data from the WPCSD District Plan 2024-27.

WPCSD SPECIAL EDUCATION DEMOGRAPHICS

The following section includes an analysis of WPCSD special education demographic data disaggregated by relevant

student population groups. Where appropriate, a comparison analysis of state and national data is included.

From 2019-2020 to 2022-2023, between 16 and 17 percent of WPCSD school-aged students had an IEP. This is slightly lower than the state average which ranged between 18 and 19 percent from 2019-2020 to 2022-2023. The national average during this same period ranged between 14 and 15 percent. Both WPCSD and the state of New York trend slightly higher than national averages of students with IEPs from 2019-2020 to 2022-23.

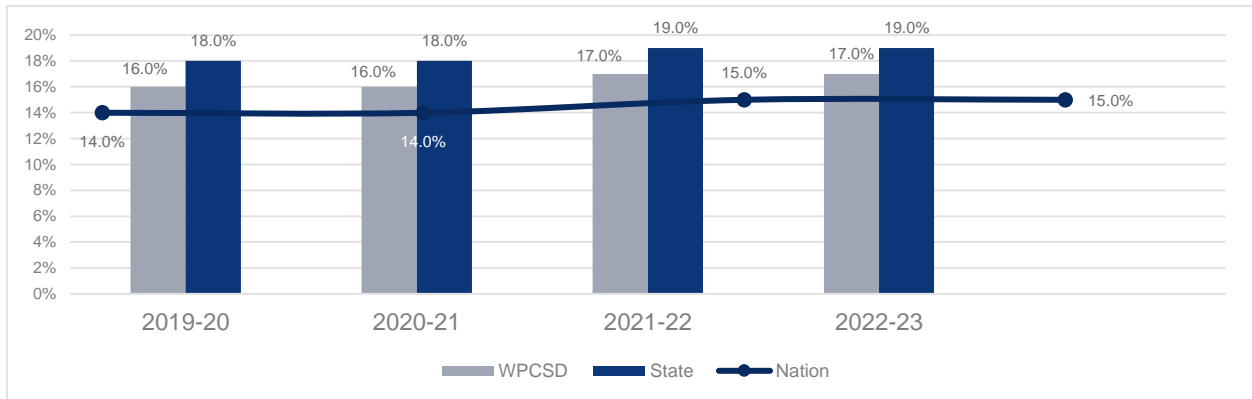
³² In New York, LEAs are responsible for 14 of the 17 indicators.

³³ 34 CFR §§300.600 and 300.604

³⁴ New York State Department of Education Data Reports available at: <https://data.nysed.gov/>

³⁵ IDEA Section 618 Data Products: State Level Data Files available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html>

EXHIBIT 2. PERCENTAGE OF WPCSD STUDENTS (GRADES K-12) WITH IEPs COMPARED TO STATE AND NATIONAL INCIDENCE RATES (AGES 6-21), 2019-20 TO 2022-23³⁶³⁷

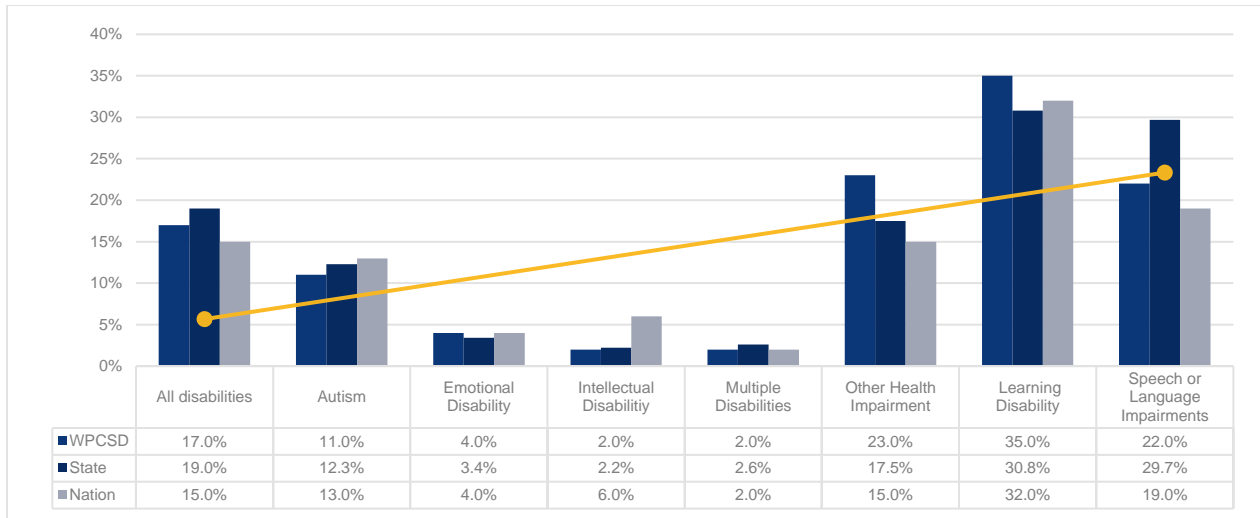


Of the school-age WPCSD students with IEPs in the 2022-23SY, 35 percent qualified for special education and/or related services due to a Learning Disability, 23 percent due to an Other Health Impairment (OHI), 22 percent due to a Speech or Language Impairment, and 11 percent due to Autism Spectrum Disorder. No significant discrepancies exist when comparing percentages of school-age students with disabilities in WPCSD by disability classification to the state or nation. Nationally, students with Intellectual Disabilities represent 6 percent of the total population of students with disabilities compared to 2.2 percent in New York state and 2 percent in WPCSD. Eligibility percentages for students with IEPs in WPCSD qualifying for special education and/or related services due to OHI or a Learning Disability are slightly higher than state and national averages. Lastly, approximately 30 percent (29.7%) of the total population of school-age students with IEPs in the state were eligible for services due to a Speech Language Impairment compared to 22 percent of WPCSD school-age students with IEPs.

³⁶ District and State data obtained from NY State Data Portal: <https://data.nysed.gov/>.

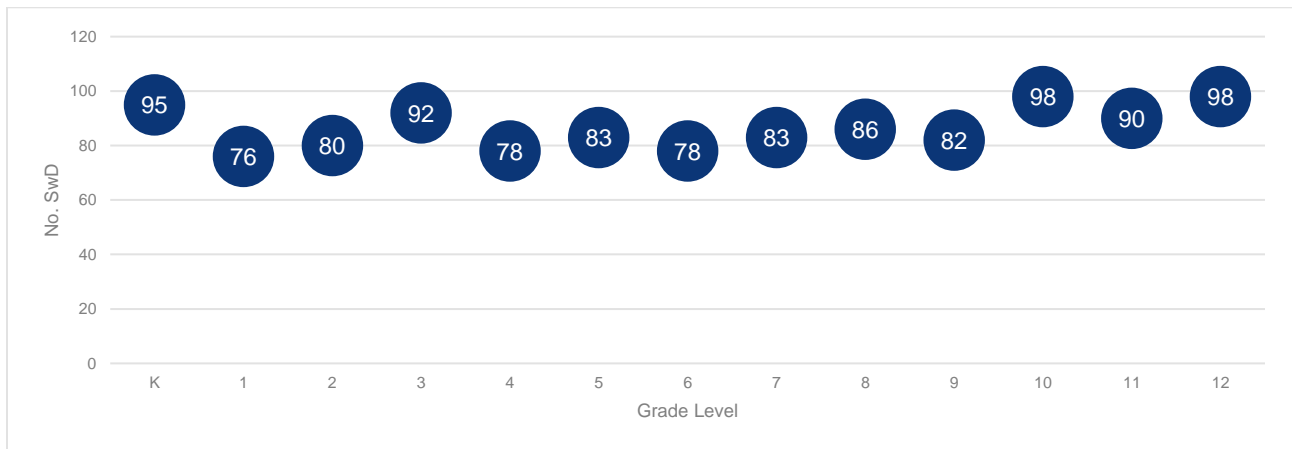
³⁷ National data obtained from National Center for Education Statistics Digest of Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/>.

EXHIBIT 3. PERCENTAGE OF WPCSD SWD BY DISABILITY AREA COMPARED TO STATE AND NATION (AGES 6-21), 2022-23³⁸³⁹⁴⁰



The number of students, ages 6-21 with IEPs in WPCSD, remained relatively stable across all grade levels during the 2023-24 school year. Grades 10 and 12 had the highest number of students with IEPs, both with 98 students. Grades 1, 4, and 6 had the lowest number of students with IEPs at 76, 78, and 78 per grade, respectively.

EXHIBIT 4. NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH IEPs BY GRADE (K-12), 2023-24⁴¹



EARLY CHILDHOOD IDENTIFICATION, AND PLACEMENT RATES

This section provides information about identification rates by race/ethnicity for children three to five years of age, in addition to early childhood educational environments in which students with IEPs learn.

³⁸ WPCSD incidence data obtained from NY Special Education Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting (SEDCAR): <https://www.p12.nysed.gov/sedcar/state.html>.

³⁹ NY State incidence data obtained from NY Special Education Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting (SEDCAR): <https://www.p12.nysed.gov/sedcar/state.html>.

⁴⁰ National data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics Digest of Education Statistics: <https://www.p12.nysed.gov/sedcar/state.html>.

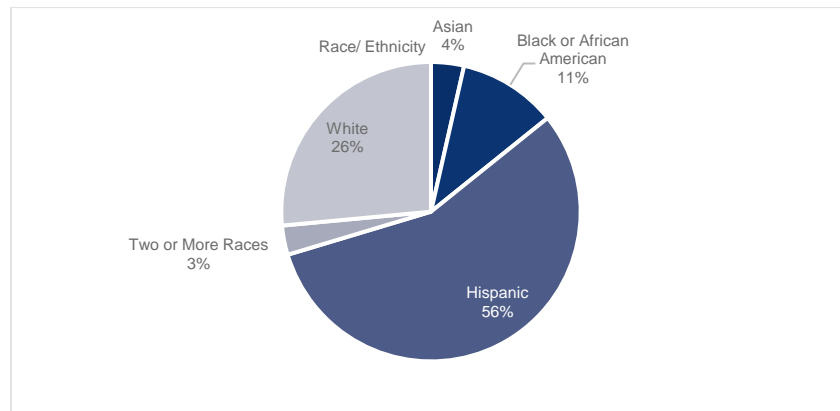
⁴¹ Data Retrieved from NYSED website <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?instid=800000034913&year=2024>

Identification Rates

On October 4th, 2023, WPCSD reported serving 223 preschool students with disabilities, ages 3 through 5 and who are not age eligible for Kindergarten, through an IEP.⁴² The district anticipated serving approximately 250 preschool students with disabilities by the end of the 2024-2025 school year.⁴³ The 2023-2024 school year data snapshot provided by WPCSD to analyze as part of this study indicated a total of 253 preschool students with disabilities being served. Both sets of data are presented within this section and identified accordingly.

Of the preschool students with an IEP, 56 percent were Hispanic. This percentage was comparable to the percentage of Hispanic, eligible students ages 6-21 in WPCSD (60.9%). White students represented 26 percent of eligible preschool students with disabilities. Students of other races and ethnicities accounted for 17 percent of the preschool students with disabilities population served in WPCSD.

EXHIBIT 5. PERCENT OF WPCSD STUDENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 3-5) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2023-24⁴⁴



Educational Placements

Eligible preschool students with disabilities who reside in the WPCSD school district can access the following special education services:⁴⁵

1. Related Services Only

For those children whose needs require related services only, the Preschool Committee on Special Education offers speech and language therapy, audiological services, psychological services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling services, medical services, parent counseling and training, school health services, and/or social work services. These services are made available in a variety of settings including a child's home, day care center, nursery school, or provider's office.

2. Special Education Itinerant Teacher Services

Special education itinerant teacher (SEIT) services means students are provided with direct instruction by a certified special education teacher affiliated with an approved program. These services are also available to preschool students with disabilities in a variety of sites including regular nursery schools, day care programs, and homes. These services are offered on an individual and group basis, as needed, to meet students' IEP goals.

3. Integrated Settings

Special classes in integrated settings provide for no more than 12 preschoolers with disabilities who attend a preschool program with non-disabled children. These classes utilize an integrated co-teaching

⁴² WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Data snapshot provided by WPCSD in Fall 2024

⁴⁵ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

model which typically includes an early childhood teacher, a special education teacher, and a teaching assistant/aide.

4. **Special Class**

Special classes are currently available in approved private preschools. Classes range from six to 12 identified children. These classes are staffed by a special education teacher and one or two teaching assistants/aides.

EXHIBIT 6. NUMBER OF WPCSD STUDENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 3-5) BY SERVICE TYPE, 2023-24⁴⁶

Nature of Services	Number of Students
Related Services	111
SEIT Only	7
SEIT and Related Services	31
Special Class	74

SPP indicator 6 monitors the percent of children with IEPs, aged 3, 4, and 5 who are enrolled in a preschool program attending a: (A) Regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program, (B) Separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility, or (C) Receiving special education and related services in the home. Summarized below are WPCSD’s performance ratings for these three areas in each of the three categories (6A, B, & C) for 2021-2023.

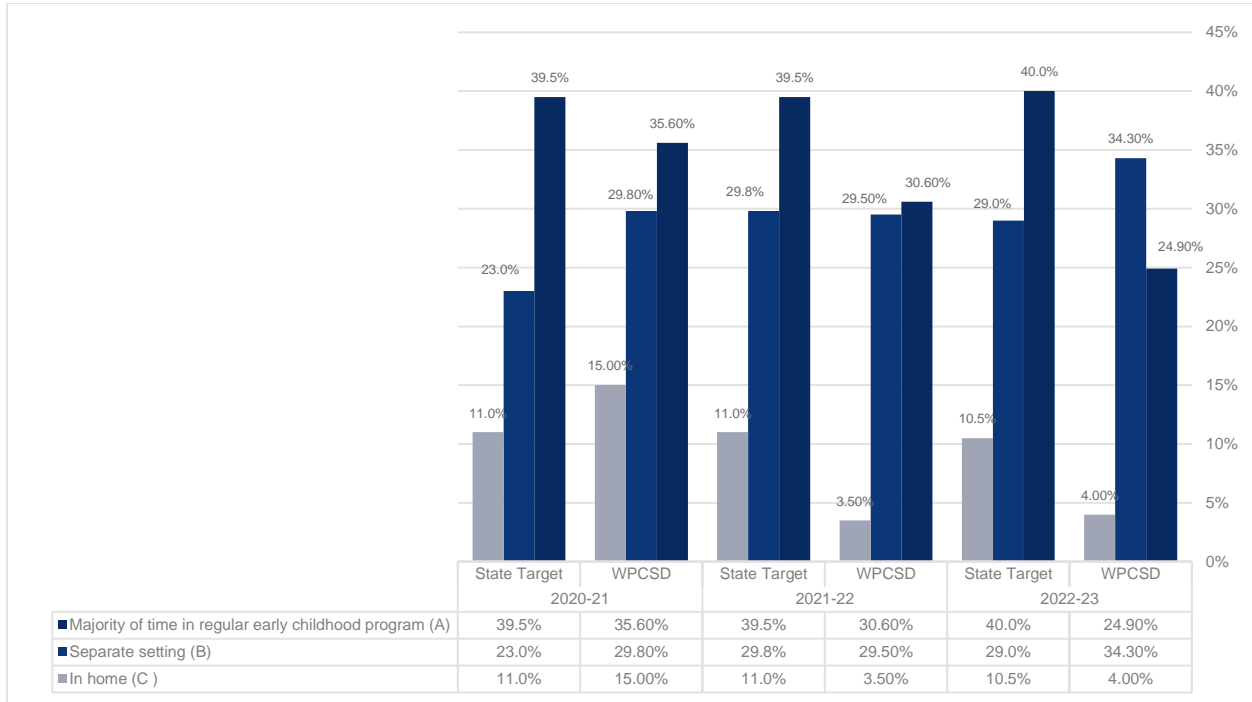
Majority of time in regular early childhood program. From 2021 to 2023, the district consistently fell short of meeting the state target for this indicator. In the 2020-2021 school year, the district was below the state target by an average of 5 percentage points. This gap widened between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, with the percentage of students spending the majority of their time in regular early childhood programs decreasing by 5 percentage points. As a result, WPCSD has not achieved the state target for this indicator during this period.

Separate setting. In 2023, the district increased the percentage of students spending the majority of their school day in a separate setting by 5 percentage points from 2021. The district met the state target in 2022.

In home. In 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, the district met the state target with 4 percent or less of preschool students with disabilities receiving services in their home. The district did not meet the state target of 11 percent in 2020-2021; however, it is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic may have disproportionately impacted this percentage.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

EXHIBIT 7. PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS (AGE 3-5, NOT IN K) BY EDUCATIONAL SETTING FOR WPCSD & STATE SPP TARGETS, 2020-21 THROUGH 2022-23⁴⁷



SCHOOL-AGED STUDENTS: IDENTIFICATION, ACHIEVEMENT & PLACEMENT

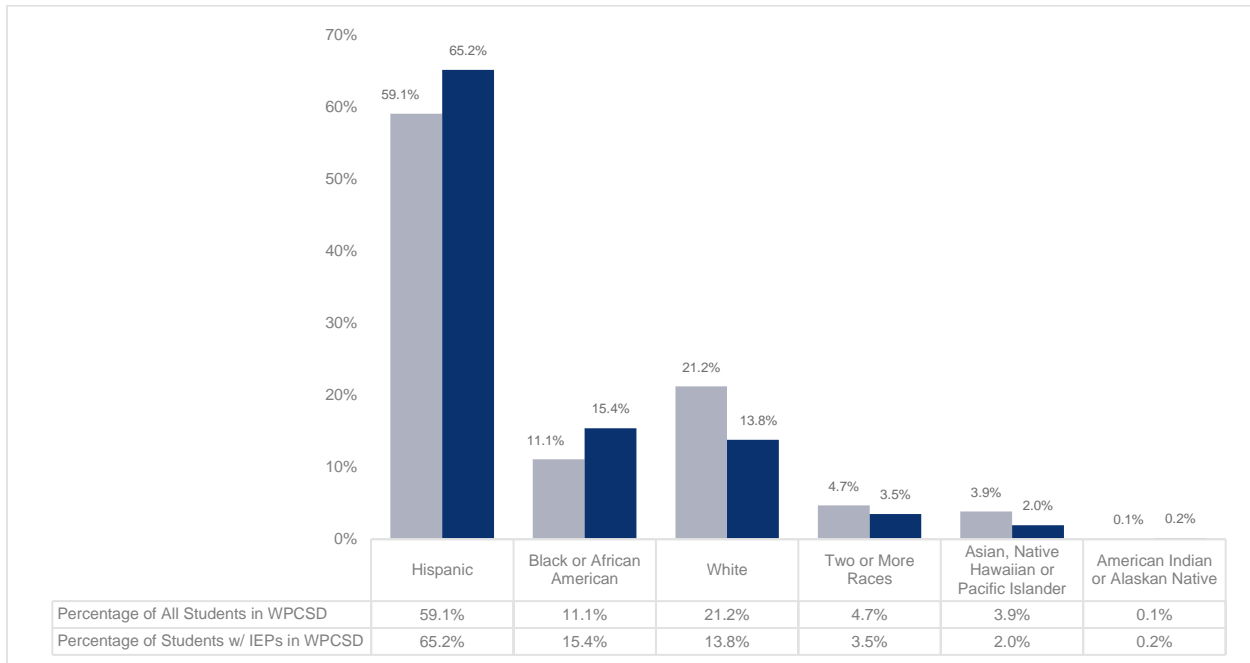
Identification by Race/Ethnicity

The exhibit below shows the composition of each racial/ethnic group of identified students based on enrollments for each demographic group. Comparing the demographic breakdown of students with IEPs to all students in the district is a useful preliminary method for ongoing monitoring to ensure one specific race or ethnicity subgroup is not being overidentified for special education services.

In 2023, 65.2 percent of students with an IEP were Hispanic, 15.4 percent were Black or African American, and 13.8 percent were white. In comparison to all students enrolled in the district, 51.9 percent were Hispanic, 11.1 percent were Black or African American, and 21.2 percent were white. The percent of Black or African American and Hispanic students with an IEP was between 4.3 to 6.1 percentage points higher, respectively, when compared to the overall percentage of total student population in WPCSD by each race/ethnicity. Comparatively, white students represent 21.2 percent of all school-age students enrolled in WPCSD yet only makeup 13.8 percent of students with IEPs, a 7.4 percentage point difference.

⁴⁷ New York State data retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/>

EXHIBIT 8. PERCENT OF WPCSD STUDENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 6-21) BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2023-24⁴⁸



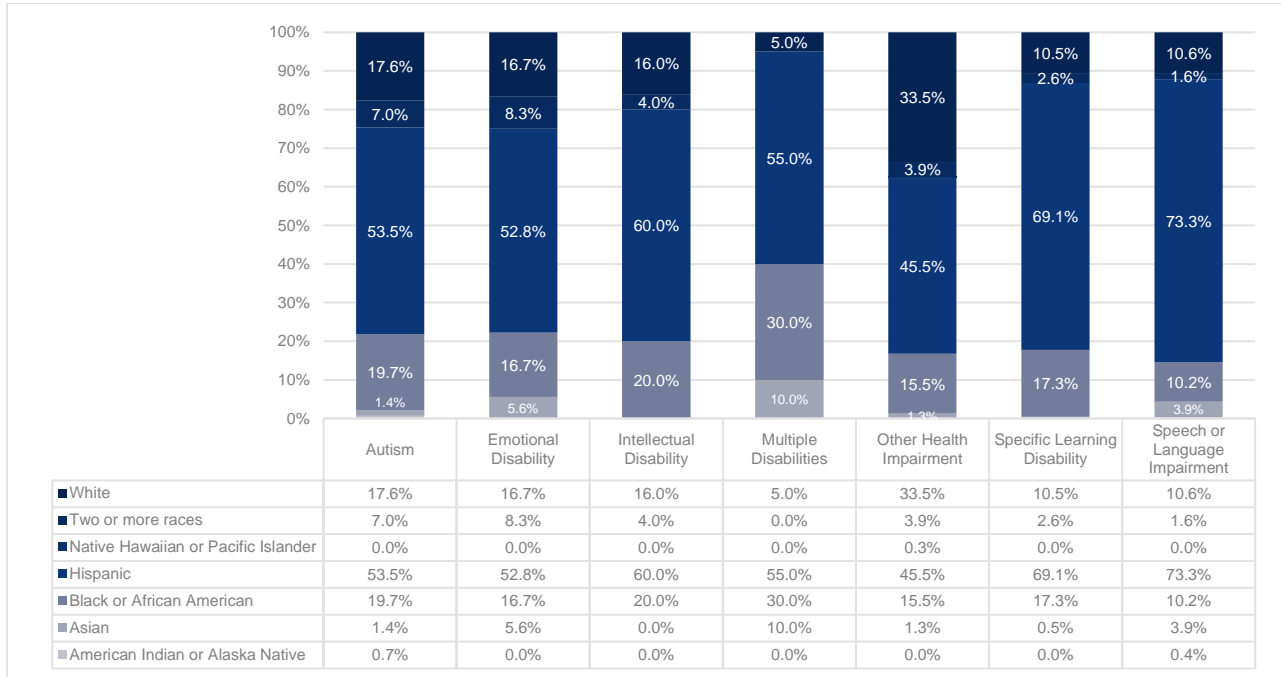
Additional analysis indicated the prevalence of certain race/ethnicities identified with specific disability types at a higher rate when compared to all students with disabilities in WPCSD. It is important to note that minimal variability in percentage of students with IEPs by race/ethnicity exists in the data represented in the graph below. That is due to a different school year (2023-2024) and data set included in this analysis.

Key differences, by race/ethnicity and disability type, for school-age students in WPCSD during the 2023-2024SY are as follows:

- Black or African American students accounted for 16 percent of school-age students with an IEP. A breakdown by disability type revealed that 30 percent of students with IEPs identified as having multiple disabilities are Black, 20 percent of students with IEPs with an intellectual disability are Black, and 19.7 percent of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder are Black.
- Hispanic students accounted for 61 percent of school-age students with an IEP. A breakdown by disability type revealed that 73.3 percent of students with IEPs identified as having a Speech or Language Impairment are Hispanic, 69.1 percent of students with IEPs with a Learning Disability are Hispanic, 60 percent of students with IEPs with an intellectual disability are Hispanic, and 55 percent of students with IEPs identified as having multiple disabilities are Hispanic.
- White students accounted for 17 percent of school-age students with an IEP. A breakdown by disability type revealed that 33.5 percent of students with IEPs identified as having an Other Health Impairment are white, 17.6 percent of students with IEPs with Autism Spectrum Disorder are white, and 16.7 percent of students with IEPs identified with an Emotional Disability are white.

⁴⁸ NY State data retrieved from: <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?instid=800000034913&year=2024>

EXHIBIT 9. PERCENTAGE OF WPCSD STUDENTS (AGE 6-21) BY DISABILITY AREA AND RACE/ETHNICITY, 2023-2024⁴⁹



Risk Ratio

One of the most useful, informative, and proactive methods used to calculate disproportionality "is the risk ratio, which compares one racial/ethnic group's risk of receiving special education and related services to that of all other students."⁵⁰ The risk ratio can be used to calculate disproportionality at both the state and district levels. The analysis below is intended to provide WPCSD with a tool to calculate risk ratios to monitor trends and identify areas of concern.

The risk ratio tool tells school personnel how the risk for one racial/ethnic group compares to the risk for a comparison group.⁵¹ It can be used to assess:

- How much more likely is it for students from one race or ethnicity group to be classified with a disability compared to all other students;
- How much more likely is it for students with disabilities from one race or ethnicity group to be suspended for more than 10 days compared to all other students;
- What the likelihood is that a student from a particular racial or ethnic group will be classified with a disability, be given a specific disability classification, or placed in a most restrictive environment;
- What the likelihood is that a student with a disability from a particular racial or ethnic group will be suspended for more than 10 days.

⁴⁹ Snapshot WPCSD demographic data for the 2023-2024SY provided to PCG, Fall 2024

⁵⁰ Bollmer, J. Bethel, et al. (2007). Using the Risk Ratio to Assess Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education at the School-District Level. *The Journal of Special Education*, Vol 41, Issue 3, pp. 186 – 198.

⁵¹ Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education. (2016).

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Special Education: A Multi-Year Disproportionality Analysis by State, Analysis Category, and Race/Ethnicity.

As a concept, "risk" looks at the general enrollment data for each racial group along with the number of students from that group who were identified for a specified category and calculates the likelihood that a student from that racial group would be found in that particular category. The general risk equation is as follows:⁵²

EXHIBIT 10. GENERAL RISK EQUATION

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Number of children from racial/ethnic group in disability category}}{\text{Number of enrolled children from racial/ethnic group}} \times 100$$

In education, risk ratios are commonly used to assess disproportionality in special education, particularly in areas like identification, placement, and discipline of students by race/ethnicity or disability status.⁵³ The most appropriate threshold for interpreting disproportionality depends on the context, but best practices generally suggest lower risk ratio thresholds than those typically set by states.

Common Practice vs. Best Practices:

- *Federal and State Guidelines:* Under IDEA, states must monitor disproportionality, and many states define significant disproportionality with a risk ratio of **3.0 to 4.0**. This means that a group is considered disproportionately affected if it is three to four times more likely than the reference group to experience a particular outcome (e.g., identification for special education).
- *Best Practices:* Research and equity-focused frameworks often argue that a risk ratio closer to **2.0** is a more sensitive and fair measure of disproportionality. This lower threshold acknowledges disparities earlier and prompts intervention before disparities become more pronounced.⁵⁴

Why 2.0 is Often Recommended:

1. *Equity Considerations:* A risk ratio of 3.0 or higher can overlook less extreme but still concerning disparities that negatively impact smaller populations or marginalized groups.
2. *Prevention Focus:* Lower thresholds allow districts to intervene earlier, reducing the long-term effects of disproportionality on student outcomes.
3. *Research Alignment:* Studies have shown that risk ratios above 2.0 already signal significant inequities in access to services, discipline practices, or placement in restrictive settings.⁵⁵

Example Application:

If Black students have a risk ratio of 3.5 for being identified as having an emotional disturbance compared to White students, this will meet many states' thresholds but may fail to address underlying inequities if best practices of 2.0 were applied. Conversely, identifying and addressing disproportionality at a 2.0 risk ratio threshold enables earlier policy or programmatic responses.

While thresholds like 3.0 or 4.0 align with federal requirements and state practices, adopting a 2.0 risk ratio threshold aligns better with proactive and equitable approaches to addressing disproportionality.

⁵² PCG analyzed student populations with at least 10 students in a particular race/ethnicity group with an IEP and at least 5 students with a specific disability classification.

⁵³ OSEP Monitoring - Significant Disproportionality Reporting Under IDEA Part B. U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). <https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/students-disabilities-laws-and-policy/osep-monitoring--significant-disproportionality-reporting-under-idea-part-b>

⁵⁴ Bollmer, J., Bethel, J., Garrison-Mogren, R., & Brauen, M. (2007). Using the Risk Ratio to Assess Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education at the School-District Level [Review of *Using the Risk Ratio to Assess Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education at the School-District Level*]. *The Journal of Special Education*, 41(3), 186–198.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Districts seeking to improve outcomes for all students may benefit from adopting lower thresholds in their data monitoring systems and equity initiatives.

For further reading, consult sources such as:

- IDEA's regulations on disproportionality monitoring⁵⁶
- Research studies on risk ratios and equity, including work by the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCREST).⁵⁷

As shown below, a risk ratio greater than 2.0 or a racial/ethnic group indicates a higher risk of over-representation, while a risk ratio of less than 1.0 indicates a higher risk of under-representation. For the state of New York, the threshold for identification of significant disproportionality for students based on race/ethnicity and disability classification is 4.0.⁵⁸

PCG conducted a risk ratio analysis of WPCSD data to identify areas where over-identification of students with disabilities based on disability, race, educational setting, and discipline may be occurring. The risk ratio calculated is not designed to replicate New York's significant disproportionality reporting process. The intent of this calculation is to provide a formative data point to assess the extent to which identification rate and educational placement and behavior decisions are impacted by students' race/ethnicity. This tool can be used to inform ongoing analysis and monitoring.

As displayed in the exhibit below, Black or African American students identified with an emotional disability (2.01), or intellectual disability (1.99) represented the highest risk ratio of possible over-representation when utilizing the 2.0 model. White students (1.87) and students of Two or More Races (1.89) with an other health impairment represented the second highest groups of students potentially reaching over-representation utilizing the 2.0 risk ratio model. Lastly, Asian students identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder represented the highest potential disability classification risk (1.80) for over-identification.

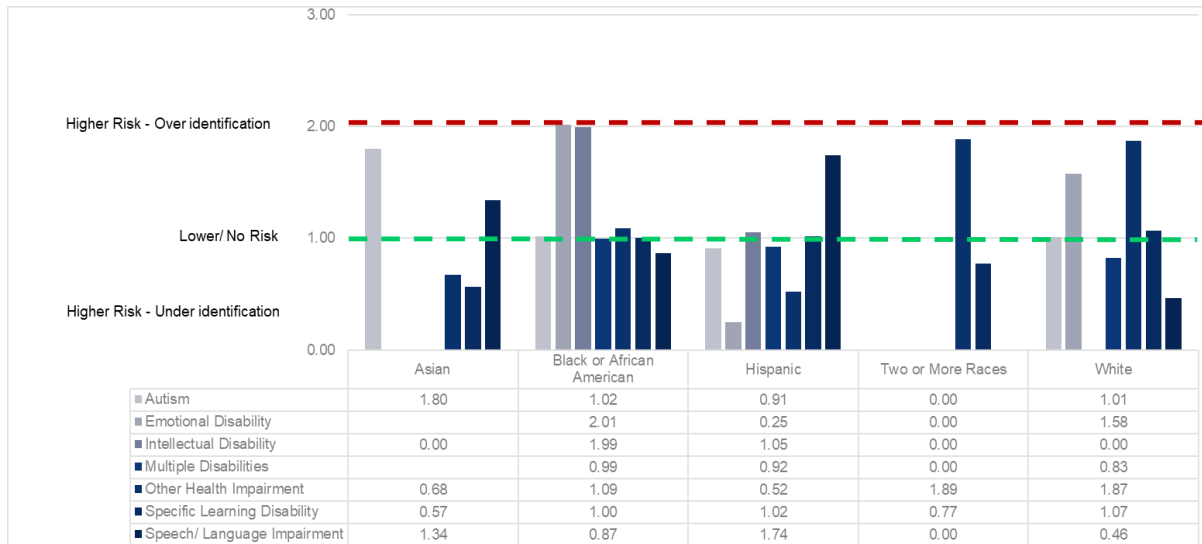
Some students with IEPs of different race/ethnicity backgrounds met or are approaching the 2.0 higher risk of over-representation by disability classification threshold. No student race/ethnicity group approached the NY state threshold for significant disproportionality (4.0) for the disability classifications analyzed. At this time, WPCSD should continue to monitor identification rates of Black or African American students identified with an emotional disability or with an intellectual disability.

⁵⁶ [OSEP Monitoring - Significant Disproportionality Reporting Under IDEA Part B](#)

⁵⁷ [Website: National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems](#)

⁵⁸ *2020-21 Criteria for Notification of Disproportionality*. NYSED IRS. (n.d.).
https://www.p12.nysed.gov/sedcar/forms/instructions/spp_criteria/sigdispro2021.html

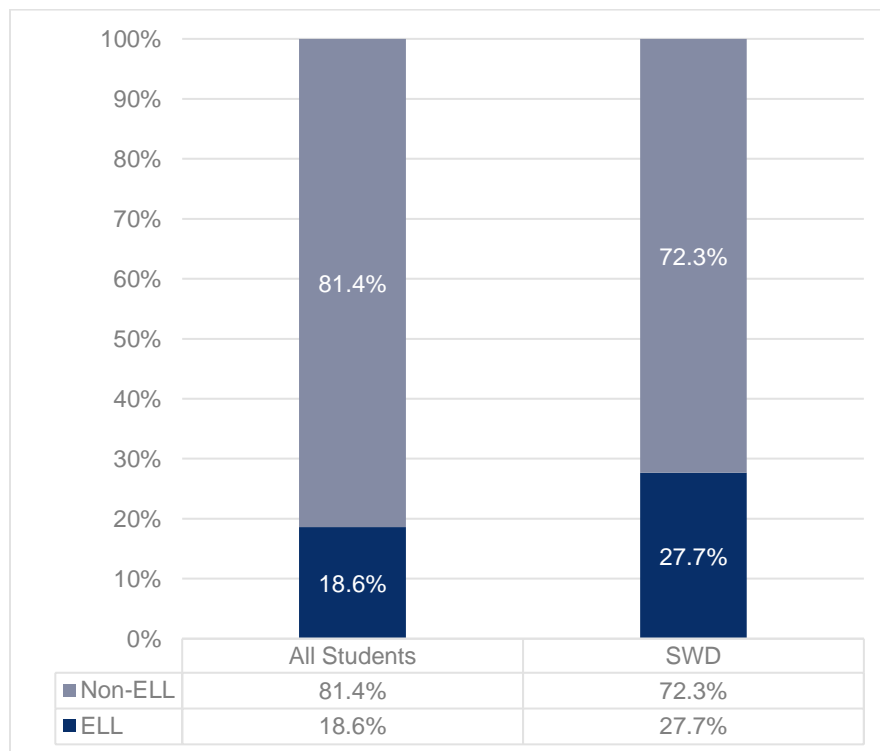
EXHIBIT 11. RISK RATIOS BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND DISABILITY, 2023-24⁵⁹



Eligibility by English Language Learner Status

In WPCSD, 18.6 percent of students are English language learners (ELLs). Of students with IEPs, 27.7 percent are ELLs.

EXHIBIT 12. PERCENT OF WPCSD STUDENTS AGES 6-21 BY ELL STATUS, 2023-24⁶⁰

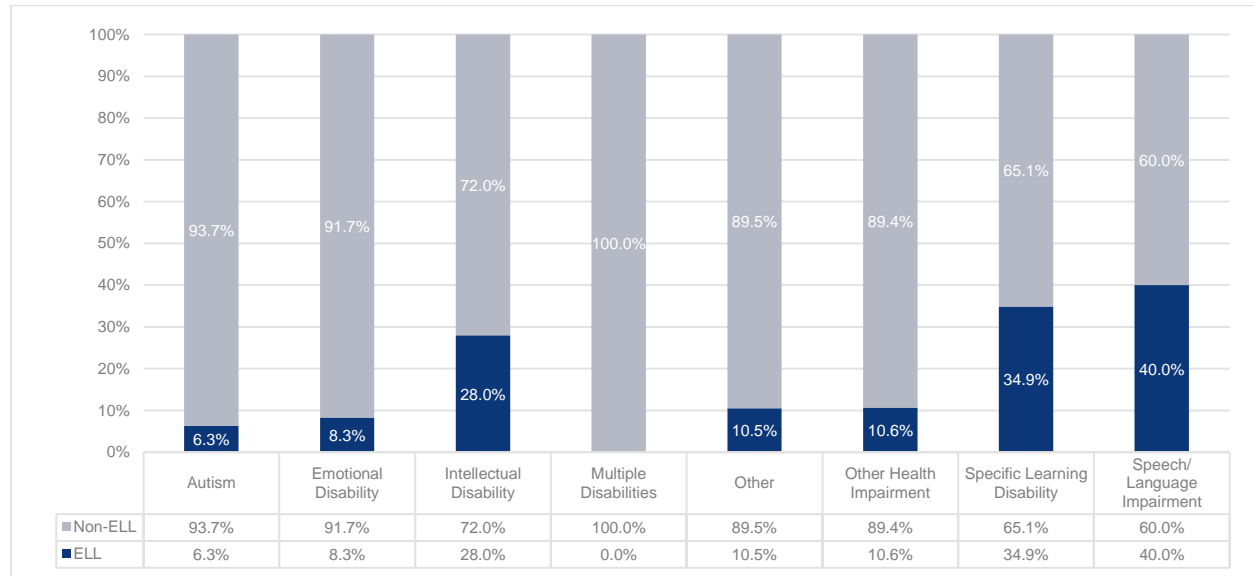


Of students with IEPs, 40 percent of students eligible for services under speech language impairment are ELLs, 35 percent of students with a specific learning disability are ELLs, and 28 percent of students with

⁵⁹ Snapshot WPCSD demographic data for the 2023-2024SY provided to PCG, Fall 2024

an intellectual disability are ELLs. These categories were higher than the overall percentage of students with an IEP who are also ELLs (27.7%).

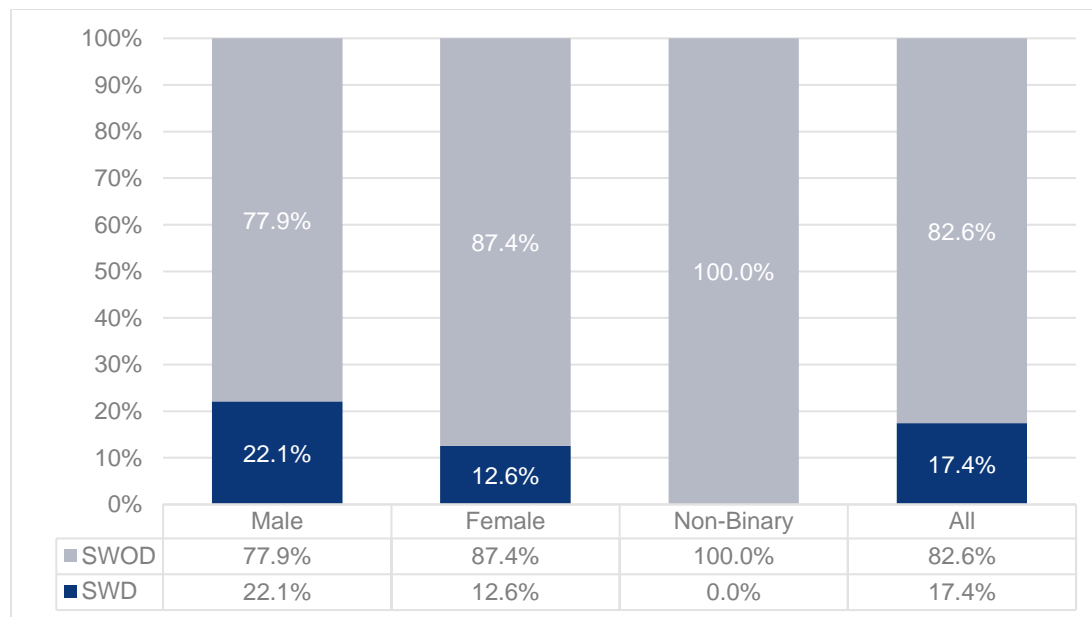
EXHIBIT 13. PERCENTAGE OF WPCSD STUDENTS WITH IEPs BY DISABILITY AREA ELL STATUS, 2023-24⁶¹



Identification by Gender

In WPCSD, students with disabilities represent approximately 17 percent of the entire population of students. Male students with IEPs accounted for 22.1 percent of all male students within WPCSD. Comparatively, female students with IEPs accounted for 12.6 percent of all female students within WPCSD. No students with IEPs identified as non-binary.

EXHIBIT 14. PERCENT OF WPCSD MALE VS. FEMALE STUDENTS WITH IEPs (AGE 6-21), 2023-24⁶²



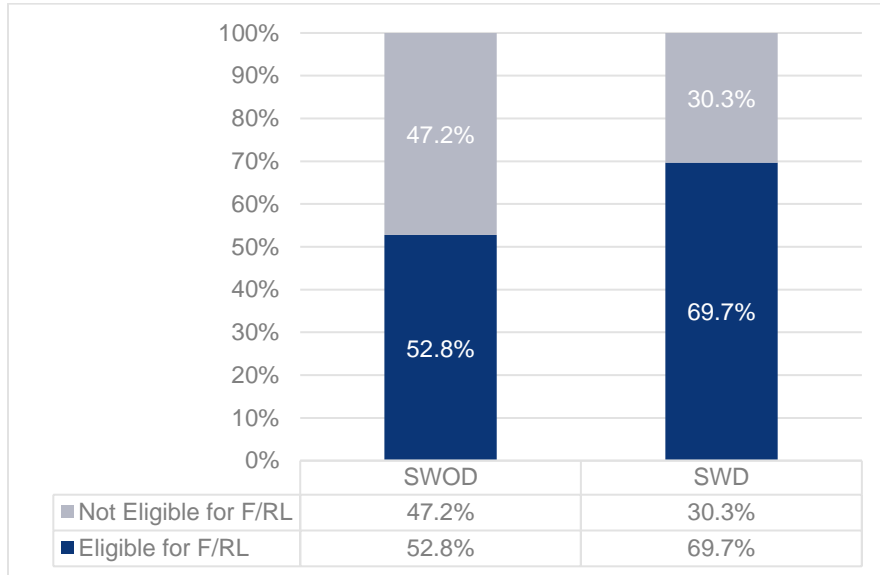
⁶¹ Data snapshot provided by WPCSD in Fall 2024

⁶² New York State data retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/>

Eligibility by Free and Reduced Price Lunch Status

In WPCSD, 55.7 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. Of students with IEPs, 69.7 percent are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch.

EXHIBIT 15. PERCENT OF WPCSD STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/ REDUCED LUNCH BY DISABILITY ELIGIBILITY (AGES 6-21), 2023-24⁶³



EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR LEARNING: SCHOOL-AGED STUDENTS

This section provides a longitudinal analysis of outcomes for school-aged students and those receiving special education based on the following: New York State Testing Program (NYSTP), graduation rates, and dropout rates.⁶⁴

New York State Testing Program

English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessment results from 2017-2018 to 2022-23 for students with and without disabilities were analyzed to understand the extent to which achievement gaps exist.⁶⁵ The percentage of students who scored proficient for the following three grade levels were analyzed: fourth, eighth, and high school Regents (ELA and Algebra I).

An area to note when interpreting scores is the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning, as many districts observed a drop in academic performance when students returned to in-person instruction. Research shows that extended periods of remote learning, disruptions to instructional routines, and challenges in accessing consistent, high-quality instruction contributed to notable learning loss, particularly in foundational areas such as reading and mathematics.⁶⁶ These effects were disproportionately felt among students from historically marginalized communities, including students with

⁶³ New York State data retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/>

⁶⁴ Data analyzed in this section was obtained from NY State Data Portal: <https://data.nysed.gov/>.

⁶⁵ Due to COVID-19, testing was not conducted in 2020. For 2020-21, an estimated 40 percent of students participated in state assessments. In WPCSD, only 48 percent of third graders participated in the English language arts assessment. The smaller sample size may not be representative of WPCSD's student population. As a result, data from 2020-21 are not included in the longitudinal analysis.

⁶⁶ Kuhfeld, M., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., & Lewis, K. (2022). *Learning during COVID-19: An update on student achievement and growth at the start of the 2022-23 school year*. NWEA Research. Retrieved from <https://www.nwea.org>

disabilities, English learners, and those from low-income households, further widening pre-existing achievement gaps.⁶⁷

For students with disabilities, the challenges were particularly acute. Many struggled with the lack of access to specialized supports and accommodations during remote learning. This compounded barriers to engagement and academic progress, emphasizing the need for individualized strategies to address both academic and social-emotional gaps. Schools are now tasked with balancing the immediate need to remediate missed learning while simultaneously ensuring access to grade-level content through high-quality Tier 1 instruction.⁶⁸

English Language Arts

WPCSD students with disabilities in grade 4 performed below NY state averages for students with disabilities from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023. It is important to note that students with disabilities in WPCSD demonstrated single digit proficiency each year assessed from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023 ranging from 4 to 8 percent proficiency. There was a 16 percent difference in 2022-23SY between 4th graders in WPCSD with IEPs and their peers across NY state. When comparing the performance of 4th grade WPCSD students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers, the achievement gap ranged from 38 percent to 43 percent, and an average of 40 percent.

WPCSD students with disabilities in grade 8 performed below NY state averages for students with disabilities from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023. WPCSD 8th grade students with disabilities experienced a surge in performance in 2022-2023SY to 15 percent proficiency from 8 percent in the year prior. When comparing the performance of 8th grade WPCSD students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers, the achievement gap ranged from 45 percent to 51 percent, and an average of 49 percent.

WPCSD students with disabilities in high school taking the ELA Regents exam performed consistently higher than NY state averages for students with disabilities from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023. When comparing the performance of WPCSD high school students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers on the ELA Regents exam, the achievement gap ranged from 13 percent in the 2018-2019SY to 38 percent in the 2021-2022SY, and an average of 29 percent.

In 2018-2019SY, WPCSD students with IEPs demonstrated proficiency at 81 percent and non-disabled peers demonstrated proficiency at 94 percent. Non-disabled WPCSD high school students performed remarkably well on the ELA Regents exam with levels of proficiency ranging from 93 to 97 percent from 2017-2018SY to 2022-2023SY. High school students with and without IEPs in WPCSD demonstrated astounding performance, each year, on this exam. It is worthwhile for WPCSD curriculum and instructional leaders to dive deeper into the high-leverage practices being implemented in high school ELA classes to replicate where possible.

⁶⁷ Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2021). *COVID-19 and education: The lingering effects of unfinished learning*. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com>

⁶⁸ Tomasik, M. J., Helbling, L. A., & Moser, U. (2021). Educational gains of in-person vs. distance learning in primary and secondary schools: A natural experiment during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Switzerland. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 103, 101605. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101605>

EXHIBIT 16. GRADE 4 ELA, 2017-18 THROUGH 2022-23⁶⁹

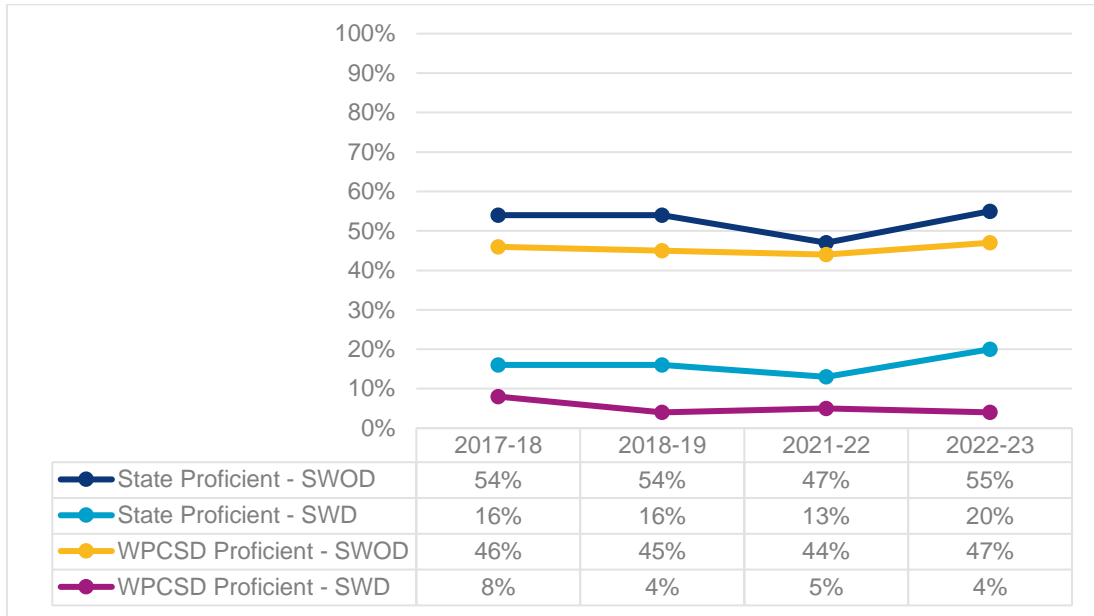
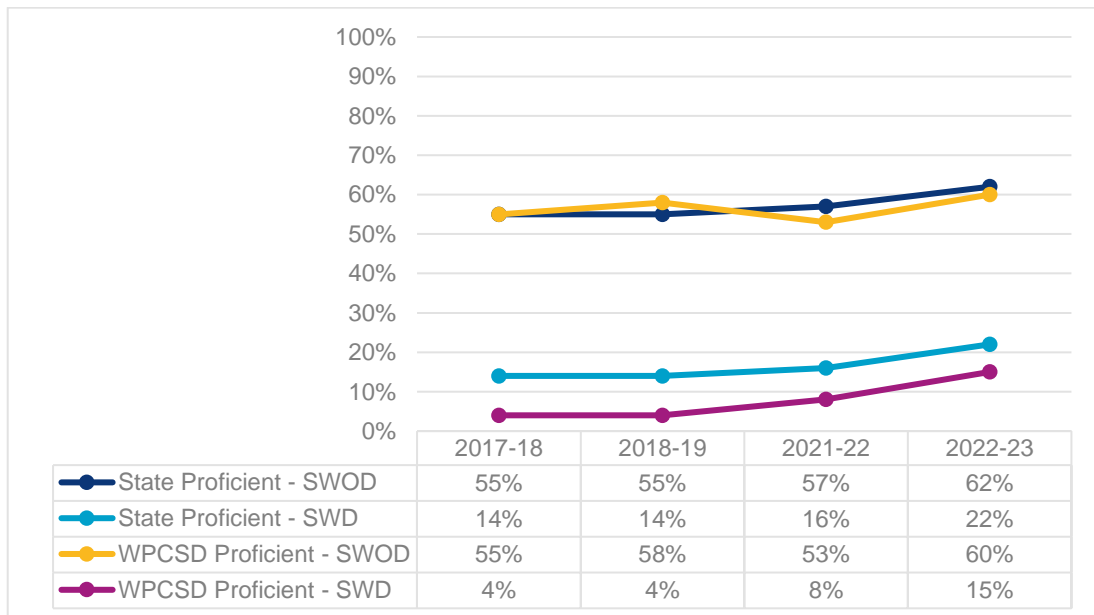


EXHIBIT 17. GRADE 8 ELA, 2017-18 THROUGH 2022-23⁷⁰



⁶⁹ Data was obtained from NY State Data Portal: <https://data.nysed.gov/>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

EXHIBIT 18. HS ELA REGENTS, 2017-18 THROUGH 2022-23⁷¹

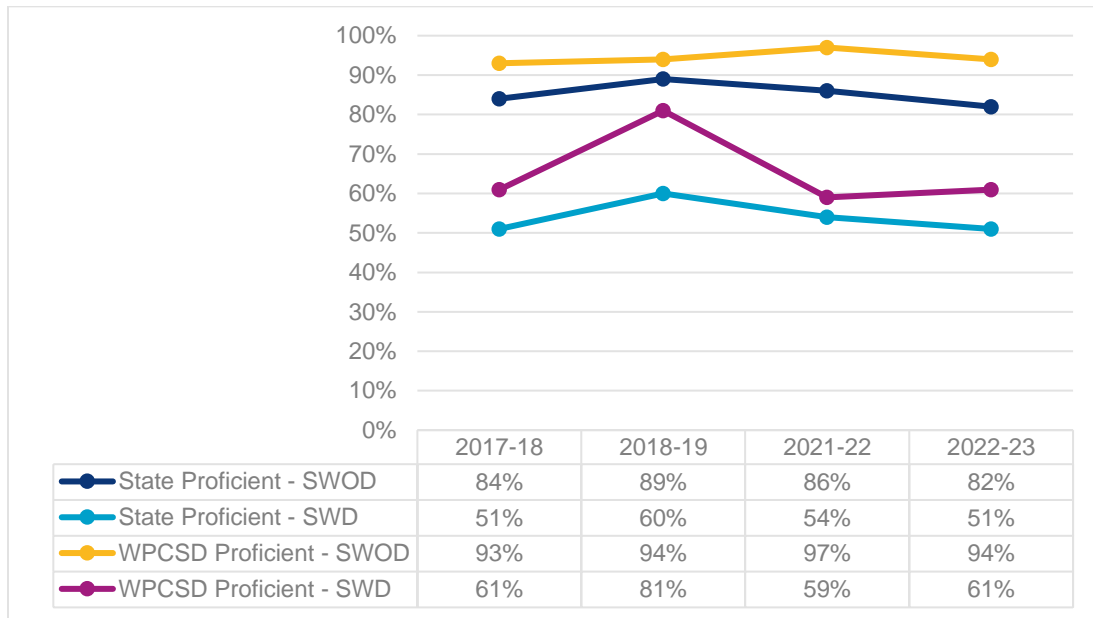
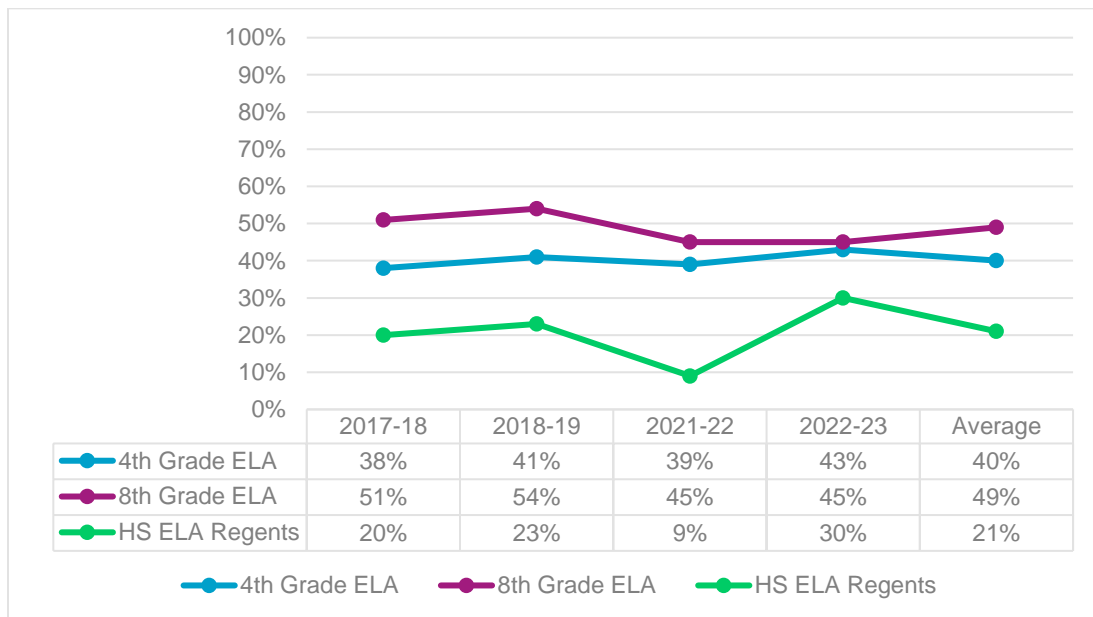


EXHIBIT 19. ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN SWOD AND SWD IN WPCSD ON STATEWIDE ELA ASSESSMENTS⁷²



Mathematics

WPCSD students with disabilities in grade 4 performed below NY state averages for students with disabilities from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023. There was a 13 percent increase from 2021-2022SY to 2022-23SY for 4th graders in WPCSD with IEPs. When comparing the performance of 4th grade WPCSD students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers, the achievement gap ranged from 35 percent to 44 percent, and an average of 40 percent.

WPCSD students with disabilities in grade 8 performed slightly below or slightly above NY state averages for students with disabilities from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023. Performance was inconsistent prior to

⁷¹ Ibid.

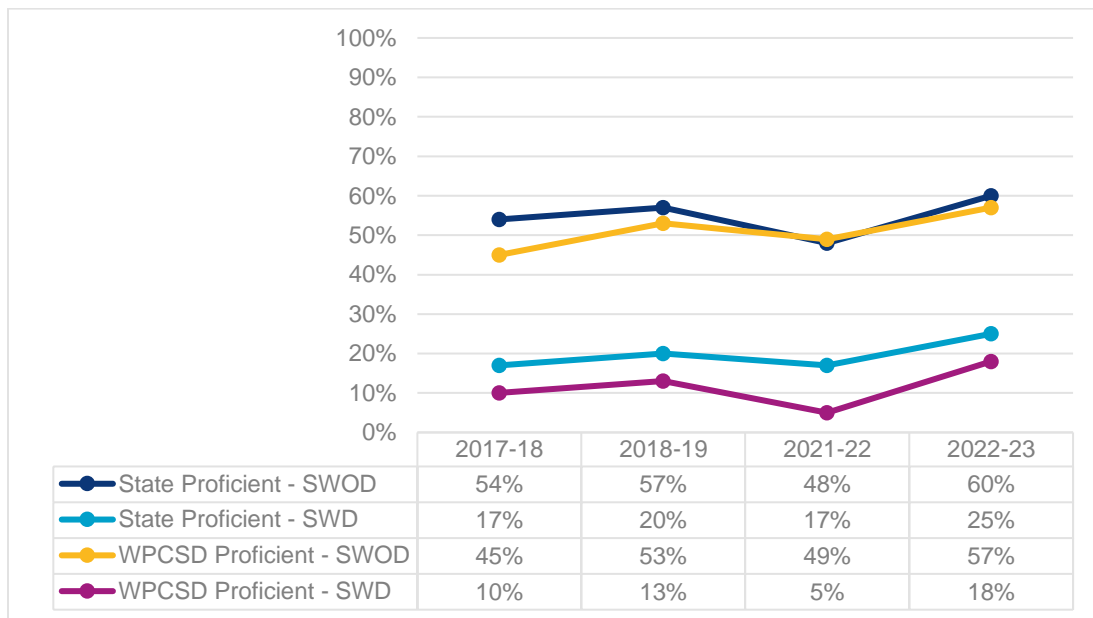
⁷² Data was obtained from NY State Data Portal: <https://data.nysed.gov/>.

and during the COVID-19 pandemic which likely impacted instruction for 8th grade students with disabilities mastering foundational Mathematics skills. When comparing the performance of 8th grade WPCSD students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers, the achievement gap ranged from 9 percent to 30 percent, and an average of 21 percent.

WPCSD students with disabilities in high school taking the Algebra I Regents exam performed slightly below or slightly above NY state averages for students with disabilities from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023. Performance was consistently above NY state averages (above 4 percentage points in 2017-2018SY and above 6 percentage points in 2018-2019SY) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. WPCSD students with disabilities experienced a double-digit percentage point decrease in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, 13 and 10 percentage points respectively. When comparing the performance of WPCSD high school students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers on the Algebra I Regents exam, the achievement gap ranged from 27 percent to 48 percent, and an average of 37 percent.

The achievement gap between students with disabilities and those without, at both the state and district level, was substantial across all grades. Similar to ELA, high school students with disabilities consistently performed higher on the Regents exams compared to the performance of 4th and 8th grade WPCSD students with IEPs. A correlation between students with IEPs having greater access to grade level curriculum and ICT classroom programming can be established based upon these results.

EXHIBIT 20. GRADE 4 MATH, 2017-18 THROUGH 2022-23⁷³



⁷³ Data was obtained from NY State Data Portal: <https://data.nysed.gov/>.

EXHIBIT 21. GRADE 8 MATH, 2017-18 THROUGH 2022-23⁷⁴

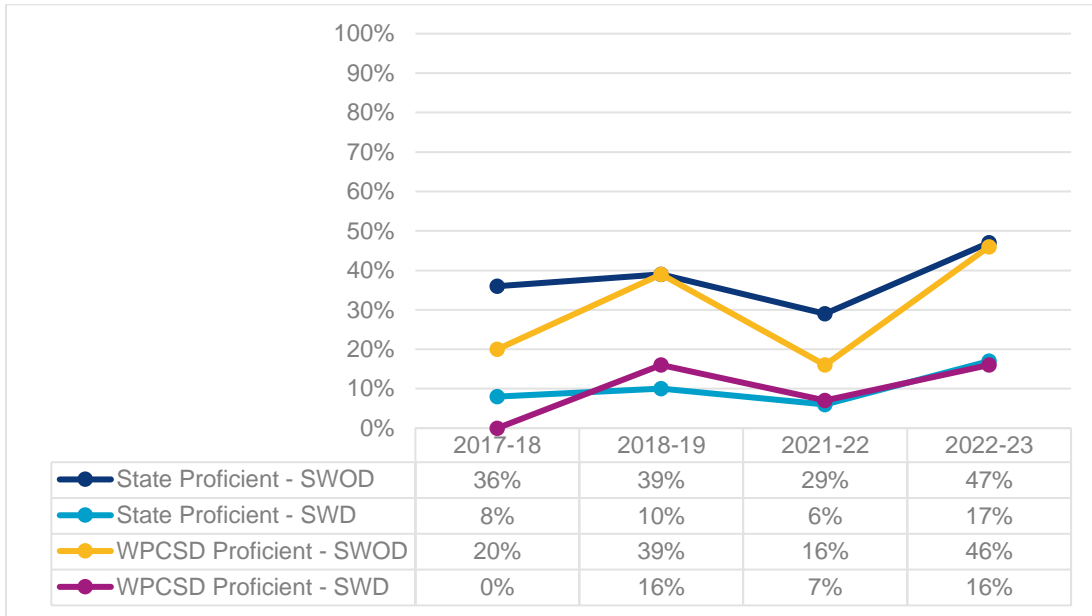
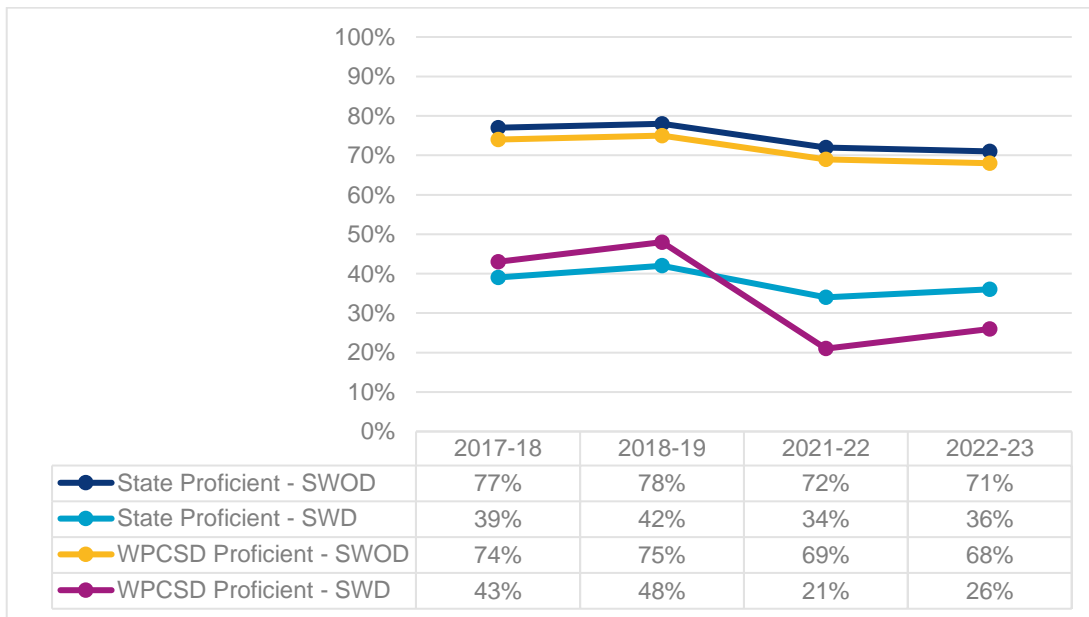


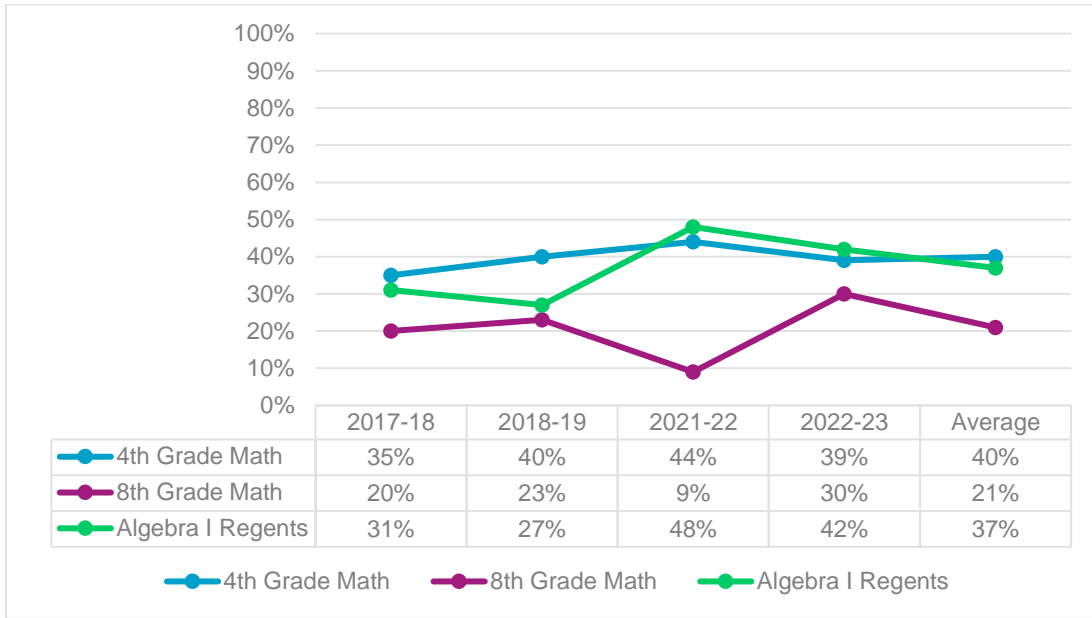
EXHIBIT 22. ALGEBRA I REGENTS, 2017-18 THROUGH 2022-23⁷⁵



⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

EXHIBIT 23. ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN SWOD AND SWD IN WPCSD ON STATEWIDE MATH ASSESSMENTS



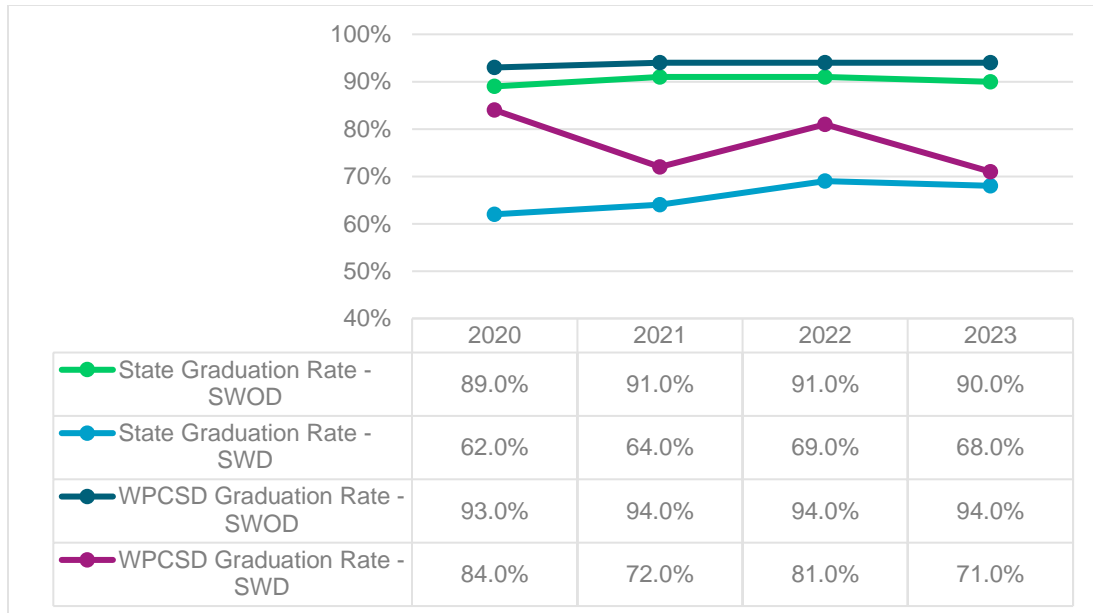
Graduation and Dropout

Graduation and dropout data between 2020-2023 was analyzed for students with disabilities and those without, both within WPCSD and across the state.

Graduation Rates

When compared to the state graduation rate for students without disabilities, a slightly higher percentage of WPCSD students graduated within four years. When compared with the state average for students with disabilities, a considerably higher percentage of WPCSD students graduated within four years. Across the years analyzed, the average graduation rate for students with disabilities was 77 percent compared to the state average of 66 percent.

EXHIBIT 24. PERCENTAGE OF WPCSD STUDENTS WITH IEPs GRADUATING COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2020-2023⁷⁶

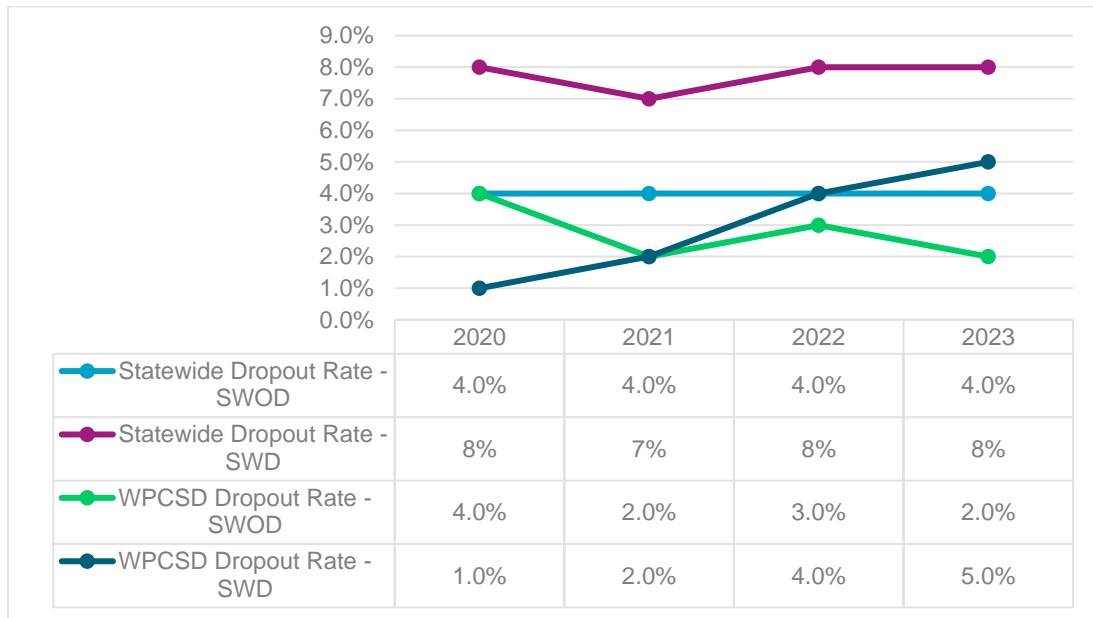


Dropout Rates

Between 2020-2023 the average percent of WPCSD students without disabilities who dropped out of high school was 2.75 percent. This was slightly lower than the average percentage of students without disabilities in NY state who dropped out (4%) between 2020-2023. Similarly, the percentage of WPCSD students with disabilities who dropped out was 3 percent. This rate was considerably lower than the state average dropout rate for students with disabilities (7.75%). Analysis of the WPCSD dropout trends for students with disabilities suggests that the district is out-performing NY state year after year. Additionally, the percentage of students with disabilities in WPCSD continued to increase from 1 percent in 2020 to 5 percent in 2023 compared to the dropout rate of WPCSD students without disabilities that has continued to decrease (4% in 2020 in 2% in 2023). It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic likely has impacted dropout rates for all students in WPCSD and in NY state.

⁷⁶ Data was obtained from NY State Data Portal: <https://data.nysed.gov/>.

EXHIBIT 25. DROPOUT RATE OF STUDENTS WITH IEPs COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2020-2023⁷⁷



EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING: SCHOOL-AGED STUDENTS

The data in this section reflect educational setting rates of all WPCSD school-aged students identified for special education. Figures are also shown by disability areas, and by race/ethnicity.⁷⁸ In addition, WPCSD data are compared to state and national data, and State Performance Plan (SPP) targets for the three educational setting categories monitored by ED’s Office of Special Education Programs and NYSED for students age 6-21⁷⁹ ED requires each state to monitor and set targets in their SPP for educational settings in which identified students are educated.

Educational Settings for WPCSD, New York, and SPP Targets

Longitudinal data from 2020-21 through 2022-23 indicated WPCSD students with disabilities were educated increasingly more often in an inclusive general education setting.⁸⁰ In 2021-2022 and 2022-23, WPCSD progressively met state targets for students who spent 80% or more of their school day in general education. For the past three years of data analyzed, WPCSD met the state target for educating students less than 40% of the time in the general education setting and in separate settings.

- **General Education Setting more than 80% of the time.** Since 2020-21, the percentage of students in this setting increased by 13.2 percentage points.
- **General Education Setting less than 40% of the time.** WPCSD met the state target for this setting for the past three years of data analyzed.
- **Separate Setting.** Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, WPCSD met the state target for this setting, but did not meet the state target for 2020-21. The percentage of students in this setting decreased 1.1 percentage points compared to 2020-2021.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

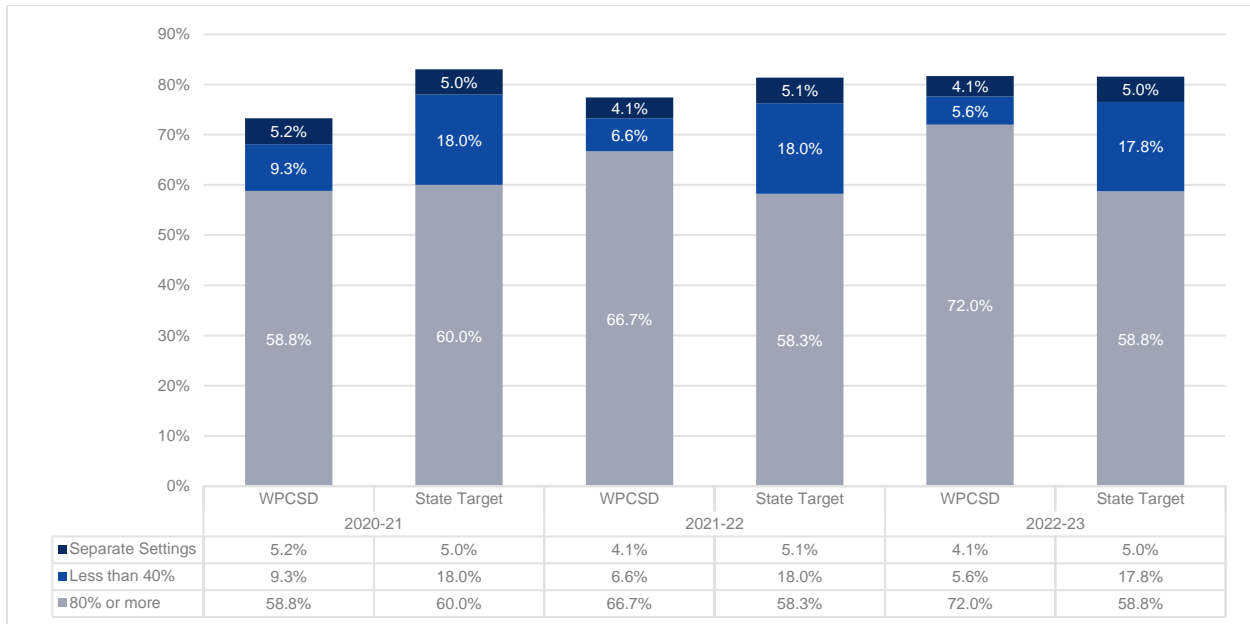
⁷⁸ NYSDE State Performance Plan follows this federal guidance on how to report students by education environment: Percent of children with IEPs aged 6 through 21 served: A. Inside the regular class 80% or more of the day; B. Inside the regular class less than 40% of the day; and C. In separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(A))

⁷⁹ National data obtained from National Center for Education Statistics Digest of Education Statistics:

<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/>

⁸⁰ State and District data obtained from Special Education School District Data Profile available at: <http://data.nysed.gov/lists.php?type=district>. LRE data unavailable for 2019-20.

EXHIBIT 26. PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS (AGES 5 IN K-21) BY EDUCATIONAL SETTING FOR WPCSD & STATE SPP TARGETS, 2020-21 THROUGH 2022-23⁸¹



Educational Setting by Primary Disability Area

On October 4th, 2023, WPCSD reported serving 1183 students with disabilities through the Committee on Special Education.⁸² Of the 1183 students with IEPs in WPCSD, 1062 students were served in regular school-based programs in buildings attended by disabled and non-disabled students, and 39 students were served in separate schools.⁸³ The district anticipated serving approximately 1250 students with disabilities by the end of the 2024-2025 school year.⁸⁴

WPCSD served 78 percent of students with IEPs in the general education setting 80% or more of the time, as noted in the WPCSD Special Education District Plan, 2024-2027.⁸⁵ The remaining 22 percent of students with IEPs were served in the following education settings: 1) 12 percent in the general education setting 79-40% or more of the time, 2) 7 percent in the general education setting less than 40% of the time, and 3) 3 percent in a separate setting.⁸⁶ The data below provides greater insight on WPCSD students with IEPs by primary disability area and education setting as of October 4, 2023:⁸⁷

- **General Education Setting 80% or more of the time.** Students identified in the following disability categories were included in the general education setting at a rate equal to or higher than the district average of 78 percent: speech/ language impairment (87%), other health impairment (91%), specific learning disability (88%), and emotional disability (78%).
- **General Education Setting between 79-40% of the time.** Students identified in the following disability categories were in this setting at a higher rate than the district average of 12 percent: intellectual disability (79%), autism (29%), multiple disabilities (33%), and “Other”(13%).⁸⁸

⁸¹ State and District data obtained from Special Education School District Data Profile available at: <http://data.nysed.gov/lists.php?type=district>. LRE data unavailable for 2019-20.

⁸² WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

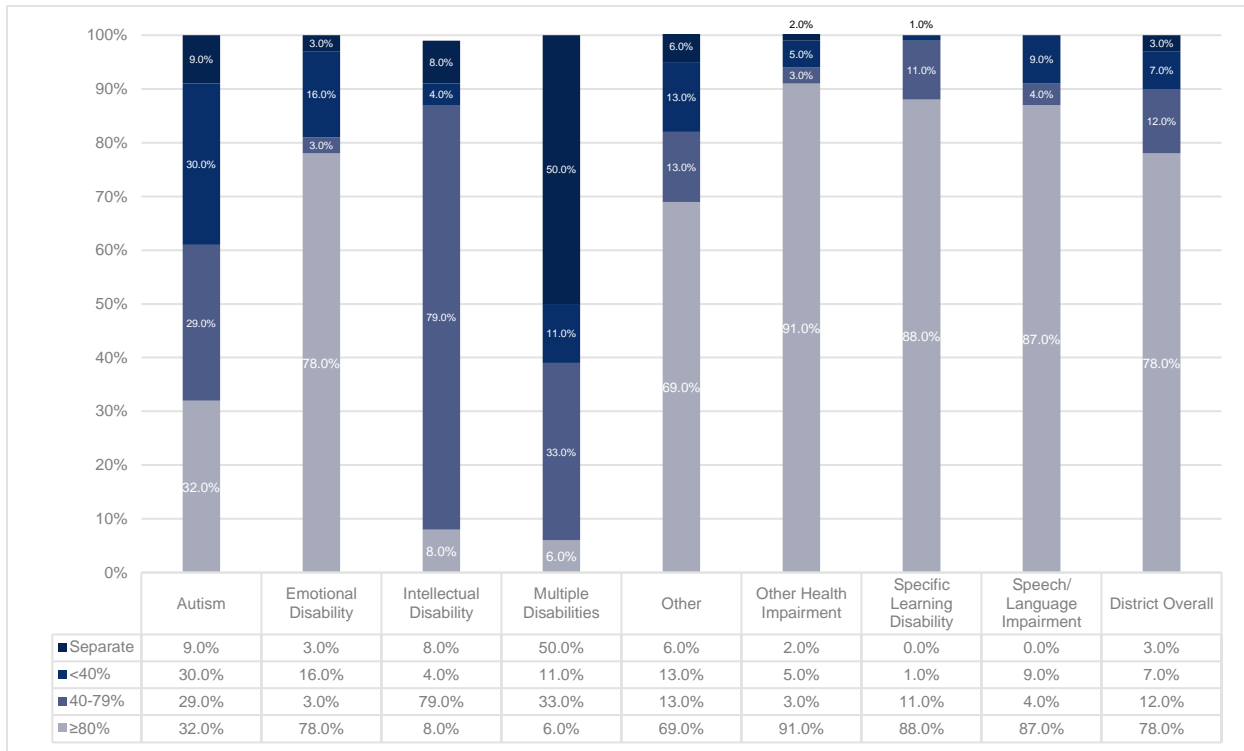
⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Orthopedic impairment, vision impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, and traumatic brain injury were combined into the “other” category represented due to the small number of students in each disability classification.

- **General Education Setting less than 40% of the time.** Students identified in the following disability categories were in this setting at a higher rate than the district average of 7 percent: autism (30%), emotional disability (16%), multiple disabilities (11%), speech language impairment (9%), and “Other”⁸⁹ (13%).
- **Separate Setting.** Students identified in the following disability categories were in this setting at a rate equal to or higher than the district average of 3 percent: autism (9 percent), intellectual disability (8%), and multiple disabilities (50%).

EXHIBIT 27. PERCENTAGE OF WPCSD STUDENTS (AGE 6-21) BY DISABILITY AREA AND EDUCATIONAL SETTING, 2023-24⁹⁰

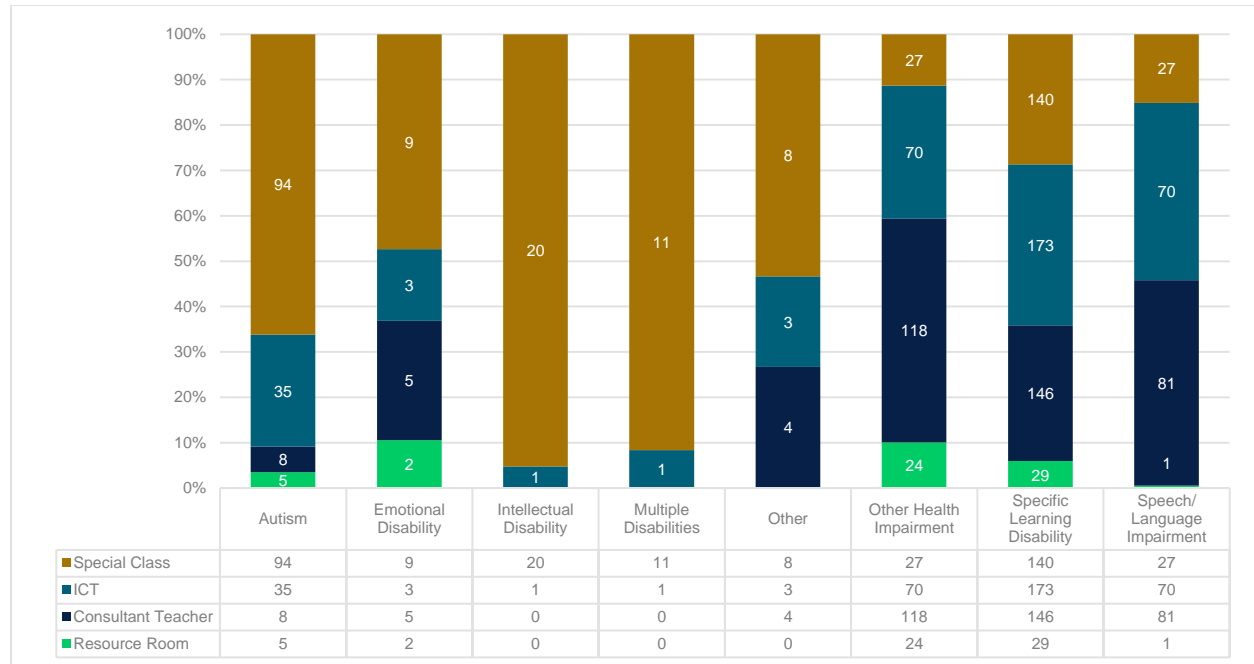


On October 4th, 2023, WPCSD reported serving students with IEPs in the following service settings by disability classification. Several key findings were noted in the analysis of the chart below. Students with intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, or autism are considerably less likely to receive services in the Integrated Co-Teach (ICT) setting. ICT and CT service models primarily serve students with speech and language impairments, students with learning disabilities, or students with other health impairments. Students with speech and language impairments and learning disabilities were served in special classes at rates higher than what is typically observed. Lastly, the number of students with autism served in special classes (94 students) is almost double the number of students with autism served in the other three service settings combined (ICT: 35 students, CT: 8 students, and Resource: 5 students).

⁸⁹ Orthopedic impairment, vision impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, and traumatic brain injury were combined into the “other” category represented due to the small number of students in each disability classification.

⁹⁰ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

EXHIBIT 28. PERCENTAGE OF WPCSD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (AGE 6-21) BY DISABILITY CLASSIFICATION AND SERVICE SETTING, 2023-24⁹¹



SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

WPCSD offers a robust continuum of services for preschoolers with disabilities, including SEIT services and special classes in integrated settings. SPP indicator 6 monitors the percent of children with IEPs, aged 3, 4, and 5 who are enrolled in a preschool program attending a: (A) Regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program, (B) Separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility, or (C) Receiving special education and related services in the home.

WPCSD preschoolers with disabilities who spent the majority of their time in regular education early childhood programs (LRE A) steadily decreased from 2020-2021SY to 2022-2023SY. WPCSD almost met the NY state target of 39.5 percent for this setting with 35.6 percent of preschoolers with disabilities in LRE A. Over the next two school years, the percentage of WPCSD preschoolers with disabilities in LRE A decreased by approximately 5 percentage points each year (30.6 percent in 2021-2022SY and 24.9 percent in 2022-2023SY). Alternatively, the percentage of preschoolers with disabilities being educated in a separate setting (LRE B) increased from 29.8 percent in 2020-2021SY to 34.3 percent in 2022-2023SY. With the exception of the 2020-2021SY which aligns with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, WPCSD was well within the state target for preschoolers with disabilities receiving services in their homes. Analysis of data from this study did not yield specific correlational or causal findings associated with LRE education setting decision-making for preschoolers with disabilities in WPCSD.

School-age peers with disabilities in WPCSD are educated in the general education setting more than 80 percent of the time is considerably higher than percentage of preschoolers with disabilities in LRE A, 72 percent (school-age) and 35.6 percent (preschool) respectively. Longitudinal data from 2020-21 through 2022-23 indicated WPCSD school-age students with disabilities were educated increasingly more often in an inclusive general education setting⁹² Since 2020-21, the percentage of students with disabilities in the general education setting more than 80 percent of the time increased by 13.2 percentage points. For the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² State and District data obtained from Special Education School District Data Profile available at: <http://data.nysed.gov/lists.php?type=district>. LRE data unavailable for 2019-20.

past three years of data analyzed, WPCSD met the state target for educating students less than 40% of the time in the general education setting and in separate settings.

On October 4th, 2023, WPCSD reported serving students with IEPs in the following service settings by disability classification. Several key findings were noted in the analysis of this data. Students with intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, or autism are considerably less likely to receive services in the Integrated Co-Teach (ICT) setting. ICT and Consultant Teacher (CT) service models primarily serve students with speech and language impairments, students with learning disabilities, or students with other health impairments. Students with speech and language impairments and learning disabilities were served in special classes at rates higher than what is typically observed. Lastly, the number of students with autism served in special classes (94 students) is almost double the number of students with autism served in the other three service settings combined (ICT: 35 students, CT: 8 students, and Resource: 5 students). WPCSD district leadership serving in general and special education capacities can continue to monitor how students with disabilities are appropriately accessing inclusive instructional models to ensure exposure to grade level curriculum and academic rigor alongside non-disabled peers.

The achievement gap between students with disabilities and those without, at both the state and district level, was substantial across all grades in WPCSD. High school students with disabilities consistently performed higher on the Regents exams compared to the performance of 4th and 8th grade WPCSD students with IEPs. A correlation between students with IEPs having greater access to grade level curriculum and ICT classroom programming can be established based upon these results.

WPCSD students with disabilities in high school taking the ELA Regents exam performed consistently higher than NY state averages for students with disabilities from 2017-2018 through 2022-2023. When comparing the performance of WPCSD high school students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers on the ELA Regents exam, the achievement gap ranged from 13 percent in the 2018-2019SY to 38 percent in the 2021-2022SY, and an average of 29 percent.

In 2018-2019SY, WPCSD students with IEPs demonstrated proficiency at 81 percent and non-disabled peers demonstrated proficiency at 94 percent. Non-disabled WPCSD high school students performed remarkably well on the ELA Regents exam with levels of proficiency ranging from 93 to 97 percent from 2017-2018SY to 2022-2023SY. High school students with and without IEPs in WPCSD demonstrated astounding performance, each year, on this exam. It is worthwhile for WPCSD curriculum and instructional leaders to dive deeper into the high-leverage practices being implemented in high school ELA classes to replicate where possible.

In WPCSD, 18.6 percent of students are English language learners (ELLs). Of students with IEPs, 27.7 percent are ELLs. Of students with IEPs, 40 percent of students eligible under speech language impairment are ELLs, 35 percent of students with a specific learning disability are ELLs, and 28 percent of students with an intellectual disability. These percentages are consistent with national eligibility trends for ELL students eligible for special education and related services.⁹³ A narrative exists in WPCSD that ELL students may not have equitable access to special education services. The quantitative data referenced within this chapter negates this perception. The perceived access barriers, such as being recommended for special education eligibility evaluations or participating in academic MTSS processes, are general education initiatives. It is critical that WPCSD staff increase familiarity with the intersections of general education and special education efforts in WPCSD to appropriately route concerns for ELL students.

Lastly, 55.7 percent of students in WPCSD are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. Of students with IEPs, 69.7 percent are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. Data presented in a subsequent chapter of this report highlights the connections between students with IEPs who are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch and rates of suspension. Almost 80 percent (78.26%) of students with IEPs suspended in the 2022-2023SY were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The constellation of data points correlating around potential food insecurity, eligibility for special education services, and likelihood of suspension for students with disabilities should be explored further on a school-by-school basis in WPCSD. This would serve as a collective effort within WPCSD as each of the areas for exploration are likely led by different departments.

⁹³ WIDA University of Wisconsin-Madison. (2023). WIDA Focus Bulletin: Identifying Multilingual Learners with Specific Learning Disabilities: Data, Advice, and Resources for School Teams. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

III. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND SPECIALIZED SERVICES

OVERVIEW

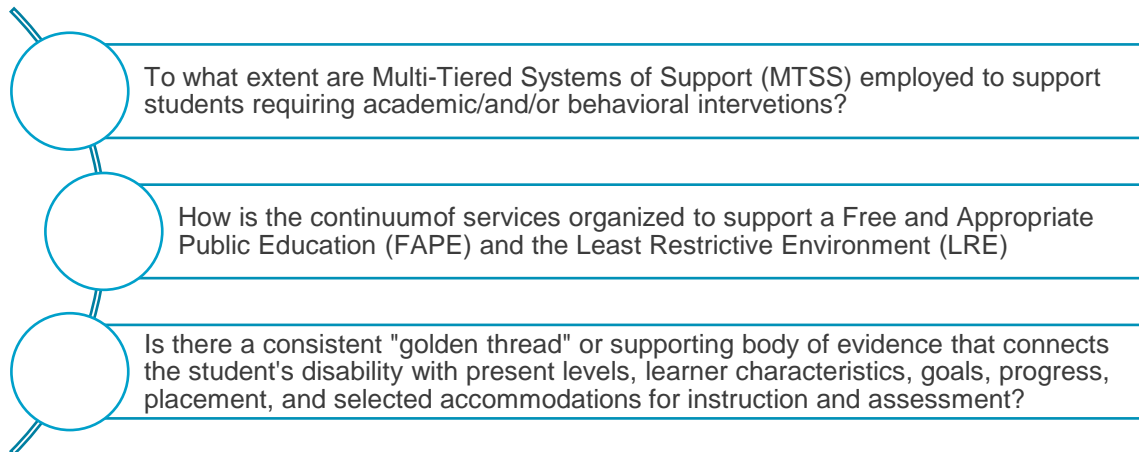
Within PCG’s Special Education Effectiveness Framework, Learning Environment and Specialized Services is one part of developing an effective special education system. High-performing special education systems deliver instruction and interventions within an inclusionary framework and with Individualized Education Program (IEP) fidelity. This leads to increased access and progress in grade-level learning standards and reduced disproportionality in special education.

The main components within this part of the framework include:

- Access to the General Curriculum and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)
- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development
- Individualized Supports
- Coordinated Transition Activities

These five areas are key to developing a learning environment and specialized services that support students with disabilities in a meaningful and proactive way. The chapter sections below align to these framework components.

The essential questions we answer in this chapter are:



Below are the overarching strengths and opportunities within the Learning and Specialized Services domain of the Special Education Effectiveness Framework.

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe and Accessible Environment. WPCSD has created an inclusive and accessible environment for students. • Access to the General Education Curriculum. All students have access to and follow the general education curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). There are inconsistencies in the implementation of MTSS practices in the general education setting. • Supporting Students with Behaviors through SDI. Students with disabilities exhibit higher rates of challenging behavior and the impact on instruction are an area of concern for WPCSD staff.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• IEP Compliance. File review revealed that the district has implemented practices to ensure that IEP compliance is a priority.• Therapeutic Wraparound Program. White Plains High School implements an integrated approach to support students in this environment.• District Commitment to Inclusive Practices. WPCSD has shown a commitment to shifting towards more inclusive practices.• District Referral Process. The WPCSD special education department has created and published written procedures and guidance for CSE referrals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Campus based teams have not developed consistent practices across the district related to UDL implementation.• IEP Development. Placement Considerations/LRE data, from onsite and via file review, revealed that there is inconsistency around placement and LRE decisions across the district.• Integrated Co-Teaching throughout the District. WPCSD currently lacks consistent and cohesive collaborative structures for co-teaching throughout the district.• ELL students with IEPs: WPCSD staff remain concerned about ensuring appropriate interventions are implemented before special education referrals for ELL students and that ELL students are accurately referred to and identified by CSE teams.
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ACCESS TO THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

MTSS Framework

The provision of instruction and interventions to students within a framework of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) improves educational outcomes for all students, including those with Section 504 and IEP plans.⁹⁴ It is designed to be a general education initiative, and while special education can support this framework, it should not fall under the supervision of special education. The framework focuses on prevention and early identification of students who may benefit from instructional and behavioral interventions, as well as acceleration that removes barriers to learning.⁹⁵ When implemented as intended, MTSS leads to increased academic achievement by supporting rigorous core instruction, strategic/targeted interventions, and improved student behavior. Furthermore, this framework has been successfully used to support a reduction in disproportionate special education referrals of students based on race, gender, or English language learner (ELL) subgroups. The core characteristics that make up a strong MTSS framework include: 1) students receive high-quality, evidence-based instruction in their general education setting, 2) continuous monitoring of student performance, 3) all students are screened for academic and behavioral problems, and 4) multiple tiers of instruction are progressively more intense based on the student's response to intervention.⁹⁶

Reflecting on the growing recognition of MTSS as a system-wide framework for supporting student achievement and positive behavior, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes MTSS as a permissible usage of Title I funds. The Act defines MTSS as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to student’s needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making.”⁹⁷ MTSS provides an overall framework for structuring and

⁹⁴ Council of the Great City Schools. (2012) Common Core State Standards and Diverse Students. Retrieve from <https://www.cgcs.org>

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (2011, January 21). A response to intervention (RTI) process cannot be used to delay-deny an evaluation for eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (OSEP Memo 11-07). <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/osep-memo-11-07-response-to-intervention-rti-memo/>

⁹⁷ Every Student Succeeds Act, Pub. L. No. 114-95, § 8101(33), 129 Stat. 1802 (2015).

coordinating the provision of high-quality core instruction. This includes additional behavioral support, such as behavior modifications or mental health support, which some students require to be successful.

MTSS is centered on a tiered system of support, where every student receives high-quality core instruction, known as Tier 1. Some students need supplemental instruction, which is referred to as Tier 2, and a small cohort of students receive the most intensive intervention and support, known as Tier 3. Movement among these tiers should be fluid. A student with acute needs does not need to progress through the tiers to get individualized support, and a student who needs extra support should not miss core instruction that is provided in Tier 1.

District Practices

WPCSD has established a vision for MTSS through the development of a district-wide strategic plan and its priorities. Two driving factors behind consistent MTSS processes are to close the achievement gap through high quality core instruction and to provide research-based interventions for all students. MTSS implementation is a matter of equity which WPCSD has prioritized as a tenet of their belief system leading instructional practices. WPCSD's strategic plan is in alignment with the core values of MTSS. The priorities and objectives outlined within the strategic plan demonstrate a commitment to MTSS implementation:⁹⁸

- Educate - Ensure engaging and innovative learning experiences:
 - Design and provide rigorous, engaging, culturally relevant and enriched curriculum and instruction that meets the needs of each student and incorporates future-focused, research-based practices.
 - Continue to support the District and Building Equity Committees' efforts and recommendations to increase access and reduce barriers
- Support - Provide the necessary structures and resources:
 - Expand support for positive social and emotional learning environments and continue to identify opportunities for growth
 - Analyze, assess root causes of chronic absenteeism, passing rates, and suspension rates to increase student achievement
- Partner - Collaborate with students, families and community:
 - Welcome, engage and nurture relationships
 - Increase cultural awareness, responsiveness and respect to promote inclusivity.

In March 2023, WPCSD contracted with Novak Educational Consulting to conduct a comprehensive need assessment of the district's MTSS system. The report acknowledged WPCSD's intention to "increase access, decrease opportunity gaps, and eliminate equity gaps for the students and community in WPCSD."⁹⁹ The needs assessment aimed to "support the district in systems change to realize the net results of full MTSS implementation through the lens of equity."¹⁰⁰ Similar to this comprehensive special education review, the needs assessment conducted a mixed methods research approach to assess all elements of MTSS implementation in WPCSD. A key finding from the needs assessment is the District's commitment to MTSS, as evidenced in the district's strategic plan, and the communication from district leaders prioritizing staff and community feedback in the development of the strategic plan. This is in alignment with PCG's assessment of the commitment to MTSS in WPCSD. When surveying WPCSD building staff as part of the needs assessment, 38 percent of general education teacher respondents agreed that the schedule allows time for evidence-based instruction and interventions to be delivered across all three tiers to meet students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs.¹⁰¹ This finding is relevant as study participants affirmed that scheduling challenges impact the ability for students with disabilities to access Tier 1 instruction and receive specially designed instruction. Furthermore, study

⁹⁸ WPCSD Strategic Plan

⁹⁹ "Comprehensive MTSS Needs Assessment for WPCSD", March 2023. Novak Educational Consulting.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

participants in both the MTSS needs assessment and this current study advocated for more common planning time to support students with differentiated learning needs.

Evidence of implementation of MTSS across all schools in WPCSD is inconsistent. Focus group and survey results indicate that MTSS implementation is a continued area of growth for WPCSD. The universal screeners used by the district include, 1) mCLASS, 2) Independent Reading Level Assessment® (IRLA), 3) NWEA, 4) Math Common Formative Assessment (CFA), 5) “Listening to Learn” for all students K-5. The screeners and assessments currently used in WPCSD address the academic and social emotional needs of all elementary students. Assessments for secondary schools were not included in the data submitted by WPCSD for review.

Staff survey respondents as part of this review shared:

- **Perceptions about the statement, “My school uses appropriate identification, referral, and screening measures related to multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) to support implementation across all levels”** vary by stakeholder: 43 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 83 percent of school building administrators, 42 percent of Related Service Providers, 62 percent of special educators, and 41 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, “My school uses positive behavior and intervention supports to support student behavior as part of a multi-tiered system of support”** vary by stakeholder: 48 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 100 percent of school building administrators, 60 percent of Related Service Providers, 52 percent of special educators, and 46 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree their school consistently implements interventions in their building:

- 55% of school building administrators
- 39% of teaching assistants
- 31% of special educators
- 0% of related service providers
- 19% of student support services
- 13% of general educators
- **23% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

Survey results and focus group feedback analysis affirmed that most staff are aware of MTSS procedures and tools, such as screeners and referral protocols. However, the disconnect exists between access to and execution of MTSS procedures in alignment with the district’s MTSS framework. The misalignment was captured through direct staff feedback and in qualitative data submitted for review as part of this study. Differences in practice across campuses highlights an opportunity to align expectations around MTSS and to review the needs assessment previously conducted to help building-based teams refine their structures and processes at the individual building level. According to the WPCSD district structure, the implementation of MTSS procedures falls within the purview of general education. The opportunity for alignment in MTSS procedures and how that informs a CSE referral serves as a collaborative partnership possibility across offices to demonstrate continuity in practice.

A review of documentation indicates that WPCSD has established some structures for data collection and progress monitoring within the MTSS process. The District uses Beginning of Year (BOY) and Middle of Year (MOY) data analysis sheets to identify interventions, monitor progress, and set goals. MTSS referral forms were also provided as examples of how students are referred based on screening data.

Additionally, a summary of each school’s 3-tiered MTSS approach, including tools and procedures, was submitted for review. Since the 2023 MTSS needs assessment was conducted, WPCSD has made significant progress in developing a more robust MTSS implementation framework aligned with its strategic plan. However, PCG’s analysis highlights that consistent implementation across schools remains a key priority for sustainable success. It is commendable that WPCSD has achieved notable progress in 18 months and should continue to build on these structures.

A review of the special education Standard Operation Procedures Manual (SOPM) and the 504 Procedures manual shows WPCSD has guidance for pre-referrals to special education that align with MTSS expectations. Per the special education SOPM, students should be referred to the building support team for interventions prior to being referred for a special education evaluation. Within the district's draft guidance on MTSS, it is noted that Tier 3 interventions should be made available to all students, even students with an IEP or a 504 plan. Additionally, specially designed instruction (SDI) in an IEP (in the eligibility area) is considered a Tier 3 support that should supplement, not replace, access to Tiers 1 and 2. It will be important for staff to understand the intersection of MTSS and special education in the guidance WPCSD is developing to avoid siloing students based on their needs. Tier 3 intervention supports should not be synonymous with the provision of special education and related services. Students with disabilities may not need Tier 3 support while students not identified as having a disability may require those supports. It is critical that MTSS does not function as a step ladder. In a well-designed MTSS system, students receive the support they need when they need it, from the staff members who are best able to support them.¹⁰² For example, a student with an IEP for an emotional disability may be struggling with reading and therefore could require Tier 2 or Tier 3 support with a reading specialist as part of an MTSS framework, and not part of their IEP.

WPCSD has documentation that supports an MTSS framework and guidance on implementation for general educators. An area of opportunity for the District's practices when it comes to the intersection of MTSS, and special education is the District's consistency of approach when referring students for special education. It was noted that some buildings will refer during different phases of Tiered interventions, while others may refer before all interventions were tried, according to feedback gained from onsite visits. Analysis of data from the WPCSD staff survey shows:

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree before a student is referred for special education, every attempt is made to meet the student's needs through general education interventions and sufficient data is collected to support this process:

- 82% of school building administrators
- 73% of special educators
- 67% of general educators
- 60% of related service providers
- 56% of teaching assistants
- 40% of student support services
- 48% of specials/electives teachers
- **65% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

- **Perceptions about the statement, "Staff in my school(s) fully understand how to interpret data necessary to determine a referral to either special education or MTSS"** vary by stakeholder: 64 percent of school building administrators, 46 percent of general educators, 44 percent of special educators, 50 percent of Related Service Providers, and 29 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, "There are clear criteria on exiting a student from MTSS (or appropriate interventions) and when to make a referral for special education"** vary by stakeholder: 46 percent of school building administrators, 20 percent of Related Service Providers, 16 percent of general educators, 29 percent of special educators, and 19 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), **agree with this statement.**

Focus group participants acknowledged incredible access to resources and interventions to support struggling learners. The integration of interventions within building structures, such as the Master Schedule, remains a challenge when constructing robust MTSS plans and potentially the execution of a referral for special education. This phenomenon is not unique to WPCSD. Participants did not advocate

¹⁰² Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (n.d.). Understanding the relationship between MTSS and special education. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/mtss/>

for professional development (PD) on MTSS interventions, rather for collaborative planning time for special and general educators, along with grade level school teams, to plan for intervention supports.

Sustainable, consistently implemented MTSS procedures was a priority focus for WPCSD in reducing the opportunity gap and barriers to access for all students in WPCSD. Several staff noted a sense of urgency around this work. WPCSD has established a centralized team currently dedicated to developing more implementation guidance for MTSS and supporting implementation in partnership with Novak Educational Consultants.

As part of high-quality core instruction, or Tier 1, WPCSD has adopted Next Generation Learning Standards (ELA and Math), NYS Social Studies Framework, NYS Science Learning Standards, NYS Standards for The Arts, NYS Learning Standards for World Language, and the Computer Science and Digital Learning Standards. The District fuses in UDL as a framework to provide access for all learners. Based on an analysis of survey data collected, 35 percent of all staff feel WPCSD has a solid understanding of UDL to support implementation across all levels.

UDL practices or implementation strategies did not emerge as a significant theme during focus groups with WPCSD staff. PCG staff conducting onsite visits noted there was limited evidence of UDL practices being implemented. While there were several schools that had some components of UDL, such as multiple means of expression and engagement, implementation of a robust UDL framework was not evident across settings.

Professional development offerings for WPCSD staff revealed a lack of current sessions that indicate a focus on UDL. A review of documents submitted indicated that WPCSD offered UDL training provided by CAST, but did not share who was required to attend, or whether this was a part of a longer PD series. The expected outcome of the session, according to the agenda submitted, was that teachers will understand the principles of UDL and know how to plan for multiple learning styles. This is a PD that should be offered yearly and implementation monitored after the PD has taken place by building administrators, district coaches and other staff who provide feedback and support for teaching level staff around instructional practices. Despite some concentrated efforts in the past, data show most building level teams do not believe they have a solid understanding of the UDL framework for implementation across all levels.

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree their school district has a solid understanding of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to support implementation across all levels:

- 46% of school building administrators
- 45% of special educators
- 41% of specials/electives teachers
- 30% of related services providers
- 42% of teaching assistants
- 32% of general educators
- 30% of student support services
- **35% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based, tiered framework for supporting students' behavioral, academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs.¹⁰³ It is part of a comprehensive MTSS model. According to the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, the purpose of implementing PBIS is to create positive, predictable, equitable, and safe learning environments where every student thrives. The Center for PBIS notes that schools implementing PBIS:¹⁰⁴

WPCSD utilizes Responsive Classrooms, in lieu of PBIS, to support positive behavior in the district. The responsive classrooms model does have components of PBIS as evidenced by survey responses:

- Use a continuum of evidence-based practices to support student needs.

¹⁰³ Center on PBIS. (n.d.). What is PBIS? Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based, tiered framework for supporting students' behavioral, academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs. <https://www.pbis.org/pbis/what-is-pbis>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

- Engage students, families, and community members to co-create culturally responsive practices.
- Regularly check the effectiveness of their practices.
- Rely on teams to guide implementation.
- Use data to identify strengths, uncover needs, and monitor student progress.
- Implement universal screening.
- Develop content expertise through coaching and on-going professional development.

Implementation of a PBIS system requires an ongoing commitment to systems change and involvement of multiple stakeholders if it is to be successful for all students. The key areas that PBIS support include 1) improved student outcomes, 2) reduced exclusionary discipline practices, and 3) improved teacher outcomes.³⁴ It is for these reasons that developing a strong PBIS model as part of a comprehensive MTSS system is critical to addressing the needs of the whole child.

While PBIS has been at the core of developing a comprehensive MTSS model that addresses behavioral needs, many districts are increasingly adopting comprehensive frameworks that combine elements of PBIS, SEL, restorative practices, and trauma-informed care to address student needs holistically. This aligns with current research suggesting that a multi-tiered, integrated approach is most effective.

District Practices

Providing positive behavioral support and interventions, as part of the MTSS process, is integral to supporting the whole child through tiered support. Survey data analysis shows that almost half of the staff agree (47%) their school uses positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) to support student behavior as part of a multi-tiered system of support. This percentage may be lower than anticipated as WPCSD is not a recognized “PBIS” district. The only outlier was in the building administrator group, with 82 percent agreeing with that statement. As with the other survey data, building administrators seem to have a higher agreement with the implementation of initiatives when compared to other staff.

The Staff Development Center in WPCSD provides professional learning opportunities focused on behavior management, mindfulness, trauma-informed care, and fostering calm and connection. These initiatives demonstrate the District's commitment to equipping staff with best practices for supporting students with behavioral needs. In addition to these training efforts, WPCSD leadership has taken proactive steps to enhance behavioral support districtwide. A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted to identify students' social and emotional needs utilizing the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) platform. The findings informed a strategic approach to supporting student behavior and fostering collaboration among educators, administrators, families, and community partners. This alignment of social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives with broader district goals highlights the district's dedication to the well-being of its students.

Further reinforcing this commitment, the District offered CIRCLE training in August 2021 through the New York Peace Institute and partnered with Andrus to provide monthly mental health meetings for staff. These sessions aimed to address the mental and behavioral health needs of educators during the partnership. Additionally, the District has invested considerable resources in developing a robust MTSS framework, informed by the needs assessment conducted by external partners. Despite these efforts, staff perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the district's multi-tiered approach to addressing student behavior do not fully align with the district's initiatives.

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree there is a well-articulated approach and support in their school(s) to address the behavioral needs of students with disabilities:

- 82% of school building administrators
- 25% of student support services
- 21% of special educators
- 20% of teaching assistants
- 10% of related services providers
- 9% of specials/electives teachers
- 6% of general educators
- **17% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

Focus group data revealed ongoing staff concerns about student behavior. Findings from PCG's onsite visits did not indicate widespread instances of significantly challenging or dangerous behaviors. Over four days, up to three PCG team members visited a series of classrooms across all schools in WPCSD. However, WPCSD staff reported a triad of challenges related to student behavior: 1) an increase in concerning behavior, 2) difficulty in supporting the breadth and depth of behavioral needs of students in both the general and self-contained settings, and 3) an overall increase in student mental health needs.

The District has contracted Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) to provide behavioral intervention support. These professionals conduct functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and assist in developing and monitoring behavior intervention plans (BIPs) for students with and without disabilities. The District's current model emphasizes classroom-based staff implementing these plans, a standard approach aligned with inclusive educational practices. However, some classroom staff have expressed a strong desire for increased access to behavioral interventionists who can address challenging student behaviors directly within the classroom without disrupting instruction.

Some staff have also advocated for behavioral interventionists to take primary responsibility for implementing BIPs or suggested removing students exhibiting challenging behaviors from the classroom to prevent disruption to the rest of the class. However, research strongly advises against removal as a default response, particularly for students with escape-maintained behaviors. Removal from the classroom often unintentionally reinforces problematic behaviors by allowing students to avoid tasks or situations they find challenging.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, frequent removals can lead to a loss of instructional control for the teacher, reduced engagement for the student, and significant disruptions to the student's learning trajectory.¹⁰⁶

Instead, best practices emphasize equipping classroom staff with the skills and support to implement BIPs effectively within the classroom setting. By maintaining students in their learning environment and addressing behavior in that setting, educators can help students build self-regulation skills and ensure that all students remain engaged in instruction. To achieve this, behavioral interventionists could focus on coaching and modeling strategies for classroom staff, empowering them to manage challenging behaviors with confidence and fidelity. A phased approach to building staff capacity and increasing the presence of behavioral interventionists during critical instructional moments could further support the WPCSD's commitment to fostering inclusive practices and minimizing disruptions to student learning.

Onsite visits revealed a strength in the district's learning environments, which were well-managed and offered supportive outlets to effectively address any dysregulations in student behaviors. Onsite observational data at the secondary level showed some students in the hallway during the day and often arriving to class tardy, but the redirection and consequences provided in response to such behavior seemed to be nonpunitive. During the student shadowing experience at the elementary level, various strategies were in place to create a safe and accessible environment for students. These included visual aids that reinforced classroom expectations. Additionally, some classrooms provided designated areas for students to take breaks, calm down, and use fidget tools. These elements collectively fostered a positive learning atmosphere and aided students in managing their behavior.

WPCSD is not recognized as a PBIS district and has adopted other pro-active approaches to addressing challenging behavior. There were no clear linkages to PBIS directly, but indirectly, PBIS seems to be in place through the use of Responsive Classrooms, which the District has adopted. While onsite staff redirected students, when necessary, in a respectful and calm manner. Students were also provided supportive options to help meet behavioral expectations across settings observed. The absence of observed severe behavioral issues during these visits suggests a potential gap between perceived and observed behaviors. This finding underscores the importance of continued dialogue, training, and alignment between staff perceptions and District practices to ensure consistency and address any unmet needs effectively.

¹⁰⁵ Allday, R. A., Bush, M. A., Ticknor, N. M., & Walker, J. L. (2012). Effects of teacher greetings on student on-task behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 45*(3), 595-599.

¹⁰⁶ McIntosh, K., Bohanon, H., & Goodman, S. (2010). Integrating academic and behavior supports within an RtI framework, Part 1: General overview. *RTI Action Network*.

An analysis of WPCSD discipline data from the 22-23SY indicated a total of 168 student suspensions. Suspension data referenced within is representative of “out of school” suspensions ranging from 1-10 days. Students with IEPs represented slightly less than half (41.1% or 69 students) of all students suspended during the 22-23SY. WPCSD’s district-wide identification rate of students with disabilities is 17 percent. Students with IEPs were suspended at a higher rate than anticipated given the total percentage of students with IEPs in the district. Further discussion and analysis of suspension by subgroups will be discussed later in this report.

EXHIBIT 29. NUMBER OF WPCSD STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES (AGE 6-21) SUSPENDED 1-10 DAYS OUT OF SCHOOL, 2022-2023¹⁰⁷

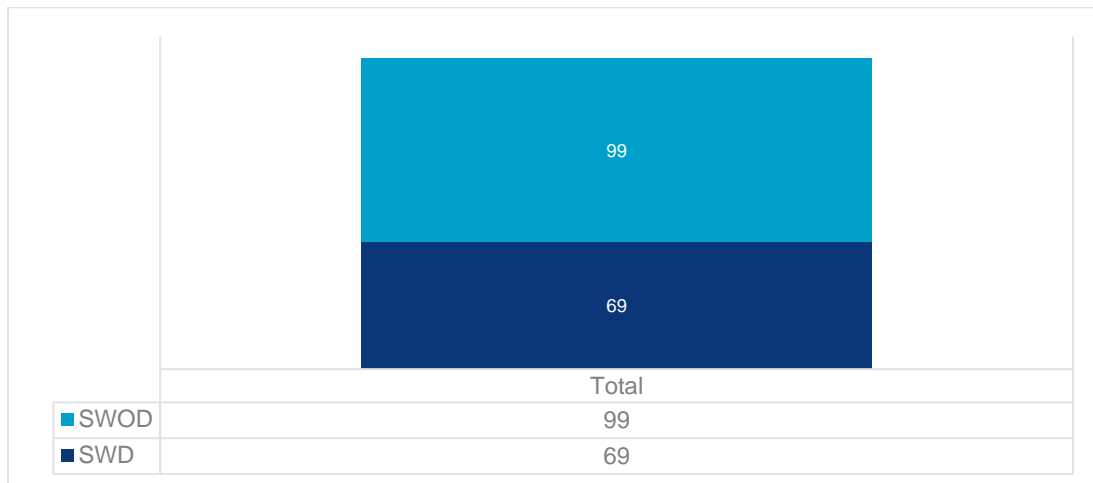
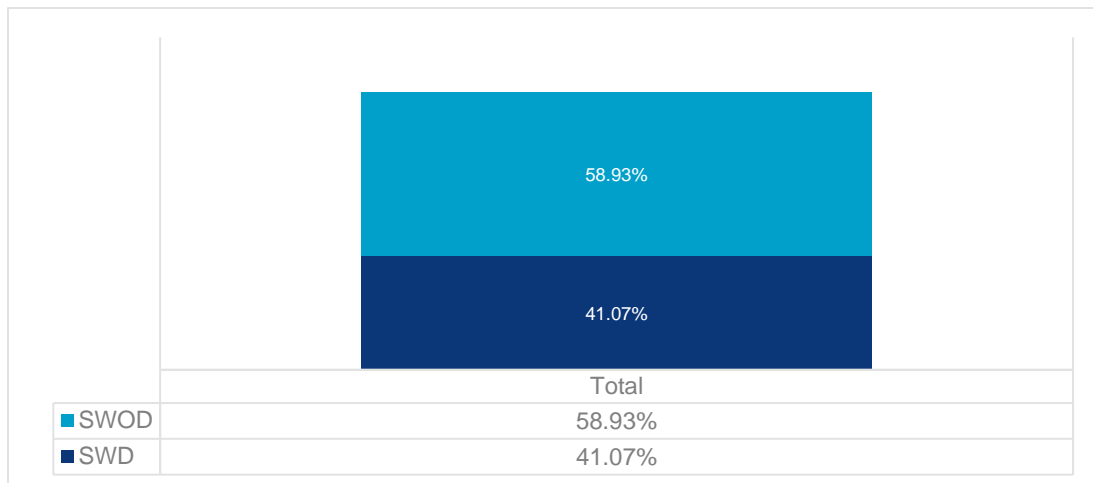


EXHIBIT 30. PERCENTAGE OF WPCSD STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES (AGE 6-21) SUSPENDED 1-10 DAYS OUT OF SCHOOL, 2022-2023¹⁰⁸



DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEP)

An Individual Education Program (IEP) creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the foundation of a quality education for students with disabilities. An IEP supports teams with implementing specially designed instruction, accommodations, and modifications to allow students with disabilities to access the curriculum and make meaningful progress. IEPs are a key component of an effective special education system.

¹⁰⁷ WPCSD Discipline Data for the 2022-2023 school year provided to PCG in Fall 2024

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Using the Golden Thread framework, PCG randomly selected and reviewed approximately 24 student IEP files to assess the overall quality and content of IEPs developed by WPCSD. Out of the sample, one (1) IEP was in draft and inaccessible, three students (3) were exited during the IEP review timeframe, and two (2) students were declassified. The remaining nineteen IEPs reviewed were a representative sample: Pk-5th (6 records reviewed), middle school consisting of 6th-8th grade (9 records reviewed), and high school (4 records reviewed). Samples were pulled from a variety of LRE settings and represented demographics comparable to the population of students with IEPs in WPCSD. The reviews and analyses were conducted through the PCG file review protocol, which is aligned with the Golden Thread Framework. More information about the Golden Thread Framework and the indicators used for the evaluation can be found in the Appendix.

A narrative summary of the IEPs reviewed is included below:

Evaluations

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many evaluations provided summaries of data from all assessments conducted. Many evaluations accounted for cultural and linguistic differences and how students' disabilities impact access to the curriculum Many evaluations included recommendations and accommodations that were individualized to the student's individual needs Many evaluations included a detailed review of student's school history and used multiple measures to assess students to determine areas of strength and weakness
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some reevaluation reports lacked parent input; initial evaluations often included more extensive parent input than reevaluations Some reevaluation reports did not consider sociological and cultural factors Some reports did not have a clear linkage to how the disability would impact the student in the educational setting

Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPS)

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PLEP organization in reviewed records indicate staff training and compliance with having required input from required participants All sections of the PLEP were addressed in the IEP and included data Parent input was captured in most IEP files reviewed Data was consistently included to provide a baseline of a student's current functioning in Key Evaluation Summary Teacher input was consistently recorded in the IEPs reviewed
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When behavior was identified as a need for students, the PLEP sections did not consistently address this or provide a summary of data related to Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) Data in PLEP statements did not consistently align with the student's strengths and weaknesses in academic areas Data for ELLs, including progress in language acquisition, was not consistently captured in IEPs Measurable data and baseline data from classroom assessments was not consistently included in PLEP statements Input from all general education teachers was not included in many files reviewed

Measurable Annual Goals

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals are written to align with grade level standards and address individual student needs and skill deficits Most goals clearly stated how progress will be monitored Most goals were explicitly aligned to specially designed instruction Goals for students working on non-academic skills were measurable and directly aligned to areas of need for the student
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals not written in Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound (SMART) format and often miss the timebound element Objectives in IEPs do not always align with the goals All IEPs reviewed had a study skills goal, but there is no evidence that one was needed

Accommodations, Modifications, and Special Considerations

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodations in many IEPs were directly connected to disability-related needs and included the degree of need and use of accommodations Classroom accommodations aligned with state and districtwide testing accommodations Most IEPs clearly outline the collaboration and additional support provided to students Accommodations, modifications and special factors clearly outlined and identified for support of the student
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many IEPs that had behavior as a concern lacked accommodations or modifications for behavior Supports for school personnel for students with BIPs was not regularly marked

Services and Placement

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LRE was calculated and clearly indicated what LRE a student was in For students that were placed in more restrictive settings (40-79% the day), it was clear why they were placed in that setting LRE removal statement was included in many IEPs
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some IEP files reviewed had minor errors in the least restrictive environment (LRE) setting (i.e. student services may be in the special ed setting, but the LRE did not align)

Progress Reports

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All files reviewed had progress report statements and were updated for all reporting periods
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many progress reports reviewed did not have data to support progress on goals. These sections were either left blank or there was limited data included to support how students were progressing towards the goals in their IEP

Narrative Summary

Evaluations

A review of evaluations was conducted for nineteen files for students with IEPs in WPCSD. Most of the evaluations reviewed met many of the indicators in the Golden Thread rubric. While examining these evaluations, several notable strengths emerged. The reports provided concise summaries of data highlighting the impact of the student's disability on their academic progress and curriculum access. This facilitated the development of IEPs aligned with the students' specific needs related to their disability. Moreover, some evaluations demonstrated a commendable awareness of cultural and linguistic differences, tailoring considerations on each student's background and language requirements. Additionally, evaluation reports included sociological summaries to use as a basis in formulating recommendations.

Some reports also included valuable recommendations for IEP development and accommodations aimed at enhancing the students' ability to access the curriculum. These accommodations were tailored to individual student needs, showcasing a personalized approach. Additionally, detailed summaries of students' school histories were provided to offer context, alongside a variety of assessments used to determine the presence of a disability and identify specific needs. These assessments encompassed teacher and parent-completed rating scales, parent interviews, adaptive assessments, and other evaluations directly addressing areas of need or skill deficit.

However, despite these strengths for initial evaluations, not all re-evaluations were as consistently strong. Some re-evaluations lacked parental input or interviews and at times left out considerations for sociological and cultural factors when interpreting scores or determining student needs. Initial evaluations often benefitted from extensive parental involvement, whereas reevaluations tended to overlook this aspect, resulting in limited parent input. Furthermore, certain evaluations relied solely on teacher-completed rating scales and may not capture the valuable perspectives of parents and students, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the student's needs across various settings.

Overall, evaluations met the compliance and quality indicators outlined in the Golden Thread framework. There is evidence that the training to support writing compliant and quality IEPs offered by WPCSD special education leadership in this area, which is consistent and the expectations for quality and compliance were evidenced throughout the IEP audit. Overall, most of the IEPs analyzed met the quality and compliance standards according to the rubric.

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree special education evaluations are sufficiently comprehensive to identify students' specific strengths and needs:

- 90% of related services providers
- 82% of school building administrators
- 76% of student support services
- 70% of special educators
- 33.4% of teaching assistants
- 41% of general educators
- **52% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPS)

Upon reviewing the Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPS) statements in the nineteen IEPs, it was found that approximately one third met most or all the quality indicators outlined in the Golden Thread rubric. In several instances, teacher input was inconsistently provided by all general education teachers. Parent and student input, if any, was not aligned to the students' strengths and needs in a meaningful way to help with the development of the IEP. The absence of clear statements explaining how the student's disability affects their ability to access and make progress in the general education setting made it difficult to fully understand the impact of their disability on their education. Moreover, some IEPs lacked crucial teacher feedback and classroom data around how the student is performing in general education, which is vital for gauging a student's performance relative to grade-level standards and appropriate social/behavioral skills. Even when teacher input and data were provided, they did not always correlate with the strengths and weaknesses identified in evaluations or other sections of the IEP,

limiting measurable baseline data for goal and objective development. All teachers should be progress monitoring to include this data in the present levels of the IEP.

Consistency in capturing input for English Learner (ELL) students was lacking, with limited to no data available regarding the support received for language development or language access scores for students taking the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT). Additionally, discrepancies were noted in the composition and content of PLEPs statements.

Survey data reveals a possible connection into why all voices are not included in the present levels reviewed:

- **Perceptions about the statement, “My school teams know how to conduct IEP meetings to incorporate all voices, (e.g., students, caregivers, and school-based staff) to develop comprehensive and individualized IEPs”** vary by stakeholder: 57 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 91 percent of school building administrators, 60 percent of Related Service Providers, 74 percent of special educators, and 60 percent of general educators **agree with this statement. Overall, 58 percent of all staff agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions of staff about the statement, “I am given adequate time/coverage when participating in IEP meeting(s)”** had less variation among stakeholders with **56 percent of all staff agreeing with this statement.**
- **Perceptions of staff about the statement, “In my school, staff develop IEP goals that are rigorous and aligned to the core curriculum”** had less variation among stakeholders with **62 percent of staff agreeing with this statement.**

Approximately one third of the IEPs reviewed met compliance or quality indicators as outlined within the Golden Thread framework for PLEPs statements. It is important to note there were clear strengths observed in certain areas (i.e., PLEPs statements written by related services). WPCSD staff should continue to work towards including all voices, including substantive data, and adding a summary of how the student performs in the general education setting compared to their nondisabled peers.

Measurable Annual Goals

A review of annual goals was conducted for nineteen files for students with IEPs in WPCSD. Most of the annual goals reviewed met most of the indicators in the Golden Thread rubric. The goals were well written and consistently aligned to grade-level standards. Most objectives, especially for students in more restrictive settings, showed the scaffolding needed to reach the annual goal. Additionally, most goals clearly indicated how progress would be monitored and were explicitly aligned with specially designed instruction (SDI) needed for individual students. For students focusing on non-academic skills such as social, executive functioning, or coping skills, goals were tailored to age and grade-appropriate skill development in all areas except for behavior. One of the reviewed IEPs had goals aligned to the student's behavior intervention plan. This may not be a requirement in WPCSD; however, it would be a good

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree placements for students with disabilities are based on student need and not by disability category and/or other demographic factors:

- 55% of student support services
- 46% of school building administrators
- 40% of related services providers
- 39% of special educators
- 36% of teaching assistants
- 31% of general educators
- **36% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree that IEPs are developed to meet compliance standards, maximize student's time in general education, and have data-driven goals that support progress monitoring:

- 85% of special educators
- 82% of school building administrators
- 70% of related services providers
- 62% of student support services
- 58% of general educators
- 50% of teaching assistants
- **65% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

practice to include some self-regulation goals for students that have BIPs as part of their IEP. The timebound piece was missing in how all goals were constructed. This may not be a WPCSD expectation. Overall, most of the goals reviewed met basic requirements, but they were not written in SMART format, some objectives did not align with the annual goal, behavior goals were not consistently written or included to support the BIP, and all students reviewed had a study goal.

Accommodations, Modifications, and Special Considerations

Analysis of the accommodations, modifications, and special considerations had the highest quality and compliance rating out of all sections of the rubric. Seventeen out of nineteen met 100 percent compliance and quality indicators. Most accommodations identified in the reviewed IEPs were tailored to address the student's disability-related needs, except for behavior, and facilitated access to the general education curriculum. Staff survey respondents and focus group participants viewed increasing student behaviors as areas of concern, yet the IEPs reviewed lacked support, accommodations or goals clearly identifying areas that staff could address to help decrease these increasing behavior needs. Support for school personnel around behavior was also consistently missed as being part of a students' accommodations. Clarity was provided regarding the need and utilization of accommodations or modifications as outlined in the IEP, ensuring transparency regarding when these supports were required. Additionally, classroom accommodations were aligned with state and district testing accommodations, ensuring consistency across settings. When a student required special considerations, this was clearly identified in the IEP.

With this section having the highest percentage meeting indicators for quality and compliance, it was interesting that the analysis of the survey data highlight variances in staff agreement around being able to identify appropriate accommodations and modifications for students to access grade-level curriculum:

- **Perceptions about the statement**, "*In my school staff understand how to identify the appropriate accommodations and modifications to allow students to access grade-level content*" vary by stakeholder: 75 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 64 percent of school building administrators, 80 percent of Related Service Providers, 65 percent of special educators, and 60 percent of general educators **agree with this statement. Overall, 61 percent of all staff agree with this statement.**

Services and Placement

Analysis of services and placement also revealed a higher compliance and quality indicator rating. Most of the files reviewed met compliance and quality for least restrictive environment (LRE). In all the IEPs, the LRE removal statement was marked and had a clear explanation for sixteen out of the nineteen files reviewed. This is an area where it was evident that the District provided guidance and clear expectations.

For students in self-contained programs or who required pull-out services, there was clarity around why they were being removed from the general education setting for these services or why they required an alternative setting for instructional purposes. The three IEPs that were not compliant were due to the statements not providing explicit information justifying the removal of these students from the general education setting.

Progress Reports

None of the IEPs reviewed included all areas identified as compliant and quality in the Golden Thread rubric. All IEPs reviewed included updated progress reports for all marking periods. Many of the progress reports reviewed did not have data to support progress on goals nor were there any instances where objective data was used to support why ratings were selected. The structure of the progress reports was compliant. The quality of progress reports reflects an area of growth. Most reports did not include progress monitoring data or data to support the rating found in the progress report. Since the data was not provided, it would be difficult for parents to determine how their child was progressing towards meeting their IEP goals.

Summary

WPCSD special education leadership has heavily invested in standardizing IEP development to ensure both compliance and quality. Findings of IEP review affirm that the District's efforts have come to fruition.

INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORTS

Inclusive Practices

Inclusion in the classroom is a term that became popular in the 1980s and was used to distinguish special education placement in the general education classroom with appropriate support. This was different from the prior concept of “mainstreaming.” The practice of mainstreaming allowed for students with disabilities to be placed in general education classrooms without the support they needed to be successful. It is important to note that the term “mainstreaming” was used shortly after the special education law was first implemented (1978) and special education was viewed as the “place” where students learned. Through the reauthorizations of IDEA and as special education expertise grew, special education is no longer considered to be a place of instruction but rather a combination of services that support students both academically and behaviorally, including those services that are specialized. The concept of inclusive instruction has grown to the idea of supporting the learning of students with IEPs along with their typically developing peers through Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, collaborative teaching, and co-teaching.¹⁰⁹

Creating an environment in which every student, including those with and without disabilities, can learn and succeed individually, and the way in which a school community supports all students, is at the core of inclusion.¹¹⁰ Research has consistently shown a positive relationship between effective and inclusive practices lead to better outcomes for students with disabilities, including higher academic performance, higher likelihood of employment, higher participation rates in postsecondary education, and greater integration into the community. The 10-year National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) described the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth ages 13 through 16 who were receiving special education services in grade seven or above when the study began in 2001. The study found that, while more time spent in general education classrooms was associated with lower grades for students with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers, students who spent more time in general education settings were closer to grade level on standardized math and language tests than were students with disabilities who spent more time in separate settings.¹¹¹

Additional studies have confirmed this finding, in that students with disabilities who are in general education classrooms more than 80 percent of the school day and have increased exposure to high-quality core instruction have improved academically on state-mandated tests.¹¹² Research also shows that including students with a range of disabilities in general education classes does not affect the achievement of their non-disabled peers.¹¹³

Moving beyond traditional inclusion, there is a growing push towards the concept of “Rightful Presence,” as advocated by the Swift Center¹¹⁴ (2024). This idea builds on earlier frameworks of inclusion by emphasizing the need to ensure that all students, especially those historically marginalized, are not only included but are genuinely present, valued, and actively engaged in their learning environments. As Calabrese Barton and Tan describe, Rightful Presence refers to the struggle to make students who have been historically excluded or overlooked “present” in schools.¹¹⁵ To embrace this paradigm, WPCSD must first evaluate its current inclusive practices through a lens of justice and equity. This involves examining how well the District’s policies, mindset, climate, and culture truly support the full participation of all students, particularly those with disabilities, in ways that affirm their rightful place in the educational community. Shifting towards Rightful Presence requires a deeper transformation—moving beyond mere inclusion to a holistic, inclusive environment where all students, regardless of ability or background, are seen, heard, and empowered. This shift is not just about adjusting practices; it’s about transforming the

¹⁰⁹ New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education. (n.d.). About inclusive education. <https://www.njcie.org/about-inclusive-ed>

¹¹⁰ Inclusive Schools Network. (2015). Together we learn better: Inclusive schools benefit all children. <http://inclusiveschools.org/together-we-learn-better-inclusive-schools-benefit-all-children/>

¹¹¹ Institute of Education Sciences. (n.d.). National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). <https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/projects/nlts2/>

¹¹² Roden, L., Borgemenke, A., & Holt, W. (2013). Improving the Academic Achievement of Students with Disabilities. *National Forum of Special Education Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ [Website SWIFT Education Center: National Center on Inclusion Toward Rightful Presence](#)

¹¹⁵ Calabrese Barton, A., & Tan, E. (2020). Beyond equity as inclusion: A framework of “rightful presence” for guiding justice-oriented studies in teaching and learning. *Educational Researcher*, 49(6), 433-440. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20927363>

foundational beliefs and values that guide the District’s approach to education, making it a more equitable and just system for all students.

District Practices

The Office of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services has a vision that emphasizes inclusion and the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. As noted on the Office’s webpage:

Our office provides programs and services for students ages 3 - 21. We strive to build an inclusive school setting where students with learning differences receive their specialized instruction, to the extent possible, alongside their general education peers. Collaboration with district staff, parents and community ensures quality programs and services.

Current special education leadership has made tremendous progress in developing inclusive educational services for students with disabilities. Ten or more years ago, WPCSD students with moderate to significant manifestations of their disabilities often spent most of their day in restrictive settings. The District offered an LRE continuum that emphasized a program-specific approach in self-contained classrooms. Some staff report in recent years that there has been a shift in the approach to inclusion, with some study participants describing this change as a move towards "full inclusion." However, it is important to note that in this context, "full inclusion" refers to meaningful inclusion—ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to an environment where they are fully engaged and supported in their learning. This shift is not about a return to traditional practices, but rather a transformation towards more intentional, inclusive practices that provide students with the resources and opportunities they need to thrive academically and socially in the general education setting.

The chart below highlights how WPCSD has evolved to promote inclusive practices for students with disabilities from the 2014-2015 school year to the 2021-2022 school year. Each educational setting, measured by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), demonstrates tremendous improvements. Additionally, the number of students with disabilities who were being served in out-of-district placements decreased by almost 50 percent from 95 to 45 students. WPCSD made considerable investments in expanding the LRE continuum through the creation of 35 integrated co-teaching classrooms. These efforts are commendable.

EXHIBIT 31. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT SETTING EVOLUTION IN WPCSD

Least Restrictive Environment Setting Evolution¹¹⁶		
	2014-2015 SY	2021-2022 SY
80% or higher	44.2%*	72%
40-79%	28.9%	23.1%
Less than 40%	18.2%	5.6%
Separate Setting	5.7%	4.1%
Other Setting(s)	3%	3.6%
Out of District	95	45
# of Self-Contained (Elementary-12:1:2)	6	3
# of Self-Contained (Autism, Intellectual Disability, Multiple Disabilities)	8	13

¹¹⁶ Board of Education Meeting Presentation by the Dept of Special Education and Pupil Services, September 2024

# of ICT Elementary Classrooms	0	18
# of ICT Secondary Classrooms	0	17 (Multiple sections)

High retention rates of teaching staff in WPCSD are a valuable asset to the District providing continuity and deep institutional knowledge. For some long-time staff who are accustomed to previous programming models, such as more program-specific, self-contained classrooms, the transition to more inclusive practices has been an adjustment. The changes implemented, as outlined above, align with current best practices and federal regulations under IDEA. Some participants expressed apprehension about what they perceived as an overreliance on Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) and Consultant Teacher (CT) settings as well as a lack of collaboration and clarity in placement decision-making processes.

Some participants noted that the District has not established clear, objective criteria for CSE teams to interpret data when determining the most appropriate placements. However, a review of the WPCSD procedures manual and guidance documents does highlight clear guidance on collecting data and analyzing that data to provide support for students and not necessarily using the data to change placement. These procedures are put in place to protect the rights of children with disabilities and to ensure that their LRE's are appropriate. Some staff reported collecting multiple sources of data over extended periods without seeing this data significantly influence decisions to move students to more restrictive settings when necessary. This misunderstanding has led to a disconnect between the purpose of collecting data and the analysis of that data to tweak instructional practices and supports. This has led to the perception among some school-based team members that their professional input is not being fully considered. Additionally, some special educators expressed hesitancy in strongly advocating for alternative placements, citing concerns about professional dynamics and their ability to openly share differing viewpoints.

Despite these concerns, it is important to recognize that inclusive practices, when implemented effectively, are widely regarded as the best approach for supporting students with disabilities. These practices ensure access to rigorous general education settings and promote equity and meaningful participation. Balancing these benefits with ongoing feedback from staff will be essential to refining and strengthening the District's inclusive practices.

To further support inclusivity and standardize placement decisions, the District has established procedures to help teams make LRE determinations grounded in IDEA regulations. Placement decisions are made during CSE meetings and involve input from the members of the committee. Despite the perception shared, WPCSD special education leadership does not hold the power to override recommendations of the committee. Their role is to ensure that LRE decisions are made by following procedures and within legal guidelines. Feedback on this approach to having procedures in place has been mixed. Some study participants recognized the necessity of standardized procedures to guide decision-making to ensure the District's progress toward inclusivity and LRE, viewing it as an effective way to promote equitable access to general education settings. Others, however, expressed concerns that this model diminishes their authority in making student-centered decisions—defined here as those tailored to the unique needs and best interests of individual students. This division was reflected in survey responses, highlighting the need for balance between standardization and empowering school-based teams to contribute meaningfully to the placement process.

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree the special education program/services at their school are of high quality:

- 64% of special educators
- 82% of school building administrators
- 55% of student support services
- 70% of related services providers
- 37% of general educators
- 38% of teaching assistants
- **50% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

- **Perceptions about the statement**, “*Placements for students with disabilities are based on student need and not by disability category and/or other demographic factors*” vary across stakeholder groups: 55 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAAs), 46 percent of school building administrators, 40 percent of related service providers, 39 of special educators, and 31 percent of general educators **agree with this statement**.
- **Perceptions about the statement**, “*Students with IEPs in my school(s) receive instruction and services in general education classes to the maximum extent possible*” are largely positive across stakeholder groups: 91 percent of school building administrators, 89 percent of related service providers, 86 percent of special educators, and 74 percent of general educators **agree with this statement**.
- **Perceptions about the statement**, “*General education teachers are provided adequate training in effectively supporting the needs of students with IEPs*” vary across stakeholder groups: 30 percent of related service providers, 27 percent of school building administrators, 25 percent of Student Support Services staff (e.g., psychologists, nurses, BCBAAs), 21 percent of special educators, and 18 percent of general educators **agree with this statement**.

Most parents of students with IEPs in WPCSD who participated in the study shared positive feedback on their experiences of special education in the district. High percentages of parents indicated receiving timely feedback on concerns (86%) and forming positive relationships with their child’s teacher(s) (85%). A small number of study participants shared that a divide exists between school-based staff in WPCSD and central office leadership. While it did not emerge as a key finding, it is important to note there is a perception of this among some parents.

To address these challenges, the District must develop and implement clear frameworks for placement decisions that prioritize collaboration during CSE meetings and align with current best practices. Equally important is fostering a cultural shift among school-based staff to embrace the understanding that special education is a flexible and dynamic service, not confined to a specific setting, but tailored to meet each student’s individual needs.

Collaborative Teaching

Collaboration amongst professionals is multi-dimensional. It requires a deep commitment on the part of all professionals with a common belief that the efforts of two are exponentially greater than those conducted in isolation. However, a commitment to collaboration is not sufficient. It must be accompanied: by 1) strong communication (both verbal and non-verbal) between professionals, 2) the ability to connect in a shared problem-solving interaction, and 3) the commitment to carry out, with fidelity, co-teaching and co-serving models, where a general educator and a special educator collaborate to simultaneously deliver grade-level curriculum to meet the specialized needs of students with disabilities.

Effective collaborators use respectful and effective communication skills to promote positive relationships and build trust among professionals and families. Effective collaborators are aware of and continue to hone their collaboration and communication (verbal and non-verbal) skills when interacting with others. They also encourage others to share their knowledge and perspectives. Often during the collaborative teaching process, there are interpersonal challenges or differences of opinion. When teachers and other professionals are effective collaborators, they are ready to interact positively and productively with diverse individuals in the school and community.

Collaborative practices are influenced by multiple factors across schools, teachers, and teacher training as well as across different school cultures. These factors may include master scheduling, teachers’ attitudes regarding collaboration, teachers understanding of the co-teaching models, and how to co-plan, co-teach, co-serve, and co-assess as a collaborative team. For collaborative teaching to be effective, it takes districtwide support from district and school leaders who can foster a collective commitment to the collaborative teaching process overall by dedicating their energy to areas of professional learning,

increasing team members' collaborative skills, creating schedules that support collaboration, and an ongoing effort to create model co-teaching classrooms from which the district can build upon.¹¹⁷

In special education, both co-serving, and co-teaching, are collaborative instructional approaches that involve educators working together to support students with diverse needs.¹¹⁸

- **Co-teaching** typically involves two or more educators, such as a general education teacher and a special education teacher, sharing responsibility for planning, delivering instruction, and assessing students in a shared classroom. They work together to design lessons, teach, and support all students, including those with disabilities, using various teaching strategies and accommodations.
- **Co-serving**, on the other hand, is a collaborative approach where educators work in parallel rather than jointly teaching within the same classroom. Each educator may work with a smaller group of students or focus on different aspects of instruction or support, complementing each other's efforts to meet the diverse needs of students in the general education setting. Co-serving allows professionals with different skill sets and expertise to work together, pooling their knowledge to create a comprehensive support system for students with disabilities. While they may not directly teach in the same classroom simultaneously, co-servers align their efforts to ensure that students receive multifaceted support tailored to their specific needs. This collaborative model aims to maximize the effectiveness of interventions and support strategies for students with diverse learning needs.¹¹⁹

There are a variety of ways to establish collaborative teaching structures that will meet the needs of staff that may not be able to meet at a regularly scheduled time every week or have limited time in their schedules. The TIES Center provides a comprehensive framework for how collaborative teaching structures can be developed even when teachers may be short on time.¹²⁰

District Practices

WPCSD offers two primary instructional models related to inclusive/collaborative practices, Integrated Co-teaching and Consultant Teacher Services.

The Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) model in WPCSD is defined as:¹²¹

“the provision of the specially designed academic instruction provided to students with learning differences alongside non-disabled peers. In an ICT classroom, the general education and special education teachers share responsibility for classroom instruction. Curriculum, materials, assignments, and assessment may be modified to meet the individual learning needs of all students. White Plains offers integrated co-teaching classes in grade K, 1, 7-11. Over the next 5 years, the District will be expanding ICT services to include grades K-11.”

Percent of WPCSD staff who agree WPCSD has established standards for delivering co-teaching/collaborative instruction:

- 53% of special educators
- 23% of specials/elective teachers
- 73% of school building administrators
- 58% of student support services
- 70% of related services providers
- 31% of general educators
- 42% of teaching assistants
- **44% of all staff surveyed**

Staff Survey

The Consultant Teacher Services (CT) model in WPCSD is defined as:¹²²

“services provided directly and/or indirectly to students with learning differences within the general education classroom. Consultant teacher services are considered indirect

¹¹⁷ Friend, M., & Cook, L. (n.d.). Collaborative Teaching: What Special Educators and General Educators Need to Know [Review of *Collaborative Teaching: What Special Educators and General Educators Need to Know*]. *Intervention in School and Clinic*.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Frattura, E., & Capper, C. (n.d.). Integrated comprehensive systems for equity. ICS Equity. <https://www.icsequity.org/>

¹²⁰ TIES Center. (n.d.). The 5-15-45 tool. <https://tiescenter.org/inclusive-instruction/5-15-45-tool>

¹²¹ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

¹²² Ibid.

when the support is provided to students' general education teacher. The IEP must indicate the subject areas in which the student will receive consultant teacher services. Consultant teacher services are available grades K-8."

The current special education administration was charged with increasing the number of students with disabilities served in inclusive settings and ensuring compliance with SPP/APR indicator performance related to LRE. WPCSD did not offer any ICT classes in elementary or secondary in the 2014-15 SY. As such, the percentage of students with disabilities spending 80% or more of their day in a general education setting (LRE A) hovered around 44 percent. Significant financial and staffing investments were made over the last 10 years to meet compliance expectations (SPP/APR) and best practices. The percentage of students with disabilities in LRE A increased by almost 30 percentage points (72%) in the 2021-22SY. This was achieved through the expansion of ICT from 0 classrooms in 2014-2015SY to 18 elementary ICT classes and 17 secondary ICT classes with multiple sections in the 2021-22SY. CT services were rolled out in conjunction with the ICT model expansion to increase the number of students with disabilities receiving services in inclusive settings. The number of students with disabilities served in more restrictive settings (LRE B and LRE C) decreased, too, resulting in ICT and CT service models serving students with more moderate to significant manifestations of their disabilities.

The expansion of inclusive practices in WPCSD has been a long-term initiative, beginning in the 2015-16 school year and gradually progressing toward more inclusive services for students with disabilities. This evolution, while positive, has not been without its challenges. WPCSD special education leadership has undertaken significant efforts to adjust and refine practices districtwide to support this shift. As highlighted in other sections of this report, WPCSD staff continue to reflect on how the transition to more inclusive practices has influenced their work and perceptions in supporting increasingly diverse classrooms. The wide range of academic and behavioral needs in more inclusive settings has required staff to adapt and implement best practices collaboratively within classrooms and teaching pairs, reflecting their commitment to meeting the needs of all learners.

WPCSD district leaders continue to gather data points, as identified in the WPCSD Special Education District Plan (2024-2027), to evaluate the extent to which objectives of in-district programs and services are achieved.¹²³ The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) is "a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of literacy skills designed to be short fluency measures that can be used to detect risk and monitor the development of early literacy and reading skills in kindergarten through eighth grade."¹²⁴ WPCSD special education leadership provided PCG a series of DIBELS data points highlighting growth on "Beginning of Year (BOY)" assessments to "End of Year (EOY)" assessments by program type, ICT and CT, across all elementary schools during the 23-24SY. Data was organized by grade level and by program type, then disaggregated by school. An analysis was conducted to determine the average growth (average growth + above average growth) by program type, and by grade level. Previous year(s) data were not analyzed as part of this study.

All five WPCSD elementary schools offer a CT service delivery model. Three out of five elementary schools offer ICT service delivery. Acronyms are used for each elementary school listed within the charts: Church Street (CS), George Washington (GW), Mamaroneck Avenue (MAS), Post Road (PRS), and Ridgeway (RDG). Key findings from the DIBELS analysis determined the following:

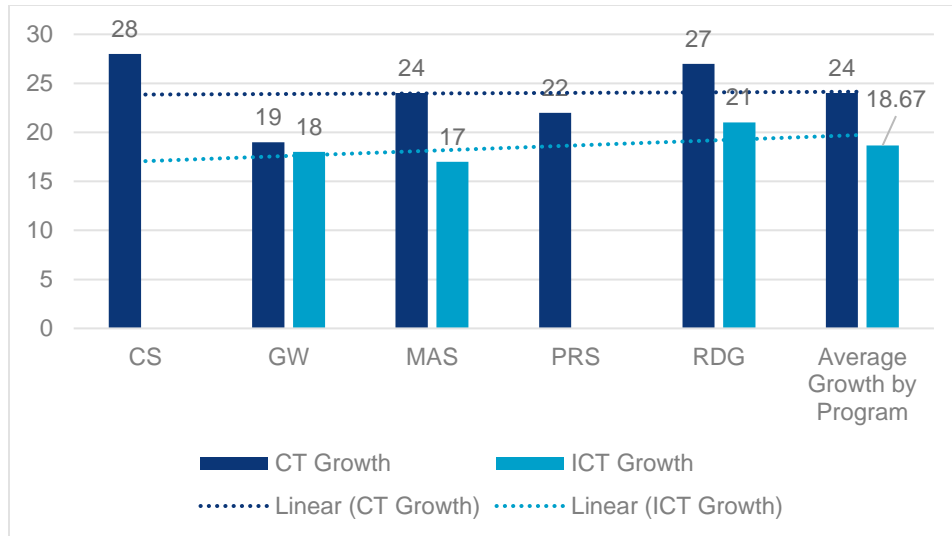
The average rate of growth for students with disabilities served in CT across all elementary schools and all grade levels was 24 percentage points. Comparatively, the average rate of growth for students with disabilities served in ICT across 3 elementary schools and all grade levels was 18.67 percentage points. The average rate of growth for students with disabilities in CT was consistently higher at every elementary school compared to peers receiving specially designed instruction in the ICT setting.

EXHIBIT 32. GROWTH BY PROGRAM TYPE 23-24 DIBELS K-5¹²⁵

¹²³ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

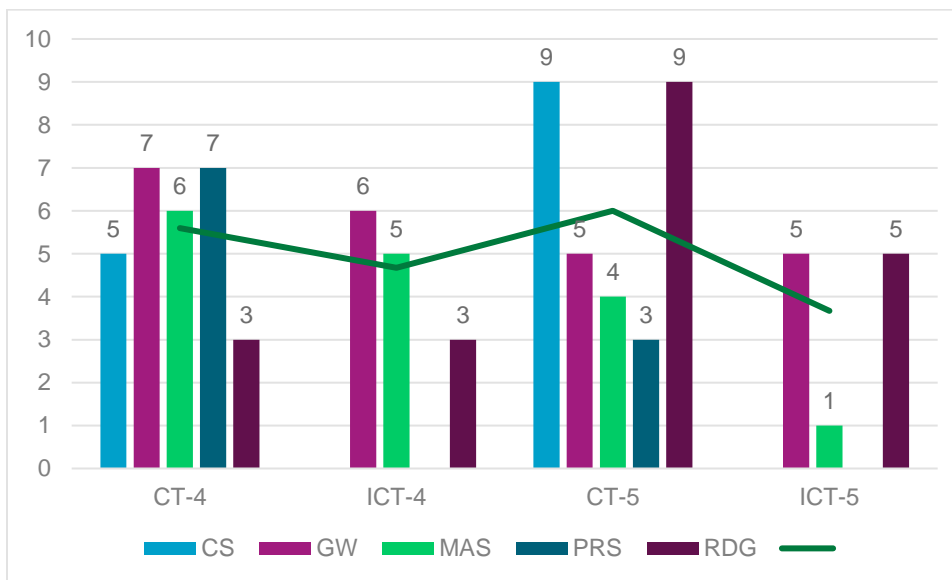
¹²⁴ University of Oregon (2021). 8th Edition of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS®). Eugene, OR: University of Oregon. Available: <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/>

¹²⁵ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year).



Students with disabilities in 4th and 5th grade achieved the highest rates of growth in EOY DIBELS assessment compared to all other elementary grades. Students with disabilities in Kindergarten and 1st grade demonstrated the lowest rates of growth in EOY DIBELS assessment compared to all other elementary grades.

EXHIBIT 33. HIGHEST RATE DIBELS GROWTH IN 4TH AND 5TH GRADE ¹²⁶

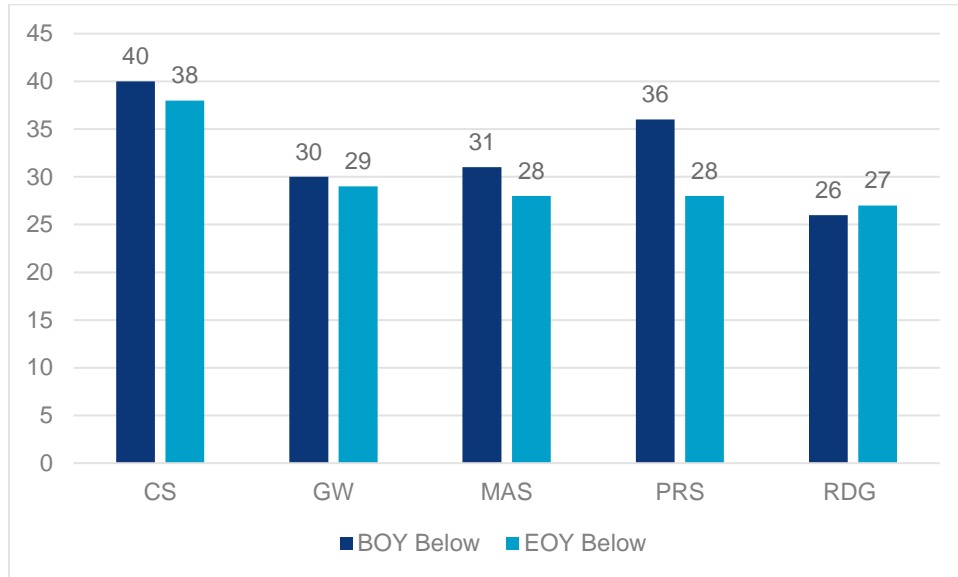


The number of students with disabilities from K-5, served in the CT setting, scoring “below” on the BOY assessment ranged from 26 at Ridgeway ES to 40 students at Church Street ES. Most schools experienced a decrease in the number of students with disabilities, K-5, served in the CT setting, scoring “below” on the EOY assessment. This represents positive growth from the BOY to the EOY assessment. Students with disabilities served in the CT program at Post Road ES demonstrated the greatest growth, specifically in 4th grade with 8 students scoring “below” on the BOY assessment and 3 scoring “below” on the EOY assessment. There was some fluctuation when analyzing BOY to EOY assessment

¹²⁶ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year).

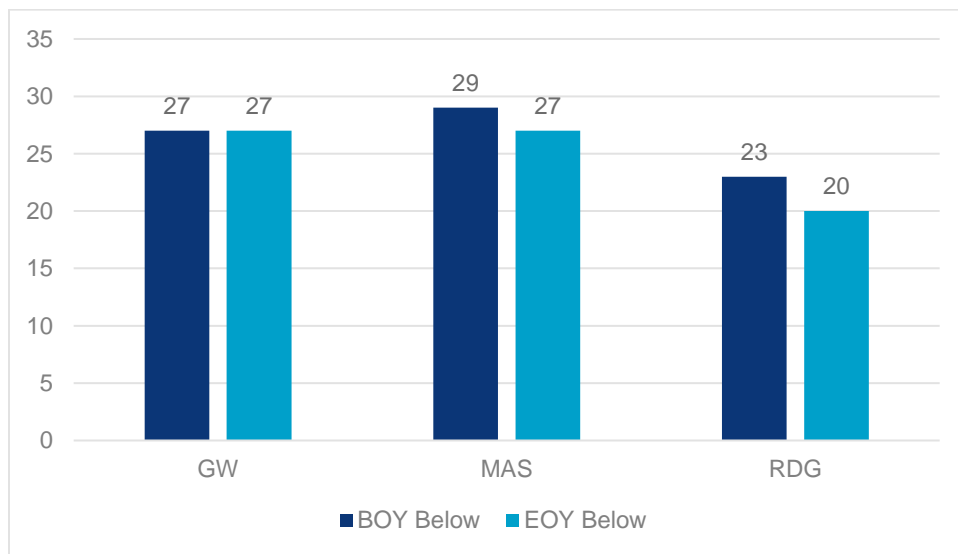
performance, by school, with some grade levels experiencing an increase in the number of students “below” on the EOY assessment.

EXHIBIT 34. BOY AND EOY IN CT 23-24 DIBELS K-5¹²⁷



Comparatively, the number of students with disabilities from K-5, served in the ICT setting, scoring “below” on the BOY assessment ranged from 23 at Ridgeway ES to 29 students at Mamaroneck ES. Every school experienced a decrease in the number of students with disabilities, K-5, served in the ICT setting, scoring “below” on the EOY assessment. This represents positive growth from the BOY to the EOY assessment. Students with disabilities served in the ICT program at Ridgeway ES demonstrated the greatest growth with 3 students scoring at “benchmark” on the EOY assessment. There was some fluctuation when analyzing BOY to EOY assessment performance, by school, with some grade levels experiencing an increase in the number of students “below” on the EOY assessment.

EXHIBIT 35. BOY AND EOY IN ICT 23-24 DIBELS K-5¹²⁸

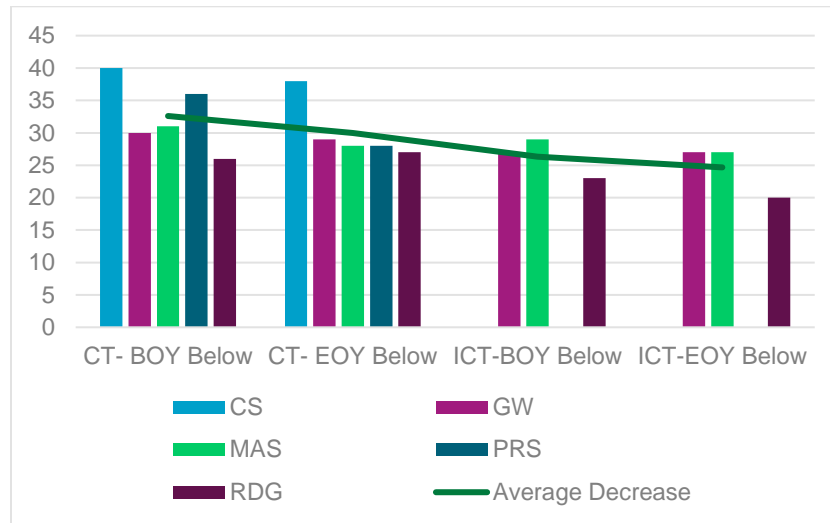


¹²⁷ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year)

¹²⁸ Ibid.

The DIBELS assessment performance analysis serves as a single data point. Some elementary schools achieved higher average rates of growth compared to others. Several factors can influence rates of growth, such as the number of dually identified students in classrooms, and staffing levels. Alternatively, a small number of students with disabilities, in both ICT and CT programs, scored “below” on the EOY assessment demonstrating a decrease in performance compared to the BOY assessment. When comparing performance on the DIBELS assessment, by program type, students with disabilities served in the CT performed slightly better than peers served in ICT. Most students with disabilities who scored “below” at the BOY also scored “below” at the EOY. The importance of high-quality specially designed instruction in the general education setting is critical to the success of students with disabilities.

EXHIBIT 36. BOY AND EOY CT vs ICT 23-24 DIBELS K-5¹²⁹



Focus group participants, both school-based staff and district leaders, expressed varying levels of confidence in the execution of ICT and CT. Time for general and special educator pairs in elementary and secondary schools was a primary concern for a number of study participants. Availability to meet the instructional needs and service hours of students with disabilities through the CT model was consistently highlighted. Special educators serving in the capacity of CTs in elementary schools are well-within the New York state guidance for caseloads. Secondary special educator CTs are bound by many complexities within the Master Schedule. WPCSD conducted a study focused on Master Scheduling and adopted recommendations, including restructuring how special educators are assigned at the secondary level. Scheduling and the impact on time for meaningful collaboration remain barriers to successful adoption of ICT and CT in WPCSD. The District leadership has supported and provided space for campuses to have co-planning opportunities on a daily basis at the secondary level and weekly at the elementary level. What may be an underlying driver to concerns raised is the variability of caseloads for special educators serving at the secondary level. Further detail is provided in the Human Capital and Leadership chapter of this report. In summary, special educator caseloads in middle and high school include providing specially designed instruction across multiple settings or programs (i.e., 26 students in ICT, 10 students in CT, and 5 students in resource room). Complexities in caseload structures, scheduling, and planning likely are influencing the perceptions of school-based teams at the secondary level believing there is insufficient time collaborate for specially designed instruction in the general education setting. During onsite visits, staff appeared to work well together with supporting all students, especially at the high school level. The content was thoughtfully planned out for each teacher to take the lead in teaching their groups of students in many classes. This supports the fact that time was spent on co-planning.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

A consistent theme mentioned by school-based staff teaching in the ICT settings was the ratio of students with IEPs and 504s to their non-disabled peers, especially in secondary. It is important to note that CT classroom quantitative data and ratios were not formally analyzed as part of this study. Anecdotally, it was acknowledged that a general education class may have between 13-15 students compared to an ICT course teaching similar content having up to double the number of students. The breadth and depth of student need in the ICT class was described as far greater and a challenge to meet even with a general educator and special educator co-teaching pair. WPCSD analyzed the ratio of students with IEPs and 504s to non-disabled peers in ICT courses and has confirmed that all but one secondary course was within the appropriate ratio. The course out of compliance was addressed by district leadership and attributed to scheduling versus intentionality. This analysis between focus group feedback and data provided by WPCSD revealed two key findings: 1) perception and reality of ICT course composition is not in alignment, and 2) more sections of ICT or CT classes may be needed to decrease student to teacher ratios and to increase the rigor of specially designed instruction for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. It is important to note that an increase in the number of ICT and/or CT classes within the existing staffing structure would likely create a secondary concern, increasing the number of classes or sections requiring planning and preparation.

PCG onsite staff had the opportunity to witness both ICT and CT services in implementation. The theoretical implementation of CT services, as outlined in NY state regulations, differs greatly from the practical implementation of CT services. CT services, according to regulations require that indirect or direct services be provided for a student with an IEP in the class or subjects needed.¹³⁰ Those services include specially designed instruction, accommodations, or the provision of both to meet the needs of the student. Onsite staff acknowledged that CT services are difficult to execute when juggling multiple classrooms and grade levels. Scheduling challenges and the existing staffing model for CT services were cited as impacting the success of this model. The onsite visit findings affirmed that CT services are bound by scheduling complexities and do not necessarily occur at the most ideal time for students. Elementary special educators serving in the CT capacity have a more streamlined caseload and cover several grade bands across several classrooms. Master scheduling and the prioritization of special educator time plays a significant role in juggling complexities necessary to meet the specially designed instructional minutes for students with disabilities.

It is not recommended that WPCSD decrease the volume of students with IEPs served via the CT model in elementary. Instructional coaches should partner with elementary CTs to more efficiently streamline responsibilities and maximize instructional time in the inclusive classroom. It is also advised that when constructing classroom ratios for upcoming school years, school building leaders' partner with special educators to prioritize placing students with disabilities in classrooms to maximize provider availability and proactively balance ratios of students with IEPs to their non-disabled peers.

Secondary ICT and CT models present more challenges in implementation when compared to elementary schools. Cumulative analysis of all data gathered in this study supports two findings: 1) secondary special educators have higher and more complex caseloads that are difficult to quantify in comparison to their elementary peers, and 2) WPCSD should conduct a more in-depth workload analysis for secondary special educators. The Human Capital and Leadership section of this report details caseloads by schools at the secondary level. The analysis highlighted the diversity of caseload construction and the increased number of students with IEPs on secondary special educator caseloads. An independent workload analysis data would provide WPCSD with more tangible information to determine if a streamlined program assignment approach utilized in elementary schools is applicable for secondary schools. The complexity of secondary special educator caseloads likely has an impact on one's perception in the composition and effectiveness of ICT and CT classes.

While a CT model is one way to deliver inclusive educational services, it should not be the sole approach. Inclusive services require flexibility and collaboration, with co-teaching and co-serving models relying on teams working together to support students both inside and outside the classroom based on their

¹³⁰ Legal Information Institute. (n.d.). *N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. Tit. 8 § 200.1 - definitions*. Legal Information Institute. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/new-york/8-NYCRR-200.1#:~:text=%28m%29%20Consultant%20teacher%20services%20means%20direct%20and%20For%20indirect,classes%20and%20For%20to%20such%20student%27s%20regular%20education%20teachers.>

individual needs. Establishing robust collaborative structures is essential to fostering effective inclusive practices, especially given the current lack of consistent collaborative teaching models across all settings in WPCSD. Providing staff with dedicated time for collaboration could help address perceptions that CT and ICT models are ineffective, enabling staff to implement more effective and tailored supports for students.

SPECIALIZED PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES

District Practices

WPCSD has expanded its continuum of alternative placements (services) aimed at offering more inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities. The continuum has evolved to ensure that students with disabilities receive the necessary services and support to access and make progress in the general education curriculum. The trend towards a more inclusive approach to special education in the district has presented challenges with specialized programming leading to confusion among staff, particularly in terms of placement. Despite WPCD special education leadership providing guidance and procedures, the perception is that WPCSD has not formalized placement criterion for each continuum option. Study participants described collecting data to demonstrate the need for a more restrictive setting. It was reported that data collected was often not leveraged in changing placements resulting in some staff feeling confused about the intention of gathering this information.

When considering a more restrictive placement, CSE (IEP) teams are advised to follow the LRE Environment checklist found in the WPCSD Standard Operating Procedures Manual (SOPM):¹³¹

1. *Teachers must complete the referral form to the PST/IST*
2. *PST/IST reviews the student's IEP and progress monitoring data*
3. *Schedule an in-class observation with the Instructional Coach*
4. *PPS and Instructional Coach gives suggestions and strategies for the creation of short-term goals*
5. *Teachers implement strategies*
6. *PPS staff observes the student*
7. *Implement strategies for 3-4 weeks and bring data back to PST/IST and set up a meeting*

The WPCSD SOPM specifies clear data points needed for a more restrictive placement change. The level of influence data gathered has on the CSE decision to change placement cannot be standardized as this is an individualized decision. WPCSD special education leadership should continue to highlight and train on the purposes of data collection and analysis, which is to guide instruction and provide supports for students within their current setting and not to utilize the data as a sole means of changing placement until all options have been exhausted. Staff survey results highlight:

➤ *88% of staff agree their school provides opportunities for students with and without disabilities to interact in academic and non-academic settings.*

Staff Survey

- **Perceptions about the statement, “My district offers a continuum of services to meet the needs of all students with IEPs” vary across stakeholder groups: 82 percent of school building administrators, 67 percent of Related Service Providers, 55 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 52 percent of special educators, and 40 percent of general educators agree with this statement.**

Some study participants expressed the need for a more robust continuum of services and increased placement of students with disabilities in more restrictive settings, while also emphasizing that well-timed and meaningful inclusion should remain a priority. It is believed by some study participants that current

¹³¹ WPCSD Special Education Standard Operating Procedure Manual

structures do not consistently support the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities, pointing out that simply being present in a general education classroom does not equate to true inclusion. In contrast, findings from PCG’s time onsite, conducting classroom visits and student shadowing, revealed evidence of meaningful inclusion in practice. Many classrooms demonstrated high-quality instructional practices and varying levels of support tailored to the needs of students with disabilities. The effective use of paraprofessionals, when properly trained for inclusive environments, was a key factor in enabling general education teachers to create meaningful opportunities for students with IEPs to fully engage in the general education setting.

WPCSD has expanded the type and number of special classes available to students with disabilities across all district schools. Specialized class availability is often limited to one elementary school or middle school given the size of WPCSD. White Plains High School offers a more robust continuum of services for students with IEPs in the building.

To address this apparent disconnect, special education leadership should clarify placement decision-making processes and continue to message how current structures support meaningful inclusion. Promoting a shared understanding of special education as a service rather than a location is essential to fostering an inclusive culture that meets the needs of all students.

EXHIBIT 37. LISTING OF SPECIAL CLASS BY BUILDING AND AREA OF NEED

School	Communication Needs	Social Emotional Needs	Developmental Delays	Speech Language and Academic Delays	Content Area Classes
Church Street	K-2, 8:1:2 (2 Classes)				
George Washington				K-1 – 12:1:2 1-2 – 12:1:2 3-5 – 12:1:1	
Mamaroneck			K-2 – 12:1:2 3-5 – 12:1:2		
Post Road		K-2 – 8:1:2 3-5 – 8:1:2			
Ridgeway	K-2 – 8:1:3 K-2- 8:1:2 3-5 - 8:1:2				
White Plains Middle and High Schools	12:1:2	Integrated Support Program (ISP)			English Math Social Studies and Science 15:1

Below is a list and descriptions of all special education programs in WPCSD.

EXHIBIT 38. WHITE PLAINS SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES AND PROGRAMS¹³²

Program	Description
Building Level Services	Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, counseling or social skills support can be provided at the building level for

¹³² WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

	<p>identified and non-identified students. These services are provided when the student has an identified need that does not require intensive intervention. Eligibility for building level services is determined by the building.</p>
Related Services	<p>When a student has an IEP or 504 Accommodation plan, related services can be recommended to meet the speech and language, motor, vision, hearing or counseling needs of a student. Based on the needs of the student, related services can be provided in a group or individually, in the classroom or in a special location. Related services are available to eligible students grades K-12/</p>
Consultant Teacher Services	<p>Consultant teachers provide direct and/or indirect services to students with learning differences within the general education classroom. Consultant teacher services are considered indirect when the support is provided to students' general education teachers. The IEP must indicate the subject areas in which the student will receive consultant teacher services. Consultant teacher services are available grades in K-8.</p>
Integrated Co-Teaching	<p>Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) is the provision of the specially designed academic instruction provided to students with learning differences alongside non-disabled pers. In an ICT classroom, the general education and special education teachers share responsibility for classroom instruction. Curriculum, materials, assignments, and assessment may be modified to meet the individual learning needs of all students. White Plains offers integrated co-teaching classes in grade K, 1, 7-11. Over the next 5 years, the District will be expanding ICT services to include grades K-11.</p>
Resource Room Program	<p>Resource room program is special education service that supports a student with a learning difference with specialized supplementary instruction, in a small group setting, for a portion of the school day. Resource room programs are for the purpose of supplementing the general education or special education classroom instruction. White Plains offers a Resource Room, at White Plains High School, grades 9-12.</p>
Special Class	<p>Special Class is a class consisting of students with learning differences who have been grouped together because of similarity of individual needs for the purpose of receiving specially designed instruction in a self-contained setting. Students in a special class receive their primary instruction in a self-contained setting. Students in a special class are receiving their primary instruction separate from their non-disabled peers. WPCSD offers self-contained classes K-12. At the elementary level there are classes to support students with intensive language and learning needs, emotional challenges and developmental delays. At the middle school level, WPCSD provides self-contained classes in each content area along with a continuation of classes for students with developmental delays and intensive language needs. The White Plains High School provides a program which supports the Regents curriculum (15:1) within a smaller setting. Classes are provided in math, English, social studies.</p>
Integrated Supports Program (ISP)	<p>Offered at the elementary level for grades K-2 (8:1:2), 3-5 (12:1:2) and at the Middle and High School Levels. Students in this program receive both academic and social emotional support with access to a school psychologist, a social worker, paraprofessional and a special education teacher to support their needs throughout the day,</p>

The WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027 provided additional context on the continuum offered by school:¹³³

*“At **White Plains Middle School**, self-contained classrooms are departmentalized and supplant instruction in English language arts, math, social studies, and science. Those classes have a 15:1 ratio, 15 students to 1 teacher. Students can be placed in any or all of the special classes depending on their needs. In addition, for students who require a higher level of support, the district has two self-contained classrooms that are not departmentalized. Students spend the day with the same teacher. Highlands has two classrooms that service students grades 6-8, with a ratio of 12:1:2, 12 students, 1 teacher, and 2 teaching assistants.*

*In addition to the specialized academic supports, **White Plains Middle School** has an Integrated Support Program or ISP. The students have a common period where they receive both academic and social emotional support. Staff is available throughout the day to support the students as they move through their academic schedule.*

***White Plains High School** houses a self-contained, departmentalized program. Students who require a smaller learning environment with a lower student to teacher ratio (15:1) and access to Regent’s level curriculum may be recommended by the CSE for classes in English, Algebra, Global History, United States History, Living Environment, Earth Science, and math electives. In addition, for students who require a higher level of support, the district has three self-contained, 12:1:2, classrooms, in which the curriculum targets functional academics, life skills, and vocational training.*

*In addition to the specialized academic supports, **White Plains High School** has an Integrated Support Program (ISP). The students have a common period where they receive both academic and social emotional support. Staff is available throughout the day to support the students as they move through their academic schedule. This program has a high level of social emotional support with a school psychologist, a social worker, and a special education teacher supporting the students.”*

In addition to specialized programming, WPCSD has established specialized services and supports for students with disabilities that span the district through the creation of CPSE and CSE Chairs and Subcommittee Chair positions. These roles support IEP compliance, timely evaluations, LRE and verification of services, and record keeping. CPSE and CSE Chairs and Subcommittee Chairs are responsible for leading all initial, annual, and re-evaluation CPSE and CSE (IEP) meetings. Individuals serving in these roles are teachers on special assignments. Unlike administrators, teachers on special assignments adhere to schedules aligned with classroom-based special educators, including summers off. This has an impact on scheduling CSE meetings and preparing for the upcoming school year during critical summer months.

In addition, WPCSD has a team of three (3) Instructional Coaches that support districtwide. These coaches support both general education and special education teachers. The coaches are divided into grade bands, with one coach serving the elementary schools (K-5), and two coaches supporting the secondary levels, (6-12 and 9-12 and age 21). The secondary Instructional Coach supports specialized programs (Special Classes) and coaches individual or teams of teachers. Coaching supports can include streamlining case management and IEP development, collaborating with content specialists on students’ accommodations and modifications, support for general education teachers, or programming for students in the functional skills/Work Based program. Elementary Instructional Coaches have similar responsibilities that include helping campuses support inclusive practices and service implementation.

Currently there is one Elementary Instructional Coach that supports all five elementary schools. The Elementary Coach supports all CT and ICT classes in addition to any specialized reading support provided to students with IEPs. The Elementary Coach helps with ordering and inventory of special

¹³³ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

education materials, coaching for staff on IEP development and progress monitoring, lessons and units for ICT staff, implementing Science of Reading (SOR) aligned practices across buildings, and helping teachers with implementing accommodations in their classrooms. The Elementary Coach also supports executive functioning and study skills supports that are required for students with IEPs. In this role the Elementary Coach collaborates closely with District leadership on logistics for special education (i.e., scheduling, instructional practices, fidelity of implementation for instructional models). Individuals serving in these roles are teachers on special assignments. Similar to CSE and CPSE positions, this role structure does not allow for year round support of special education initiatives.

OUT OF DISTRICT PLACEMENTS

District Practices

Out-of-district (OOD) placements are a vital part of the continuum of services offered by WPCSD to meet the unique needs of students whose educational requirements cannot be adequately addressed within district programs. These placements ensure that students with significant disabilities receive specialized support in settings designed to meet their individualized needs.

The most significant component of the WPCSD special education budget is the cost associated with OOD tuition. This expenditure is projected based on factors such as students aging out, anticipated new placements, and contingency planning for unforeseen needs. The cost of each OOD placement, including related services, typically ranges from \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually, underscoring its substantial financial impact. Currently, approximately 45 WPCSD students with IEPs are being served in OOD placements during the SY 24-25, reflecting the district's commitment to providing appropriate and individualized educational opportunities for all students. 134

The WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027 includes the following summary for Out of District programming:¹³⁵

Out-of-District Programs and Services

WPCSD offers a full continuum of special education programs and services in District schools. The Committee on Special Education is responsible for placing students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment consistent with their needs. Generally, continued placement in a general education setting is the first consideration of the CSE when planning for the educational needs of a student with an IEP. The CSE considers removal from a general education setting in the District only when, because of the nature and severity of a student's disability, the education of the student cannot be satisfactorily achieved, even with the provision of supplementary aids and services, within the general education classroom. In a small number of cases, the CSE will recommend placement in another public school district, a BOCES program, or an approved private school program. The following is a description of programs in which the District CSE has recommended placement of a student with a disability in an out-of-district program.

1. **Other Public School Programs:** Special education programs in other public-school districts are considered for District students with disabilities when an appropriate in-district program is not available. The District currently has one student classified with intellectual disabilities in the special education program in Eastchester. For this program, the classes range in size from 8-12 students with one teacher and one or two teacher aides.
2. **Board of Cooperative Educational Services Programs:** WPCSD is a component school district of Southern Westchester BOCES. BOCES is a regional public education collaborative which functions in New York State as an extension of local school districts.
 - a. The District utilizes Southern Westchester BOCES, Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES, and Rockland BOCES programs and services for students with more intensive educational,

¹³⁴ SY23-24 WPCSD data provided to PCG in Fall 2024

¹³⁵ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

emotional, or management needs that cannot be appropriately met in an in-district program. The District currently has students with disabilities in the following BOCES special education programs:

- i. **Therapeutic Support Programs** The Southern Westchester, Putnam/Northern, and Rockland BOCES Therapeutic Support program provides a structured, supportive, and individualized academic program for students with more intensive emotional and behavioral needs. These small classes are usually in a public-school setting and include individual and group counseling services. Students are taught how to accept responsibility for their behavior, progress academically, and have a successful school experience. Staffing ratio is 8:1:1 or 12:1:1. Currently, five students attend a therapeutic support program.
 - ii. **Multiple Disabilities Program** The Putnam/Northern BOCES Pinesbridge program provides educational services for students with multiple medical and orthopedic disabilities. The focus is on the development of adaptive and vocational skills in a small setting with a low student to adult ratio, 12:1:4. Related services are provided in the areas of speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Currently, four students attend Pinesbridge.
 - iii. **Autism and Communication Development Programs** The Southern Westchester, Putnam/Northern, and Rockland BOCES has a program for students with multiple disabilities that provides a structured, supportive, and individualized academic program for students with more intensive academic and/or physical needs. Students are provided with intensive academic support along with a range of related services. The emphasis is on functional academics and pre-vocational skills. Currently, 12 students attend a program that supports students with Autism and other developmental disabilities.
3. **Approved Private Day Schools:** When the needs of a student with a disability cannot be met in a program operated by the District, another public school district, or a BOCES program, the District may, with the approval of the NYS Education Department, utilize more restrictive, approved private day placements. These schools are approved by the New York State Education Department and provide highly individualized programs with intense supervision and structure. WPCSD is currently utilizing the following programs:
- a. **Clearview School** The Clearview School services students with emotional disabilities. The school provides instruction in a small therapeutic environment, with a low student to teacher ratio (12:1:1). Psychiatric and counseling services are available to both students and parents, as are 24-hour-a-day crisis intervention services. Currently, there are two students who attend the Clearview School.
 - b. **Green Chimneys/Clearpool** This program services students with both learning and emotional disabilities. The day program provides individualized and small group instruction (12:1:1) and behavioral interventions. Additional services include speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and counseling. Currently, three students attend Green Chimneys/Clearpool.
 - c. **Hawthorne Country Day School** This school supports students with Autism and other developmental delays. The school offers individualized and small group instruction, utilizing research-based methods that support students with Autism. There is a broad range of ratios such as 6:1:2, 8:1:2, and 12:1:2, and students can receive related services. Currently, there is one student who attends Hawthorne Country Day School.
 - d. **John A Coleman School** This school services students who have medical, physical, academic, and/or social emotional needs. Coleman School can service pre-K students through first grade in both self-contained and inclusive classrooms. Currently, there is one student at the John A Coleman School.

- e. **State Supported Schools** State supported schools educate students who have hearing or vision disabilities. Students receive small groups, grade-level instruction in combination with skills such as sign language or Braille. Currently, there is a student attending a state supported school.

4. Special Act Schools: Special Act Schools were created by the state to support students for whom other day and residential programs are no longer appropriate. Students may be placed in Special Act Schools by the CSE and receive both academic and social emotional supports. Currently, there are six students placed at Special Act Schools.

5. Approved Residential Schools: Approved residential schools support students with learning differences who are unsuccessful in a private school. Residential schools provide a smaller learning environment with significant behavioral supports. We currently have one student placed at Center for Discovery.

6. Home/Hospital Instruction: Some students with disabilities who are unable to attend school due to medical conditions (physical or psychiatric) receive their educational program at home or in a hospital setting. The CSE recommends how many hours of home instruction are appropriate to meet the student's needs. There are currently three students on Home/Hospital Instruction.

ELL STUDENTS WITH IEPs

English Language Learners (ELLs) and Recently Arrived Immigrant English Learners (RAIELs) are a diverse group that includes subgroups such as U.S.-born students whose home language is not English, refugees, unaccompanied minors, and students with limited or interrupted formal education. These students enter schools at all grade levels with varying English proficiency, educational backgrounds, and home language literacy levels. While they bring unique strengths to the classroom, they also face common and distinct challenges.

RAIELs, like other ELLs, need to acquire English proficiency, but they often have additional needs that non-recently arrived ELLs may not experience. These include mental, physical, and social challenges stemming from dislocation or trauma, academic gaps due to limited prior schooling, and the adjustment to a new country, community, and school environment. Addressing these varied needs presents a significant challenge for education agencies, which must develop policies and practices that support both ELLs and RAIELs effectively.

In a 2015 study conducted by WestEd two factors were identified as leading to inconsistent identification of ELL students who may have learning disabilities: 1) a lack of understanding among teachers about why ELL students are not making adequate progress, and 2) poorly designed and implemented referral processes for ELL students. The study reviewed state guidelines and protocols from 20 states with the largest populations of ELL students on the practices of how they identify and support ELLs who have disabilities and provided an extensive review of the current literature.¹³⁶ This study and the resulting literature could be used as a guideline to increase support and collaboration among staff who support ELL students.

District Practices

The number of students with disabilities who are ELLs increased by 30 percent nationally from the 2011-12 to the 2019-22 school years.¹³⁷ New York state saw a 6.7 percent increase in the number of dually identified students who are ELLs and have an IEP in this timeframe.¹³⁸ Results of the New York State English as a Second Language Assessment Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) from the 2022-2023 SY indicated that levels of English proficiency by grade ranged from 2 percent (1st grade) to 22 percent

¹³⁶ Elizabeth Burr, Eric Haas, Karen Ferriere. Identifying and supporting English learner students with learning disabilities: Key issues in the literature and state practice, WestEd July 2015. Pages 2-14.

https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2015086.pdf

¹³⁷ "OSEP Fast Facts: Students with Disabilities who are English Learners (ELs) Served under IDEA" 2022. Retrieved from: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/osep-fast-facts-students-with-disabilities-english-learners> "

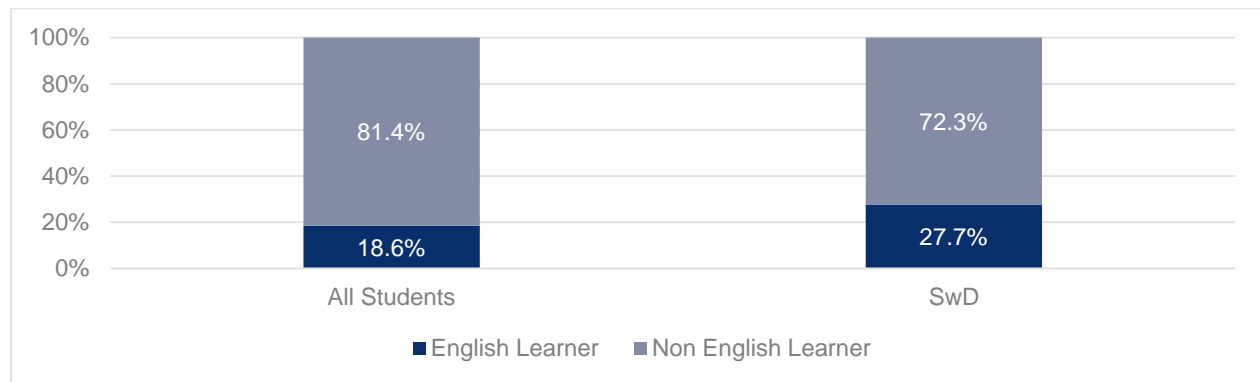
¹³⁸ Ibid.

(grade 6).¹³⁹ Similar to New York state, and the nation, WPCSD continues to grapple with how to most appropriately balance identifying ELL students as being eligible for special education and related services while ensuring equitable access to and progress in the general education curriculum. Supporting dually identified ELL students will need to be an ongoing training opportunity for all WPCSD staff.

The New York State Education Department's (NYSED) Blueprint for English Language Learner (ELL) Success provides a framework for ensuring equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities for ELLs, including those with disabilities. The Blueprint emphasizes culturally responsive practices and accurate identification procedures to distinguish between language acquisition challenges and potential disabilities. Misidentification of ELLs as students with disabilities—or overlooking their needs entirely—can impede their academic progress. To mitigate this, NYSED highlights the importance of comprehensive assessments that include evaluations in the student's home language, culturally and linguistically appropriate tools, and collaboration between ESL and special education professionals.¹⁴⁰

The percentage of ELL students in WPCSD has steadily increased from 15 percent in the 2013-14 school year to 19 percent in the 2023-24 school year.¹⁴¹ Among students with IEPs, approximately 28 percent are ELLs. Of students with IEPs, 40 percent of students eligible for services under speech language impairment are ELLs, 35 percent of students with a specific learning disability are ELLs, and 28 percent of students with an intellectual disability are ELLs. These categories were higher than the overall percentage of students with an IEP who are also ELLs (27.7%). The higher rates of eligibility for ELLs under speech-language impairment and specific learning disability align with national trends.¹⁴³

EXHIBIT 39. PERCENT OF WPCSD STUDENTS AGES 6-21 BY ELL STATUS, 2023-24



A key finding of this study is the belief that English Language Learners (ELL) students may be under-identified for special education and related services. This issue stems from several critical factors noted in our data analysis of focus groups and surveys, including delays in referrals for evaluation at school-based Individual Support Team (IST) meetings, insufficient access to appropriate interventions addressing both academic needs and language acquisition, placement decisions along the continuum of services, misalignment between the volume of services on IEPs and student needs, and limited parent access to translated IEPs.

Most of these factors fall within the scope of general education rather than special education. The referral process for special education begins in general education, and it is essential that tiered interventions, including academic and behavioral supports, be implemented and documented within the MTSS framework before making a referral to special education. For ELL students, this process should include a

¹³⁹ Data retrieved from NYSED site: <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2014&instid=800000034913>

¹⁴⁰ New York State Education Department. (2014). *Blueprint for English language learner (ELL) success*. Retrieved from <http://www.nysed.gov>

¹⁴¹ Data retrieved from NYSED site: <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2014&instid=800000034913>

¹⁴² Data retrieved from NYSED site: <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?instid=800000034913&year=2024>

¹⁴³ "English Learners with or at Risk for Disabilities", Institute of Education Sciences, 2021. Retrieved from: [https://ies.ed.gov/blogs/research/post/english-learners-with-or-at-risk-for-disabilities#:~:text=English%20learners%20\(ELs\)%20are%20the,disabilities%20and%20speech%2Flanguage%20impairment.](https://ies.ed.gov/blogs/research/post/english-learners-with-or-at-risk-for-disabilities#:~:text=English%20learners%20(ELs)%20are%20the,disabilities%20and%20speech%2Flanguage%20impairment.)

focus on data collection and analysis to ensure that challenges are not related to language acquisition, cultural differences, or gaps in education, rather than a disability.

District-level leadership has an opportunity to collaborate with building leaders to ensure that the academic, social, and behavioral needs of ELL students are effectively addressed within general education. Strengthening initiatives within general education, such as MTSS and ESOL services, can help ensure that ELL students receive appropriate support early on, reducing the likelihood of misidentification or delays in accessing necessary services. This collaborative approach reinforces the importance of equitable practices and ensures that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

While some staff believe that ELL students are under-identified for special education services, the quantitative data analyzed for this study does not support that perception. Feedback from focus groups and surveys indicates that staff perceive a significant gap between the number of ELL students they feel should be referred for special education and the number currently receiving those services. Survey responses align with focus group feedback, highlighting staff concerns about meeting the needs of students who are both ELL and identified for special education:

- **Perceptions about the statement**, “*Services for English Learner students with disabilities at my school(s) are meeting student needs*” vary by stakeholder: 15 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 27 percent of school building administrators, 0 percent of Related Service Providers, 19 percent of special educators, 28 percent of teaching assistants, and 13 percent of general educators **agree with this statement. Overall, less than 20 percent (18%) of all WPCSD staff survey respondents agree with this statement.**

Increased clarity around WPCSD’s shared vision related to serving ELL students, including ELL students with IEPs, is critical. Strengthening intervention practices prior to referrals for special education, through an MTSS framework, can positively impact ELL students. It is critical that building-level leaders and school-based ELL instructors prioritize clarifying expectations for general and special education initiatives. Specifically, guidance should be provided on the intersection of second language acquisition and expected academic gains for students with minimal formal school exposure and/or gaps within a student’s first language development.

BEHAVIOR SERVICES

High-quality behavioral support and services are integral in special education as they address the diverse needs of students, promote a positive learning environment, and foster academic and social-emotional growth. These supports are necessary to assist students in developing essential behavioral skills, emotional regulation, and social interactions, which are often challenging for students with disabilities. By implementing evidence-based behavioral interventions and strategies, educators create structured and supportive settings that enable students to thrive academically while improving their overall well-being. Ultimately, high-quality behavioral support not only contributes to the academic success of students with disabilities but also nurtures their confidence, independence, and ability to participate fully in educational and social settings.¹⁴⁴

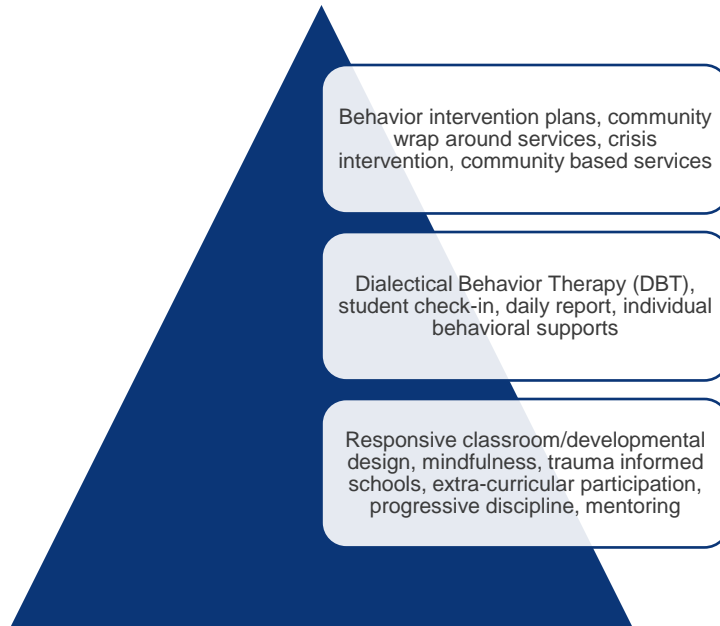
District Practices

WPCSD continues to innovate programmatically to support students struggling with behavioral challenges. Onsite observational data did not highlight any observable concerns around behavior. Excellent behavior management techniques and strong classroom management practices were observed in many classrooms visited. Both school-based staff and District leadership have acknowledged an increase in mental health concerns resulting in challenging behavior and have stressed the importance of allocating more resources for counseling across all schools, including elementary. The analysis of documentation submitted by the District provided insight into their responsiveness to the needs in this area which includes several professional learning opportunities for staff in responsive classrooms, trauma-informed practices, and other behavioral management techniques that can support staff with managing student behaviors.

¹⁴⁴ Center on PBIS. (2024). PBIS supports students with disabilities. University of Oregon. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-supports-students-with-disabilities>

A series of PD offerings and resources around behavior management, mindfulness, trauma informed practices and other behavioral focused learning opportunities have been offered in WPCSD as an outcome of that study. Additionally, WPCSD leadership created an MTSS-focused tiered system of support for behavior that proactively tries to mitigate the consequences that COVID has on SEL development and behavior. The graphic below depicts the three-tiered system and offerings in each tier in WPCSD.

EXHIBIT 40. MTSS THREE-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR BEHAVIOR



WPCSD school-based staff, and district leadership (including the Superintendent), acknowledged concerns with the increase of challenging behavior in the classroom and the District's approach to addressing challenging behavior. WPCSD staff survey results indicate:

- **Perceptions about the statement, "My school uses positive behavior and intervention supports to support student behavior as part of a multi-tiered system of support"** vary across stakeholder groups: 100 percent of school building administrators, 60 percent of Related Service Providers, 50 percent of special educators, 48 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), and 46 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, "There is a well-articulated approach and support in my school(s) to address the behavioral needs of students with disabilities"** vary by stakeholders: 73 percent of school building administrators, 25 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 21 percent of special educators, 10 percent of Related Service Providers, and 6 percent of general educators **agree with this statement. Overall, 17 percent of all WPCSD agree with this statement.**
- **Perceptions about the statement, "My district offers a continuum of services to meet the needs of all students with IEPs"** vary across stakeholder groups: 82 percent of school building administrators, 67 percent of Related Service Providers, 55 percent of Student Support Services staff (Psychologist, Nurse, BCBA, etc.), 52 percent of special educators, and 40 percent of general educators **agree with this statement.**

Focus group and survey participants reported instances of physical harm experienced by WPCSD staff due to student behavior. The impact of challenging behavior on staff morale was acknowledged by a number of study participants. Staff emphasized the importance of prioritizing their safety and the safety of other students when assessing the overall well-being of the classroom.

Additionally, staff requested greater clarity on what constitutes “allowable behavior” and how disruptive behaviors impacting classroom instruction should be addressed. However, these perceptions conflict with the professional development opportunities provided by the district and the observations of PCG staff during onsite visits, where behavioral supports were evident. This disparity highlights the need for stronger collaboration and ongoing support to help staff effectively implement best practices following professional learning. Ensuring alignment between district-provided training, observed practices, and staff perceptions will be crucial for addressing behavioral challenges and enhancing classroom environments.

POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

To support students and young adults with disabilities in achieving their post-secondary and career goals, transition services are required for students as they prepare for life after high school. Successful transition planning requires a coordinated set of activities that include the student, family, and education team.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and State Vocational Rehabilitation (VRs) agencies often collaborate to support students and families in making decisions about the necessary services and support needed after high school. In New York, the IEP for each student with a disability must address transition service requirements beginning no later than when a child turns 14, or younger, if deemed appropriate by the CSE team, and updated annually thereafter. The IEP must include:

1. Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and
2. The transition services (including course of study) needed to assist the student with a disability in reaching those goals.¹⁴⁵

As noted by the IRIS Center, school-based teams should emphasize transition planning to improve outcomes for students with disabilities once they leave high school. Though the school counselor typically has a significant role in transition planning, it is ultimately a team effort.¹⁴⁶ This includes ensuring students with disabilities are provided with appropriate instruction in career development and opportunities to participate in service learning/community-based instruction that is linked to the general curriculum, classroom instruction, and student interests.

District Practices

In WPCSD, transition services for students begin no later than the initial IEP at age 14—or earlier if the IEP team determines it is appropriate. These services include the development of an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) as part of the student’s annual IEP. While the District’s Standard Operating Procedures

- 32% of WPCSD staff survey respondents indicated they support post-secondary transition activities and/or the development of transition plans.
- 74% of WPCSD staff agree that planning effective services and activities for postsecondary transition begins for students at age 15 (or the year in which a student turns 15) at my school.
- 67% of WPCSD staff agree that students with disabilities have the opportunity to partner with district staff on the creation of their transition plans.
- 58% of WPCSD staff agree that students with disabilities transitioning out of WPCSD are prepared for college, career, or post-secondary opportunities.

Staff Survey

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2020). A transition guide to postsecondary education and employment for students and youth with disabilities.

<https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/osers/transition/products/postsecondary-transition-guide-08-2020.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ IRIS Center. (n.d.). An overview of secondary transition. Vanderbilt University.

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/cou2/cresource/q1/p01/>

Manual (SOPM) does not emphasize this process, best practices identify six key steps that IEP teams should follow to create a comprehensive and effective ITP:

1. Conduct transition assessments, both formal and informal.
2. Develop measurable post-secondary goals based on assessment data.
3. Identify individual transition services supporting post-secondary goals and graduation requirements.
4. Draft a relevant course of study considering the student's remaining time in the school system.
5. Coordinate with Adult Service agencies for post-education support.
6. Formulate IEP goals aligned with post-secondary goals.¹⁴⁷

Currently, WPCSD uses Naviance for career and post-secondary transition assessments. That serves as the sole formal assessment used for both general and special education students. Other transition assessments used in special education include the *Brigance Transitions Skills Inventory*, the *Pictorial Interest Inventory*, along with multiple informal assessments. There are also informal inventories conducted with students and teacher- and student-directed exploration of post-secondary options. There are no requirements that these assessments be used. These tools are available for WPCSD to implement when constructing robust transition plans for students with IEPs. WPCSD study participants shared a common belief that there is room for improvement in the creation of transition plans and the connections to post-secondary options for students with disabilities. At the time of this report, PCG did not receive documents that highlighted the transition focus in the District. PCG did visit work-based learning opportunities during the onsite visits. It was reported by study participants that WPCSD has programming to support post-secondary skills acquisition, job readiness, and college and career partnerships.

While PCG did not receive documents to review regarding transition planning, it was evident WPCSD provides numerous resources and support for transition planning and post-secondary opportunities, including partnerships with community organizations, which were highlighted during the onsite visit. WPCSD staff affirmed being responsive to improving the post-secondary outcomes for students through: 1) ensuring IEPs are compliant in the area of transition (evidenced by PD offerings and training), 2) expanding internal and external partnerships to provide students with job skill-building opportunities, including work experiences at local elementary schools and within the broader community, and 3) maintaining data on how students with IEPs are being prepared for post-secondary life beyond WPCSD.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The expansion of inclusive practices in WPCSD has been a long-term initiative, beginning in the 2014-15 school year and gradually progressing toward more inclusive services for students with disabilities. This evolution, while positive, has not been without its challenges. WPCSD special education leadership has undertaken significant efforts to adjust and refine practices districtwide to support this shift. As highlighted in other sections of this report, WPCSD staff continue to reflect on how the transition to more inclusive practices has influenced their work and perceptions in supporting increasingly diverse classrooms. The wide range of academic and behavioral needs in more inclusive settings has required staff to adapt and implement best practices collaboratively within classrooms and teaching pairs, reflecting their commitment to meeting the needs of all learners. WPCSD special education leadership has heavily invested in standardizing IEP development to ensure both compliance and quality. Findings of the IEP review affirm that the District's efforts have come to fruition.

WPCSD has expanded its continuum of alternative placements (services) aimed at offering more inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities. The continuum has evolved to ensure that students with disabilities receive the necessary services and support to access and make progress in the general education curriculum. The trend towards a more inclusive approach to special education in the district has presented challenges with specialized programming leading to confusion among staff, particularly in terms of placement. Despite WPCSD special education leadership providing guidance and procedures, the perception is that WPCSD has not formalized placement criterion for each continuum option. Study participants described collecting data to demonstrate the need for a more restrictive setting. It was

¹⁴⁷ Provided by Island County Parent to Parent and Island County Developmental Disabilities (2023).

reported that data collected was often not leveraged in changing placements resulting in some staff feeling confused about the intention of gathering this information.

The WPCSD SOPM specifies clear data points needed for a more restrictive placement change. The level of influence data gathered has on the CSE decision to change placement cannot be standardized as this is an individualized decision. WPCSD special education leadership should continue to highlight and train on the purposes of data collection and analysis, which is to guide instruction and provide supports for students within their current setting and not to utilize the data as a sole means of changing placement until all options have been exhausted.

WPCSD continues to innovate programmatically to support students struggling with behavioral challenges. Onsite observational data did not highlight any observable concerns in the area of behavior. Excellent behavior management techniques and strong classroom management practices were observed in many classrooms visited. Both school-based staff and District leadership have acknowledged an increase in mental health concerns resulting in challenging behavior and have stressed the importance of allocating more resources for counseling across all schools, including elementary. The analysis of documentation submitted by the District provided insight into their responsiveness to the needs in this area which includes several professional learning opportunities for staff in responsive classrooms, trauma-informed practices, and other behavioral management techniques that can support staff with managing student behaviors.

Focus group and survey participants reported instances of physical harm experienced by WPCSD staff due to student behavior. The impact of challenging behavior on staff morale was acknowledged by a number of study participants. Staff emphasized the importance of prioritizing their safety and the safety of other students when assessing the overall well-being of the classroom. Additionally, staff requested greater clarity on what constitutes “allowable behavior” and how disruptive behaviors impacting classroom instruction should be addressed. However, these perceptions conflict with the professional development opportunities provided by the district and the observations of PCG staff during onsite visits, where behavioral supports were evident. This disparity highlights the need for stronger collaboration and ongoing support to help staff effectively implement best practices following professional learning. Ensuring alignment between district-provided training, observed practices, and staff perceptions will be crucial for addressing behavioral challenges and enhancing classroom environments.

A key finding of this study is the belief that English Language Learners (ELL) students may be under-identified for special education and related services. This issue stems from several critical factors noted in our data analysis of focus groups and surveys, including delays in referrals for evaluation at school-based Individual Support Team (IST) meetings, insufficient access to appropriate interventions addressing both academic needs and language acquisition, placement decisions along the continuum of services, misalignment between the volume of services on IEPs and student needs, and limited parent access to translated IEPs.

Most of these factors fall within the scope of general education rather than special education. The referral process for special education begins in general education, and it is essential that tiered interventions, including academic and behavioral supports, be implemented and documented within the MTSS framework before making a referral to special education. For ELL students, this process should include a focus on data collection and analysis to ensure that challenges are not related to language acquisition, cultural differences, or gaps in education, rather than a disability.

District-level leadership has an opportunity to collaborate with building leaders to ensure that the academic, social, and behavioral needs of ELL students are effectively addressed within general education. Strengthening initiatives within general education, such as MTSS and ESOL services, can help ensure that ELL students receive appropriate support early on, reducing the likelihood of misidentification or delays in accessing necessary services. This collaborative approach reinforces the importance of equitable practices and ensures that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

IV. HIGH EXPECTATIONS

OVERVIEW

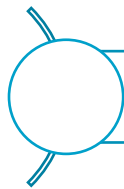
This section of the framework includes increasing expectations of students with disabilities by having a growth mindset and presuming competence while incorporating culturally relevant and growth-oriented practices. The main components of this domain include:

- Growth Mindset
- Presumed Competence
- Positive Learning Environment
- Student Engagement

These areas foster a culture of high expectations for students with disabilities and set the stage for academic optimism when working with students with disabilities.

While all domains of the framework are critical to developing an effective special education system, this portion of the framework grounds districts in a culture of high achievement and presumed competence. The chapter below aligns to these framework components.

The essential question we address in this chapter is:



How does WPCSD perform on student outcomes and transition for students with disabilities?

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduation Rate. From 2019-2020 to 2022-2023, WPCSD’s average 4-year graduation rate for students with disabilities (77%) exceeded the state average of 66%. • Dropout Rate. From 2019-2020 to 2022-23, WPCSD’s average dropout rate for students with disabilities was 3%, significantly lower than the state average of 7.75%. • Elementary ICT. Most ICT classes showed evidence of collaborative teaching models. • Science of Reading (SOR) Initiative. There is clear evidence of SOR initiative for literacy across general and special education. • Utilization of Teaching Assistants. Across settings, Teaching Assistants were used in an effective way to support students in the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specially Designed Instruction (SDI). Not all classrooms showed clear evidence of SDI to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. • Consultant Teacher (CT) model. In many cases it was not clear how the special education teacher was effectively utilized in the general education setting in the CT model. • Collaborative Teaching Structures. Stronger collaborative teaching structures are needed to enhance collaboration between general and special education staff. • Special Classes. There were no guiding criteria for how students qualified for Special Classes and which students belonged in 8:1:3, 8:1:2, 12:1:1, or 12:1:2 and no clear methodology for these programs to help staff understand which students are appropriate for these settings • Accommodations and Modifications. Accommodations and modifications were not clearly observed across settings for

	special education students in general education settings outside of adult support.
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ACADEMIC OPTIMISM AND PRESUMED COMPETENCE

To create a climate and culture where all students thrive, beliefs and actions must be established that support high expectations for every student. Teachers may unintentionally lower expectations for students with disabilities, believing the practice to be supportive, but such practices can hinder their potential. In modern educational discourse, it is essential to adopt strengths-based approaches that presume competence and operate with the least dangerous assumption—meaning that in the absence of definitive evidence, teachers should presume that students with disabilities can achieve with the proper support.¹⁴⁸ As schools focus on improving outcomes for students with disabilities, research highlights the necessity of examining not only socioeconomic status and instructional practices but also the attitudes and beliefs that influence expectations and academic opportunities for these students.

Despite efforts to align curricula and increase funding, students with disabilities continue to trail their peers in achievement. This suggests that effective education requires more than resources; it demands a shift in school culture toward academic optimism—a collective belief in the capacity of all students to succeed.

Research by Wayne Hoy and his colleagues emphasizes three critical factors for fostering academic optimism, which in turn can positively impact student achievement, even in disadvantaged contexts:¹⁴⁹

- **Academic emphasis:** Schools must adopt a belief system centered on high expectations for student success.
- **Collective efficacy of the faculty:** Educators must believe in their ability to positively influence student learning outcomes.
- **Trust among faculty, parents, and students:** Cooperation and mutual trust between school staff, students, and families are essential for creating an environment where academic growth thrives.

This concept of academic optimism aligns with strengths-based approaches, which focus on the abilities and potential of students rather than their limitations. By assuming competence and maintaining high expectations, schools can create environments where all students, including those with disabilities, are given the opportunity to meet and exceed academic standards.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, presumed competence goes together with the least dangerous assumption. This principle holds that in the absence of conclusive evidence, teachers should assume that all students, regardless of disability, can access grade-level curriculum and progress with appropriate supports.¹⁵¹ It also encourages an asset-based approach, where the focus is on what students can do and how they can develop, rather than on their deficits.

Promoting high expectations and inclusive practices through these frameworks helps to establish a school culture where every student is seen as capable of growth and success. Schools that foster academic optimism, presumed competence, and a strengths-based mindset can bridge achievement gaps and empower students with disabilities to reach their full potential.

¹⁴⁸ Biklen, D., & Burke, J. (2006). Presuming competence. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 39(2), 166–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680500540376>

¹⁴⁹ Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C.J., & Woolfolk Hoy A. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. Working Paper. The Ohio State University. <http://www.waynehoy.com/school-academic-optimism/>

¹⁵⁰ Jorgensen, C. M., McSheehan, M., & Sonnenmeier, R. M. (2010). *Presumed competence reflected in the inclusive schooling practices of 21 school districts*. Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 35(3-4), 149-160.

¹⁵¹ Donnellan, A. M. (1984). *The criterion of the least dangerous assumption*. Behavioral Disorders, 9(2), 141-150.

District Practices

The performance of students with disabilities (SWDs) in the WPCSD on statewide assessments reveals both areas of success and opportunities for improvement, as outlined in the District's 2022-23 State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR). The data provides a detailed overview of outcomes for SWDs across grade levels and subjects, highlighting strengths in graduation rates and dropout prevention while emphasizing the need for growth in academic achievement which is discussed in more detail below.¹⁵²

WPCSD has achieved notable successes in supporting students with disabilities through critical milestones. The District's average 4-year graduation rate for SWDs, from the 2019-2020 to the 2022-2023 school years, was 77 percent exceeding the state average of 66 percent during this timeframe. This reflects a commitment to providing the necessary support for students to complete high school and pursue post-secondary opportunities.¹⁵³ Additionally, the average dropout rate for SWDs, from the 2019-2020 to the 2022-2023 school years, was 3 percent compared to the state average dropout rate for students with disabilities at 7.75 percent during this timeframe.¹⁵⁴ These outcomes underscore the District's ability to retain and engage students with disabilities effectively, keeping them on track toward long-term academic success.

At the same time, the District's academic performance data indicates areas where focused efforts are needed to improve proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. In Grade 4 ELA, only 4 percent of SWDs achieved proficiency in the 2022-23SY, compared to the state average of 20 percent, highlighting a need for targeted interventions in elementary education. By Grade 8, 15 percent of SWDs demonstrated proficiency in ELA, marking a 7-percentage point improvement from the 21-22 school year. While this progress is encouraging, it still falls short of the 2022-23SY state average of 22 percent. High school students with disabilities in WPCSD showed relative strength, with 61 percent achieving proficiency on the ELA Regents exam, surpassing the state average of 51 percent during the 2022-23SY.¹⁵⁵

- 67% of staff agree their school effectively communicates the importance of high expectations.
- 64% of staff agree school and district leadership have high expectations for students with disabilities.
- 74% of staff agree staff have high expectations for students with disabilities.

Staff Survey

In Math, proficiency rates among SWDs varied but generally lagged behind state averages. In Grade 4, 18 percent of SWDs achieved proficiency during the 2022-23SY, an increase of 13 percentage points from the 21-22 school year but still below the state average of 25 percent. Grade 8 proficiency improved by 9 percentage points to 16 percent in the 2022-23SY, nearing the state average of 17 percent. At the high school level, Math Regents proficiency was 26 percent for the 2022-23SY, reflecting a 5-percentage point improvement from the 21-22 school year. However, this remains significantly below both the state average of 36 percent and WPCSD's historical performance, which peaked at 48 percent in 2018-19.¹⁵⁶

For SWDs assessed using alternate academic achievement standards, WPCSD displayed mixed results. In Grade 8, proficiency rates were 56 percent in ELA and 63 percent in Math, showing progress yet remaining below state targets of 82 percent and 76 percent, respectively. Data for Grade 4 and high school SWDs assessed using alternate standards was suppressed due to small sample sizes, but these areas require ongoing attention to ensure equitable support and growth.¹⁵⁷

The persistent achievement gaps in key areas signal a need for intensified academic rigor and enhanced instructional supports at the Tier 1 level as noted in other areas of this report. Survey data indicates that District staff value high expectations for SWDs, with 67 percent agreeing their school effectively

¹⁵² Data was obtained from NY State Data Portal: <https://data.nysed.gov/>.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

communicates this importance, 64 percent believing leadership holds high expectations, and 74 percent affirming that staff themselves maintain high expectations. However, the gap between these perceptions and student outcomes points to a critical need to align these expectations with actionable strategies to drive improvement.

The District must expand such strategies to other grade levels to address existing proficiency gaps and to build sustainable, high quality instructional practices. To achieve this, WPCSD should prioritize strengthening Tier 1 ELA and Math instruction to ensure SWDs meet or exceed state proficiency targets. Continuing to provide educators with professional development focused on delivering rigorous, high-quality instruction tailored to the needs of SWDs will be essential. This also relies on staff being willing to invest their time in professional learning opportunities, even when attendance is not mandated by the District. By participating in these offerings, staff can build the essential skills and knowledge needed to effectively implement inclusive practices, ultimately enhancing outcomes for all students. Additionally, leveraging assessment data to identify and address specific areas of need can drive targeted interventions that yield measurable outcomes.

While standardized tests are only one measure of success, they provide valuable insights into areas requiring improvement to close achievement gaps. Based on the data analyzed across several years, it appears WPCSD is moving in the right direction by developing inclusive educational services that prioritize students with disabilities accessing grade-level curriculum. By continuing to align high expectations with high-quality core instruction and targeted supports, WPCSD can sustain its commitment to improving outcomes for all students with disabilities.

The percentage of WPCSD students with disabilities who spend 80 percent or more of their day in general education has continued to increase. This metric alone does not ensure equitable access to high-quality core instruction. Students with disabilities in WPCSD continue to demonstrate significantly lower academic outcomes compared to their non-disabled peers in the district and the statewide averages for students with disabilities. These disparities suggest that placement in general education settings, without meaningful access to instruction aligned with their needs, is insufficient for driving academic progress.

High-quality core instruction is foundational to the success of all students, including those with disabilities. For students with disabilities to benefit fully from inclusive settings, general education teachers must be equipped to implement instructional practices that are accessible, differentiated, and grounded in the principles of UDL.¹⁵⁸ Research consistently shows that inclusive education leads to better outcomes for all students when general education classrooms foster high expectations, effective collaboration between general and special education staff, and intentional use of evidence-based practices.¹⁵⁹ However, the success of Tier 1 instruction is contingent on the capacity of general education systems to meet the diverse needs of their learners.

If general education classrooms lack robust Tier 1 practices—such as clear learning goals, formative assessments to monitor progress, and strategies that proactively address barriers to learning—students with disabilities are more likely to disengage or fail to access the grade-level content required for academic growth. Research also highlights that insufficient teacher preparation and limited professional development in inclusive practices can exacerbate these inequities, further hindering the academic success of students with disabilities.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the quality of Tier 1 instruction is critical, recognizing special education is only as strong as the general education foundation supporting it.

Inclusion extends beyond physical presence; it encompasses equitable participation and access to rigorous learning opportunities. To close the outcome gap for students with disabilities, WPCSD must prioritize strengthening Tier 1 general education instruction as the foundation of inclusive practices. This ensures that all students, including those with disabilities, have the opportunity to thrive within the general education environment.

Prioritizing high-quality, and well-timed specially designed instruction in self-contained, resource, and general education settings is critical. That can be achieved through increasing academic rigor, balancing

¹⁵⁸ CAST. (2018). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. Retrieved from <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>

¹⁵⁹ Hehir, T., Schifter, L. A., Grindal, T., Ng, M., & Eidelman, H. (2016). *A summary of the evidence on inclusive education*. Abt Associates. Retrieved from <https://www.abtassociates.com>

¹⁶⁰ Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Vaughn, S. (2010). *Response to intervention: A framework for reading educators*. International Reading Association.

access to Tier 1 and remedial instruction, and promoting student independence. While many strong instructional practices were evident during onsite visits, instructional practices to promote student achievement were inconsistent across settings. WPCSD focus group and survey participants echoed this concern, with survey data showing only 48 percent of staff agree there is an effective process by which staff collaborate regarding the needs of students with disabilities. Without adequate collaboration for staff to support co-teaching models, there will likely be continued challenges in creating high-quality instructional practices across all settings.

One way the District has tried to develop collaborative structures is through hosting a “Self-Contained Class Curriculum” study group in the fall of 2023. The purpose of the group was to 1) explore new curriculum materials, 2) utilize the new materials to develop and articulate a K-through age 22 scope and sequence of skills and lesson, and 3) recommend a targeted approach to professional development, curriculum implementation, and purchasing of any additional materials. This self-contained curriculum workgroup highlights the District’s efforts to create collaborative structures across the continuum in response to staff concerns about lack of collaboration.

Many districts that are working to improve student outcomes have identified high-leverage practices (HLPs)¹⁶¹ and evidence-based practices (EBPs) for supporting students with disabilities. When used together, HLPs and EBPs can be powerful tools for improving student outcomes. Special education teachers must be flexible problem solvers who not only have expertise in using highly effective practices, but also are proficient in understanding, implementing, and monitoring evidence-based practices with individual students and making decisions regarding changes in practice as needed. The effective and consistent implementation of HLPs and EBPs can be supported by the presence of the instructional coaches within WPCSD. The current staffing setup enables the successful implementation of HLPs and EBPs in special education practices.

WPCSD has laid a strong foundation in several areas related to having high expectations for all students. The belief that all students with disabilities can achieve at high levels must be universally embraced to truly foster a culture of high expectations. This belief, known as academic optimism, must permeate every classroom and every school. It involves not only holding students to high standards but also fostering a collective sense among faculty and staff that they have the capacity to make a positive difference in student outcomes. When this optimism is coupled with a commitment to presumed competence, which assumes that all students can meet grade-level standards with the proper support, the result is a powerful combination that can drive student success.

Onsite Classroom Visits and Student Shadowing

Similarly to the data in WPCSD’s SPP/APR report for SY22-23, there were both strengths and areas of opportunity noted during onsite visits. Specifically, the ICT classes represent a strong collaborative teaching model at the elementary level. These classes allow for a variety of support options, including parallel teaching, one teach/one assist, station teaching, and in some cases, two teachers providing whole group instruction and then supporting students during independent work. This variety of collaborative teaching structures represented a comprehensive model to support students in the general education setting. Students appeared to be engaged throughout the lessons observed and staff created a positive learning environment for students in these settings.

Conversely, in special classes, the level of rigor and presumed competence varied across programs. Some classes exhibited clear structures and routines and provided rich access to assistive technology and AAC for students to access and engage with their environment and peers. This was not the case across settings visited. For example, in some classes, there were no picture symbols being used or AAC devices to support student communication. In these settings, students were observed to be working on the same skill or task with limited differentiation and SDI even though it was evident there were varying levels of skill in the classroom.

In the general education setting, it was not always evident that accommodations or modifications were being provided to students even with Teaching Assistants and special educators present in the classroom. It often appeared they were providing scaffolded support for students, but not accommodations that would help the student access the curriculum independently. While there were

¹⁶¹ [Website Council for Exceptional Children: High Leverage Practices](#)

some classes that had clear evidence of accommodations and modifications being provided, it was not a consistent practice observed. In some cases, the general education teacher appeared to rely heavily on the special education teacher to provide accommodations and modifications, when it should be provided by both educators in collaboration. This was largely observed in the CT services model, where special educators pushed in for approximately 80 minutes of instruction. If the general education teacher was giving a whole group lesson, the special educator was often observing the lesson or circulating around the room keeping students on task. After the whole group lesson concluded, the special educator would sometimes pull a group of students or would support during independent work. It appeared to be a missed opportunity to leverage special educator expertise in the CT services model for several classrooms visited. While it was reported this was often due to scheduling, particular focus should be placed on this model to ensure that students are receiving high quality SDI that is aligned to their needs and the minutes in their IEPs.

While it was not always evident that accommodations and modifications were provided, Teaching Assistants were consistently involved in the classroom and working with students across all schools visited. This was a strength, as it was clear that Teaching Assistants were engaged with students and supporting them in a variety of ways. Overall, Teaching Assistants consistently added value to the classrooms visited.

Additionally, there are no guiding criteria for students placed in special classes, as noted in other sections of this report. Staff articulated not knowing how or why a student was placed in an 8:1:3 class versus a 12:1:2 class. Onsite visits did not provide clarification in how placement decisions are made related to programming offered in specialized classes. In some cases, medically fragile students were placed in classes with students on the autism spectrum with greater language abilities and skills. There also did not appear to be a clear methodology in these classes, and students were paired in ways that may not be conducive to their learning unless the teacher is highly skilled in modifying and differentiating content.

However, specialized reading instruction offers a notable example of a responsive and promising District initiative. The introduction of a districtwide reading program rooted in the Science of Reading (SOR) includes training for both general and special education teachers and represents a comprehensive effort to prioritize literacy for all students. Several intervention sessions were observed and there were model practices observed in several of these intervention sessions.

Parents who participated in the study showed a different perspective. Survey responses from WPCSD parents reflect a generally positive perception of the District's efforts to foster inclusivity, support, and high expectations for students with disabilities. 80 percent of parent respondents agree that their child is a valued member of the school community and is included in both academic and non-academic activities. Additionally, 85 percent of parents feel that building administrators set a positive and welcoming tone within their schools, while 70 percent believe these administrators actively support special education.

Parents also felt the expectations set by educators were high, with 75 percent agreeing that their child's special education teachers hold high expectations for their child. Similarly, 77 percent of parents agree that their child's general education teachers maintain high expectations. These findings suggest that WPCSD has made significant strides in creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment that promotes high expectations for all students from most parents' perspectives.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The data from WPCSD's 2022-23 SPP/APR provides a comprehensive overview of the District's performance in supporting students with disabilities. Several key accomplishments highlight the District's dedication to improving educational outcomes for students with IEPs, including an impressive graduation rate of 85.2 percent—far exceeding the state target—and a significantly lower dropout rate. Middle school Math proficiency, particularly in Grade 8, reflects the District's ability to set and achieve high expectations in certain academic areas. These successes underscore the District's potential to build upon these strengths and broaden their impact across additional grade levels and subject areas.

Despite these achievements, the data also revealed areas that require targeted intervention, especially in ELA and Math at elementary and high school. Proficiency rates for students with disabilities in WPCSD fall below state targets. This trend, along with gaps in alternate academic achievement standards, points to the need for a districtwide effort to enhance academic rigor and ensure that students with disabilities

are receiving adequate support to succeed academically. These findings suggest that while WPCSD is capable of high performance, there is an urgent need to extend this success to additional academic areas and grade levels to close achievement gaps.

Onsite observations revealed a range of strengths in WPCSD's inclusive settings, particularly at the elementary level. There was evidence of strong co-teaching practices at the elementary level, including safe and well-managed classroom environments where students were actively engaged in instruction. ICT classrooms demonstrated effective instructional practices and specialized reading support for students was also a notable strength

Opportunities for growth were identified in increasing the use of SDI in some ICT and CT settings and further incorporating UDL principles to ensure all students can access lessons through multiple entry points. While there was evidence of effective practices, inconsistencies were noted in the implementation of assistive technology/AAC, accommodations, and modifications across classrooms, particularly in Special Classes. Building greater consistency in high-quality, differentiated instructional practices will be critical to fully meeting the diverse needs of students with disabilities and ensuring equitable access to the curriculum.

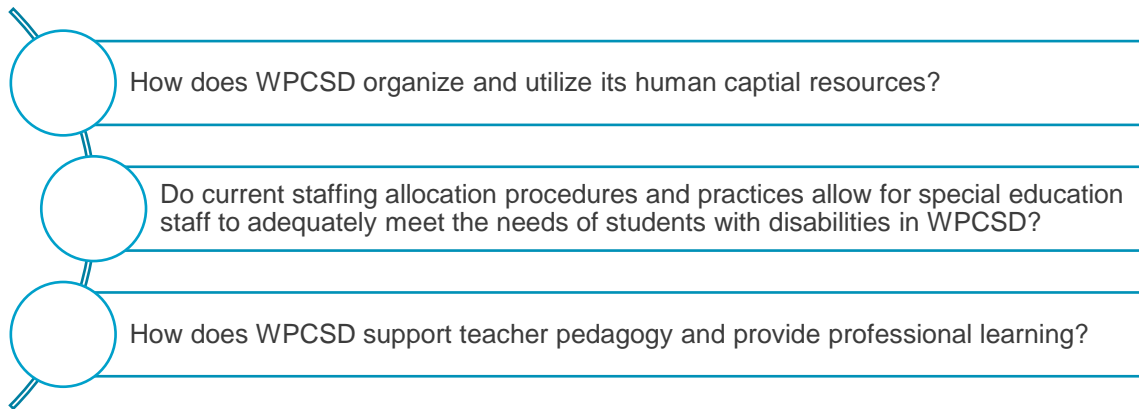
V. HUMAN CAPITAL AND LEADERSHIP

OVERVIEW

This domain within the framework emphasizes the critical role of leadership and human capital in creating an effective special education system. Leadership is essential for fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability, and student-centered decision-making, where school administrators and staff share ownership of the success of students with disabilities. Effective leadership also involves coordinating efforts with community organizations to enhance outcomes for these students.

Equally important is the investment in human capital, ensuring that the staff, from recruitment to retirement, are highly qualified and continuously trained to meet the diverse needs of learners. High-quality staffing, strategic caseload management, and ongoing professional learning are vital components in this area. Experts emphasize that addressing staff shortages in special education should focus on recruiting and retaining teachers with the right skills and passion, placing them in the right schools, and providing them with the professional development they need to succeed. When leadership and human capital align, they create a powerful force for improving student outcomes in special education.

The essential questions we answer in this chapter are:



Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Retention and Tenure. Of the staff members interviewed, the majority held tenure. Overall, the District has low turnover rates for staff. • Collaboration. Staff expressed their desire to work with one another and value their coworkers' professional experience. • High Quality Staff. Districtwide, WPCSD has compassionate and caring staff aiming to support the needs of students with disabilities. • Students with IEPs to Special Educator Ratios. Student to special educator ratios in WPCSD are all in alignment with NY state guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing Perceptions Related to Inclusive Practices. Varying perspectives exist in WPCSD between special education leadership and building staff when implementing the District's vision of inclusive practices. • Professional Development. The District should optimize the use of time during professional development workshops by focusing on practical, classroom-ready resources and training. Workshops should prioritize actionable strategies over introductory or theoretical sessions to better support educators' immediate needs. • Class Sizes for ICT at MS/HS. The class sizes for ICT at middle school and high school are within state expectations. However, the variability in student needs,

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students with IEPs to Paraprofessional Ratios. Student to paraprofessional ratios in WPCSD are all in alignment with NY state guidance. Some classrooms and/or buildings have assignments of paraprofessionals exceeding state requirements.	<p>both academically and behaviorally, are difficult to address adequately.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restructure of Administrative Leadership in WPCSD. Additional administrators are necessary to support long-term, sustainable execution of special education policies and initiatives. CSE/CPSE chair roles should be converted to year-round positions along with 2 new administrator roles as part of the leadership restructuring.
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SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFFING FORMULAS AND CASELOAD ANALYSIS

Creating a special education staffing formula is a complex and nuanced task and requires continuous monitoring and flexibility. Staffing needs change continuously throughout the school year, as students move between schools or in/out of the district and new students are found eligible for services. A staffing formula is also impacted by districts' varying implementation of inclusive practices and the degree to which they employ more "push-in" type support versus more "pull out." According to the Inclusive Schools Network:

*The task of determining staffing needs at a school and across a district is challenging because the type and level of support required by each student is determined on an individual basis through the IEP team, yet these student-by-student decisions are significantly impacted by numerous contextual variables. These variables include, but are not limited to, philosophy of administrators and teachers, school leadership factors, classroom practices that support diverse learners, the degree of collaboration and joint ownership for all learners across the entire faculty, and the ability of the leaders to organize the delivery of services through innovative scheduling and staffing practices.*¹⁶²

As such, special education staffing formulas can differ considerably between states and across districts within the same state. According to a March 2020 study, twenty states have specific policies about caseloads. Each varied widely and used different combinations of factors such as disability category, age range, average caseload, maximum caseload, service provider, amount of time the student is served in special education, type of program, formulas, or some combination of two or more characteristics to determine appropriate caseloads.¹⁶³

Several states and professional organizations have created resource guides to assist districts with creating staffing formulas. These resources are designed to aid in the analysis of instructional staff (special education teachers and paraprofessionals) needed as a minimum starting point for providing a full continuum of services to meet the needs identified in students' IEPs.

Before making final staffing decisions, additional considerations to consider include:

- The severity of student needs and types of support services needed;
- Implementation of a full continuum of service delivery models; and
- Compliance with special education legal requirements.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Inclusive Schools Network. (2023, September 23). *Staffing Model Resources*. Inclusive Schools Network.

<https://inclusiveschools.org/resources/staffing-models/>

¹⁶³ Hogue, L. B., & Taylor, S. S. (2020). A review of special education caseload policies state by state: What impact do they have? *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 33(1), 1-11.

¹⁶⁴ *Resources - Staffing Considerations*. Special Education - Education Service Center, Region 20 (ESC-20). (n.d.). <https://www.esc20.net/apps/pages/special-education-resources-staffing-considerations>

Rather than focus solely on caseloads, several guides advocate for the use of a workload analysis, which factors in tasks such as IEP development and progress monitoring in addition to teaching time per special educator.¹⁶⁵ A caseload is different from a workload.

- A caseload is a head count, or the number of students with an IEP for which a special educator is responsible.
- A workload includes all the responsibilities required of special educators and is based on the severity of students' needs.¹⁶⁶

In Illinois, the State Special Education Rule transitioned from a caseload to a workload staffing model in 2007. This requires districts to establish limits on the workload of special educators to ensure the provision of all services required under students' IEPs, as well as ancillary and support services, at the necessary level of intensity. Each district's plan must include an analysis of the activities for which special educators are responsible, such as individualized instruction, consultative services, attendance at IEP meetings, and compliance-related paperwork.

Other states have adopted or are exploring similar approaches. For example, Minnesota developed tools for workload analysis to assess the time and effort required for various educator responsibilities, helping districts allocate resources effectively.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Pennsylvania introduced a workload framework that accounts for direct instruction, indirect services like collaboration with general educators, and IEP management, ensuring equitable staffing practices.¹⁶⁸ These models emphasize the growing need to balance workload demands with educator availability, particularly as inclusionary practices like co-teaching become more widespread.

For additional details, see sources like the Pennsylvania State Toolkit and recent updates on workload practices in school-based settings from organizations like Education Resources and NEA's policy resources.¹⁶⁹ These provide examples and calculation methods for implementing workload-focused models effectively.

Additional information on the impact and intersection of caseload are included in the sections below.

- 15% of staff agree there is an adequate number of staff to implement students' IEPs with fidelity.
- 18% of staff agree related service providers can meet the service times of all students on their caseloads.
- 18% of staff agree services for English Learner students with disabilities at their school are meeting students' needs.
- 56% of staff agree special education teachers are effectively used to support the needs of students with IEPs.
- 59% of staff agree related service providers at their school are used effectively to support the needs of students with IEPs.
- 16% of staff agree they are provided adequate time/coverage to develop IEPs.

Staff Survey

¹⁶⁵ Ibid; Yecke, C. P., & Hale, N. A. (n.d.). *Workload considerations for effective special education*. https://www.mnase.org/uploads/4/7/7/9/47793163/bullard_workload_manual.pdf

¹⁶⁶ Hackett, J., Kostecki, C., Thomas, T., Rodick, B., & Loizzi, M. (n.d.). *Work load plans for special educators: Navigating the process effectively*. Illinois State Board of Education. https://www.isbe.net/Documents/work_load_plans.pdf

¹⁶⁷ Minnesota Department of Education. (n.d.). *Workload tools for special educators*. Retrieved from the Minnesota Department of Education official site.

¹⁶⁸ Pennsylvania State Toolkit. (n.d.). *Special education caseload vs. workload analysis model*. Pennsylvania Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Retrieved from [https://psha.org/pdfs/school-based-toolkit/Special%20Ed%20Caseload%20vs%20Workload_NBI49_Backgrounder_v2%20\(002\).pdf](https://psha.org/pdfs/school-based-toolkit/Special%20Ed%20Caseload%20vs%20Workload_NBI49_Backgrounder_v2%20(002).pdf)

¹⁶⁹ National Education Association (NEA). (n.d.). *Special education workload analysis: Policy considerations*. Retrieved from <https://educationresourcesinc.com>

District Practices

New York State Department of Education (NYSED) has established the following guidelines when determining caseload size:¹⁷⁰

- **Consultant Teacher Services**
 - a. The total number of students with disabilities assigned to a consultant teacher shall not exceed 20.
- **Integrated Co-Teaching Services**
 - a. The maximum number of students with disabilities receiving integrated co-teaching services in a class shall be determined in accordance with the students' individual needs as recommended on their IEPs, provided that the number of students with disabilities in such classes shall not exceed 12 students, unless a variance is provided
- **Special Classes**
 - a. Special class size for students with disabilities. The maximum class size for those students whose special education needs consist primarily of the need for specialized instruction which can best be accomplished in a self-contained setting shall not exceed 15 students, or 12 students in a State-operated or State-supported school, except that:
 - The maximum class size for special classes containing students whose management needs interfere with the instructional process, to the extent that an additional adult is needed within the classroom to assist in the instruction of such students, shall not exceed 12 students, with one or more supplementary school personnel assigned to each class during periods of instruction.
 - The maximum class size for special classes containing students whose management needs are determined to be highly intensive and requiring a high degree of individualized attention and intervention, shall not exceed six students, with one or more supplementary school personnel assigned to each class during periods of instruction.
 - The maximum class size for special classes containing students whose management needs are determined to be intensive and requiring a significant degree of individualized attention and intervention, shall not exceed eight students, with one or more supplementary school personnel assigned to each class during periods of instruction.
 - The maximum class size for those students with severe multiple disabilities, whose programs consist primarily of habilitation and treatment, shall not exceed 12 students. In addition to the teacher, the staff/student ratio shall be one staff person to three students. The additional staff may be teachers, supplementary school personnel and/or related service providers

EXHIBIT 41. NEW YORK STATE REGULATION 8 CRR-NY 200.6 PROVIDES GUIDANCE ON THE STUDENT TO EDUCATOR RATIO IN THE CONTINUUM OF SERVICES.

Special Class 12:1 / 15:1	Special Class 12:1:1	Special Class 8:1:1	Special Class 6:1:1	Special Class 12:1:4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12:1 (Only for elementary and junior/middle levels in NYC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than 12 students per class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than eight students per class • One full time sped teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than six students per class • One full time sped teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than 12 students per class • One full time sped teacher

¹⁷⁰ 200.6 Continuum of services. (n.d). govt.westlaw.
[https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/l09aea522c22211dda1bb852bdc84e3be?viewType=FullText&originationContext=document&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&bhpc=1](https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/l09aea522c22211dda1bb852bdc84e3be?viewType=FullText&originationContext=document&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default)&bhpc=1)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than 12 or 15 students per class depending on level • One full-time special ed teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One full time special ed teacher • One full time para 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One full time para 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One full time para 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One additional staff person (para) for every three students
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- **Resource Room Programs**

- An instructional group which includes students with disabilities in a resource room program shall not exceed five students per teacher.
- The total number of students with a disability assigned to a resource room teacher shall not exceed 20 students.

- **Related Services**

- The frequency, duration and location of each such service shall be in the IEP, based on the individual student's need for the service.
- For students with disabilities determined to need speech and language services, the total caseload of such students for teachers providing such services shall not exceed 65.

For a more thorough analysis of staffing, PCG calculated the number of students with disabilities by program setting at each WPCSD school and cross referenced that with staffing data for special educators and paraprofessionals. The primary LRE (program) settings are reported out in the charts below and align with the WPCSD Special Education District Plan (2024-2027). It is important to note that multiple datasets were analyzed and compiled to create the charts within. It is advised the WPCSD adopt one, consistent reporting mechanism to compile and track this information for reporting purposes given the complexities of caseload analysis, particularly at the secondary level.

Caseload ratios for WPCSD elementary school special educators was calculated using two datasets. Dataset one was the number of special educators, by school, assigned to a program (i.e., ICT, CT, Special Class, etc.) This information was cross-referenced with the number of students with IEPs served in each program and by school. The average caseload was calculated by dividing the number of students with IEPs served in each program and by the number of special educator(s) assigned to that program. For example, "Elementary School A" has 32 students with IEPs served in the ICT program. There are 4 special educators assigned to "Elementary School A" to serve students in the ICT program. The caseload ratio for this program would be 8:1, or 8 students to 1 special educator. It is important to note that numerical caseload analysis, such as this example or the WPCSD data presented below, does not account for the complexities and nuances related to the provision of special education services.

Elementary school special educator caseloads in WPCSD are below or considerably below ratios set forth by NYSED in all program types analyzed as part of this study. Special educators at the elementary level are assigned by program (i.e., ICT, CT, Special Class, etc.) and serve almost exclusively in that capacity. That allows for a more streamlined approach to collaborative planning with general education partners and delivering specially designed instruction.

EXHIBIT 42. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATOR CASELOAD ANALYSIS^{171 172}

	ICT	CT	Special Class: 12:1:1 or	Special Class:	Special Class:	
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¹⁷¹ Staffing data provided to PCG by WPCSD, Fall 2024

¹⁷² Elementary special educator caseload data provided to PCG by WPCSD, Fall 2024

			12:1:2	8:1:2 or 8:1:3	Passages	
School	Average caseload			# of Special Educators by School		
Church Street	N/A	14.3:1	N/A	7.33:1	N/A	6
George Washington	7.83:1	14.33:1	9.67:1	N/A	N/A	12
Mamaroneck Avenue	7.5:1	15.67:1	8.5:1	N/A	N/A	11
Post Road	N/A	15.33:1	N/A	N/A	7:1	5
Ridgeway	7.67:1	13.3:1	N/A	6:1 (8:1:3) 7.5 (8:1:2)	N/A	12

Special educators in middle school and high school have higher caseloads when compared to their elementary counterparts. Caseload data presented for middle school and high school special educators must be interpreted with caution as caseloads often include more than one setting type (i.e., ICT, self-contained, resource room, etc.). Caseload analysis, by special educator at the secondary level, would be a more accurate representation of the diversity of caseload structure. Due to the nature of caseload structuring, there is no feasible measure to analyze across the datasets at the secondary level. However, middle school and high school special educators appear to be carrying a higher caseload and would benefit from a workload analysis.

EXHIBIT 43. WHITE PLAINS MIDDLE SCHOOL: NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH IEPs BY PROGRAM COMPARED TO NUMBER OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS^{173174 * **}

	ICT	CT	Special Class	Special Class Subject Area			
White Plains Middle School (East View and Highlands campuses)	Number of Students with IEPs by Program				Total # of Students IEPs	# of Special Educators	Average number of Special Educator to Student with IEP
	111	97	22	46	276	18	15.33:1

*Average to be interpreted with caution. Some special educators have higher caseload numbers than represented due to serving in dual capacities (e.g., ICT caseload of 10 students and a Self-contained caseload of 14 students for a total of 24 students)

**One student may have multiple services, e.g. resource room and integrated co-teaching¹⁷⁵

EXHIBIT 44. HIGH SCHOOL: NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH IEPs BY PROGRAM AND BY SCHOOL COMPARED TO NUMBER OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS^{176177 * **}

¹⁷³ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027
¹⁷⁴ Staffing data provided to PCG by WPCSD, Fall 2024
¹⁷⁵ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027
¹⁷⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷⁷ Staffing data provided to PCG by WPCSD, Fall 2024

	RR	ICT	CT	Special Class	Special Class Subject Area			
White Plains High School (White Plains and Rochambeau campuses)	Number of Students with IEPs by Program					Total # of Students IEPs	# of Special Educators	Average number of Special Educator to Student with IEP
	62	157	36	27	223	505	32	15.78:1

*Average

to be interpreted with caution. Some special educators have higher caseload numbers than represented due to serving in dual capacities (e.g., ICT caseload of 10 students and a Self-contained caseload of 14 students for a total of 24 students)

**One student may have multiple services, e.g. resource room and integrated co-teaching¹⁷⁸

Survey respondents reported that 42 percent of staff surveyed agree that special education teachers are effectively used to support the needs of students with IEPs. When analyzing responses by subgroup, approximately 40 percent of general educators believe that special education teachers are used effectively to support the needs of students with IEPs compared to 80 percent of Related Service Providers and 91 percent of building administrators. WPCSD focus group participants also echoed the need for additional special educators, particularly in the ICT or CT roles, to best meet the needs of students with disabilities. The breadth and depth of needs articulated by WPCSD study participants, both academic and behavioral, demonstrated by students with IEPs in the ICT and CT setting has impacted staffing perceptions.

It was noted during PCG onsite visits that some special educators, particularly at the secondary level, were supporting students with IEPs across multiple settings. For example, one special educator may serve in the CT capacity, pull-out capacity via resource room, and/or the ICT capacity. This approach potentially increases the number of required prep times for subject areas with general educator colleagues. Additionally, it increases the total number of students with IEPs on special educator caseloads. WPCSD has sufficient staff to support students with IEPs. However, the Master Schedule must be designed to maximize special education staff outputs, particularly efficiency and quality of specially designed instruction.

General educators, and other school-based survey and focus group participants, expressed hesitation in their ability to support students with disabilities through inclusive models of service delivery. A lack of access to professional development was not frequently cited as a reason for this hesitation. Rather, this feedback in focus groups was often paired with questions regarding the appropriateness of ICT and CT placements of students with IEPs who were believed to be better served in more restrictive settings. WPCSD special education leadership has invested in multiple modes of professional development and classroom-based coaching support, to promote co-teaching practices. Survey results do not reflect those investments in professional development on co-teaching have yielded the intended outcomes for WPCSD staff. As reported previously, when asked if WPCSD has established standards for delivering co-teaching/collaborative instruction, 31 percent of general educators, 50 percent of special educators, and 42 percent of teaching assistants agreed with this statement.

The disconnect can be attributed to several possibilities. It is plausible that WPCSD staff lack clarity in how to provide specially designed instruction effectively, particularly in the ICT and CT models. It can also be attributed to the belief that special education services can yield more positive outcomes for students with more significant manifestations of their disabilities in self-contained programming than through the inclusive model being promoted in WPCSD. An increased percentage of students with high incidence disabilities make academic progress in general education classes compared to students in traditional resource settings.¹⁷⁹ The inclusive education literature base does not support the concept that restrictive

¹⁷⁸ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

¹⁷⁹ "Inclusive Education Research and Practice", 2022. Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education. Bui, X., Quirk, C., Almazan, S. and Valenti, M. (2010). Inclusion Works! Elkridge, MD: Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education.

settings for students with low incidence disabilities yields more positive academic or behavioral outcomes.¹⁸⁰

Conversely, parents of students with disabilities who participated in this study did not express staffing concerns related to FAPE or IEP implementation. Most parent survey respondents shared a positive view of special education services in WPCSD with (86%) reporting teachers respond to their concerns within a reasonable amount of time. Additionally, 85 percent of parents in the survey report having good working relationships with their child’s teacher(s). Most parent survey respondents (71%) are satisfied with their child’s overall special education services. Special educators were hailed by one parent as “unsung heroes advocating for students with disabilities” by “going above and beyond”. Other parents acknowledged how school-based staff engage parents by producing classroom newsletters and working diligently to facilitate meaningful relationships.

Of the parents who shared concerns of their experiences in WPCSD related to special education, those cited were not directly tied to staffing inadequacies. More than half (60%) of parents reported there is an adequate number of special educators to implement their child’s IEP with consistency. Similarly, 59 percent of parents reported there is sufficient special education and related services and placements to serve their child. More detail regarding parent perspectives can be found in the Family and Community Engagement chapter later in this report.

Teaching Assistants and Aide Staffing Assignment by School

WPCSD has established the following guidelines for assigning Teaching Assistants and Aides throughout the District:¹⁸¹

- **Special Class TA:** Teaching Assistant assigned to special class.
- **Special Class Coverage:** Additional Teaching Assistant or Aide assigned to the special classes to cover absences, lunch, etc.
- **CT:** Teaching Assistant or Aide assigned to the Consultant Teacher classes.
- **ICT:** Teaching Assistant or Aide assigned to the Integrated Co-Teaching classes.
- **ISP:** Teaching Assistant or Aide assigned to the Integrated Support Program (ISP) program.
- **ISS:** Teaching Assistant or Aide assigned to the In School Suspension class.
- **Building:** Each elementary school in WPCSD is assigned 7 additional Teaching Assistants and/or Aides for support.
- **Comp:** Teaching Assistant or Aide assigned to the building.
- **IEP:** Aides assigned to a student’s IEP and included in the overall count for a building.
- **Kinder:** Each elementary school in WPCSD Kindergarten classroom is assigned a Teaching Assistant and/or Aide for support.
- **Aide:** Additional Aides assigned to a building for support.

EXHIBIT 45. TEACHING ASSISTANT AND AIDE ASSIGNMENTS BY SCHOOL

Teaching Assistant and Aide Assignments by School**												
School	Special Class TA	Special Class Coverage	CT	ICT	ISS	ISP	Building	Comp	IEP	Kinder	Aide	Total
Church Street ES	6	1	3				7	1	1	5		24
George Washington ES	5	1	3	1			7	1	6	5	3	32

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ WPCSD Special Education District Plan 2024-2027

Mamaroneck Avenue ES	4	1	3	1			7	1	3	5		25
Post Road ES	4	1	3				7	1	1	5		22
Ridgeway ES	7	1	3	1			7	1	5	5		30
Eastview MS			1		1	1	2	1	2		2	10
Highlands MS	4	1		2	1	1	4	1	8		1	23
White Plains HS	6	1			1	1	4	1	10		2	26
Rochambeau			4									4
Total												196

Staffing data gathered from WPCSD revealed the abundance of teaching assistants across the District, particularly at the elementary level. Each elementary school is provided seven teaching assistants totaling to 35 staff members across all elementary schools. Similarly, every Kindergarten grade is provided with one teaching assistant totaling 25 staff members across all schools. Buildings at the middle and high school are allocated anywhere between two to four teaching assistants. Coverage support equating to 1 teaching assistant for special classes is allocated for each building except for Eastview Middle School, which does not have a Special Class.

WPCSD is not experiencing chronic vacancies or attrition in the Teaching Assistant or Aide roles which is in stark contrast to most districts throughout the country. Study participants acknowledged that the District prioritizes hiring excellent, highly qualified staff according to parents and WPCSD staff. Those serving in the Teaching Assistant and Aide positions have garnered tremendous respect from their school-based peers, often taking on some of the most challenging tasks with a positive attitude.

Parent perception of needing more paraprofessionals is likely counterintuitive to how the roles are implemented in practice given survey findings. Fifty-one percent of parents reported there is an adequate number of paraprofessionals to implement their child’s IEP with consistency. This finding is in alignment with parent requests for additional adult support and the process in how that is added to a child’s IEP. This division in perspective was apparent in survey responses from WPCSD staff:

- **Staff perceptions vary regarding the effective use of paraprofessionals** to support students with disabilities and the presence of clear plans to phase out paraprofessionals to promote student independence.
 - 65 percent of Teaching Assistants, 55 percent of school building administrators, 50 percent of Related Service Providers, 50 percent of special educators, and 47 percent of general educators **agree with this statement**.

Related Services Assignment by School

WPCSD has assigned Related Service Providers (RSPs) by school in the following manner:

EXHIBIT 46. RELATED SERVICES PROVIDER ASSIGNMENTS BY SCHOOL

Related Services Assignment by School					
School	School Psychologist	School Social Worker	Speech Pathologist	Occupational Therapist	Physical Therapist
Church Street ES	2	1	2		
George Washington ES	2	1	2.5		

Mamaroneck Avenue ES	2	1	2	Contracted	Contracted
Post Road ES	2	1	1		
Ridgeway ES	2	1	3		
Eastview MS	2	1	1		
Highlands MS	3	2	1		
White Plains HS	5	4	1		
Rochambeau	1	1	0		
Totals	21	13	13.5		

Related service provider caseload assignment data was not provided to PCG to analyze as part of this study. It was reported that all related service providers have caseloads within the state mandated allowances. An in-depth, service minute allocation analysis for Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) was conducted by WPCSD district leadership. The results indicated that when assigning time to different scopes of work, all SLPs have a workload within reasonable limits.

Survey responses from WPCSD related to RSP caseload and availability for collaboration suggest limitations in staffing:

- **Staff perceptions vary regarding related service providers ability to meet the service times** of all students on their caseloads:
 - 14 percent of general educators, 41 percent of special educators, 30 percent of Related Service Providers, 18 percent of Student Support Services, 70 percent of building administrators **agree with this statement**. Overall, 19 percent of all staff **agree with this statement**.

Comparative Staffing Analysis Across Districts

PCG conducted an analysis of caseload staffing for comparable school districts and WPCSD. In parentheses is the state acronym for reference. A summary of the findings is included below:

EXHIBIT 47. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STAFFING RATIOS¹⁸²

Comparative Analysis of Staffing Ratios (Staff to Student)						
	Percentage of SWDs	Special Educator	Teaching Asst/Aide	Psych	Speech	OT/PT
WPCSD (NY)	17%	13:1	6:1	56:1	87:1	Contractual (not reported)
District A (NY)	21%	13:1	13:1	295:1	102:1	
District B (NY)	17.8%	17:1	14:1	105:1	138:1	
District C (MA)	17%	11:1	21:1	125:1	74:1	
District D (NV)	17%	20:1	11:1	155:1	144:1	

PCG did not review written guidance detailing the model(s) used currently to allocate school-based staff members in WPCSD. Focus group and interview participant feedback spoke to the fluidity applied when addressing allocations based on building, programs, enrollment, and student numbers/need. As

¹⁸² District data obtained from NY State Data Portal: <https://data.nysed.gov/>

previously mentioned, WPCSD is not experiencing attrition by role or long-standing, difficult to fill vacancies related to the provision of special education and related services. Being understaffed in critical student facing roles did not elevate to a key finding.

Comparative districts referenced within were selected based upon a number of criteria, including percentage of students with and without disabilities in the district, and geographic location. WPCSD has the lowest staff to student ratio in 3 out of the 4 roles identified, with the exception of special educator to student. It is important to note that this comparative staffing analysis does not account for the number of students with specially designed instruction, and/or related services on their IEPs therefore must be interpreted with caution.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

One of the key areas to developing an effective special education program is through professional learning. This includes ensuring professional learning meets the needs of staff in their roles, which is different for every district and staff. Professional learning should include a balance of instructional and special education topics, as this creates a variety of options that supports all students' needs and meets staff at their level of learning in their career.

District Practices

While WPCSD offers routine professional development and training workshops, ongoing training is not mandated, leaving an immense gap in support for staff. Special education focus group participants highlighted, despite the District's large investment in professional development, the emphasis of the workshops focus on understanding regulations and introductory materials, for example IEP writing, rather than addressing the specialized needs of students with disabilities, particularly in behavior management. As noted previously, the training on IEP development has produced high quality IEPs that meet compliance standards. However, staff feel more is needed from an instructional lens to provide high quality inclusive educational services to students. A review of professional development documents provided by the District from 2016 to present was completed as part of this study.

The following professional development topics were provided to PCG by WPCSD:

1. IEP Writing and Development
2. Prior Written Notice
3. Roles and Responsibilities of Staff (E.g. CSE Chairs, Aides, Service Coordinators, Clerical Support, Co-Teachers, LPT)
4. Circle Training
5. Mindfulness Training
6. Chairperson Training – Nuts and Bolts of Special Education
7. Drafting Smart Goals
8. Eligibility under CSE and Section 504
9. Pupil Services New Teacher Training
10. TEACCH Foundation Training
11. Integrated Support Services and Programming
12. Least Restrictive Environment and District Vision for Inclusion
13. Universal Design for Learning
14. Restraint and Seclusion Training
15. Science of Reading
16. Social Emotional and Trauma Workshop

- *22% of staff believe general education teachers are provided adequate training in effectively supporting the needs of students with disabilities.*
- *17% of staff believe there is a well-articulated approach and support in their schools to address the behavioral needs of students with disabilities.*
- *33% of staff agree the district prioritizes best practices for professional development for general education teachers to better support classified students and promote inclusion.*
- *32% of all staff believe they have been provided adequate training in communicating with parents/caregivers of students with disabilities.*

Staff Survey

WPCSD has phenomenal staff members who are eager to learn more about the communities they serve. However, focus group participants identified the lack of effective professional development tools that can be realistically applied in the classroom. Survey data and focus group interviews reveal that staff do not feel they have the training to communicate with parents/caregivers of students with disabilities, leaving them ill-equipped to answer questions parents may raise.

Focus group participants believe that costs are not a concern, given the District's ample funding. Staff report the gaps exist in the insufficient time dedicated to professional development and the lack of relevant content. Staff voices offer valuable insights into the work happening on the ground. Notably staff shared their voice is not heard when it comes to professional development feedback. Many have proposed ideas that could enhance their own learning and that of their colleagues, yet they believe their suggestions are not reflected in the workshops offered. Incorporating staff feedback and mandating professional development sessions throughout the school year would foster greater cohesion and a deeper understanding of how to effectively support students with disabilities. To ensure the successful implementation of professional development tools, District leaders must collaborate closely with school principals to conduct regular, targeted check-ins with staff. Leadership should also develop and utilize structured walkthrough tools to assess and focus on key components of professional development, ensuring these practices are being effectively integrated into the classroom. Additionally, WPCSD leadership should identify and designate model classrooms that could act as on the ground training spaces for staff. These classrooms should leverage existing structures while showcasing exemplary co-teaching practices and clearly defining staff expectations, providing a framework for effective collaboration and teamwork.

- *51% of staff believe educators in their district are adequately prepared to deliver quality instruction, write standards-based IEPs, and appropriately monitor student progress and engage in the IEP process.*
- *28% of staff believe paraprofessionals are used effectively to support students with disabilities and there are clear plans to support fading paras to increase student independence.*
- *35% of staff believe professional development offerings at their schools have enabled them to better support the teaching/learning of students with IEPs.*
- *40% of staff agree professional development offerings at the district level has enabled staff to better support the teaching/learning of students with IEPs.*

Staff Survey

Many paraprofessionals and teaching assistants do not have the certifications or are not adequately trained to provide support to students with disabilities, especially those in self-contained classrooms or who have behavioral needs. During focus groups, support staff expressed their concerns about the limited professional development available to them. Although staff in self-contained classrooms are required to receive CPI certification and an annual refresher training, those in integrated Co-teaching (ICT) and Collaborative Teaching (CT) settings are not. Focus group participants echoed the need for all staff to receive CPI certification to better serve and support students with disabilities. The inconsistency in protocols across schools regarding intervention strategies, scheduling, and behavior management creates confusion around staff roles and responsibilities preventing staff from delivering effective support.

High-quality, relevant professional development for both general and special education staff is a necessity for the success of WPCSD. The District has the opportunity to strengthen its professional development framework to better support both staff and students. While steps are being taken to implement UDL training, clarity is needed on how UDL will be effectively integrated into existing practices. Meaningful inclusion cannot occur without adequately trained and supported staff who can support the diverse needs of their students. Moreover, to align with the culture of WPCSD, teachers' voices and ideas regarding professional development should be valued and sought out.

LEADERSHIP

One of the main tenets of effective leadership in special education includes shared accountability where leaders guide staff toward a common vision and values and embrace the principle that holding all students to high expectations is the shared responsibility of all. This requires leaders to empower students, staff, caregivers, and the community to share responsibility for teaching, learning, and student outcomes. Shared accountability for student learning is an ongoing and continuous process. Part of shared accountability in effective leadership is team building, in which leaders create a vision for collaboration and partnerships and develop a plan for communicating the vision with staff, families, and the community to support buy-in. This develops trust and open communication among all stakeholders. However, to do this, leaders must celebrate the small wins with their teams and model the norms of collaboration, providing and analyzing data, and presuming positive intentions. This also includes developing structures for professional learning communities and one-on-one check-ins with staff, as needed.

Effective leadership requires collaboration in which leaders intentionally design schedules and provide professional learning opportunities that promote collaboration between the district office, building leaders, educators, related service providers, and paraprofessionals. This also includes supporting meaningful collaboration with families and training staff on facilitating effective meetings with colleagues and families. To create collaborative structures, leaders must encourage the sharing of multiple perspectives, demonstrate active listening, and solicit feedback from staff, stakeholders, and community partners. This requires staff training in applying collaborative strategies such as sharing ideas, active listening, questioning, and problem-solving.¹⁸³

District Practices

The WPCSD Department of Special Education and Pupil Personnel is led by the Assistant Superintendent and two Directors. The two Directors are divided across grade level bands (CPSE through 5th grade and 6th through 12th grade). Several CSE Chairs aligned to each grade band and administrative support team report to each Director within the leadership structure. In addition to the Directors, five individuals with specific scopes of work aligned to special education and related services are supervised by the Assistant Superintendent. Those roles include: 1) Nursing Coordinator, 2) Homeless Liaison, 3) Code of Conduct/Discipline, 4) Residency, and 5) Guidance. Lastly, three Instructional Coaches report to the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Pupil Personnel. WPCSD provided the following staffing chart, as part of the data and document request, disaggregated by role and responsibility.

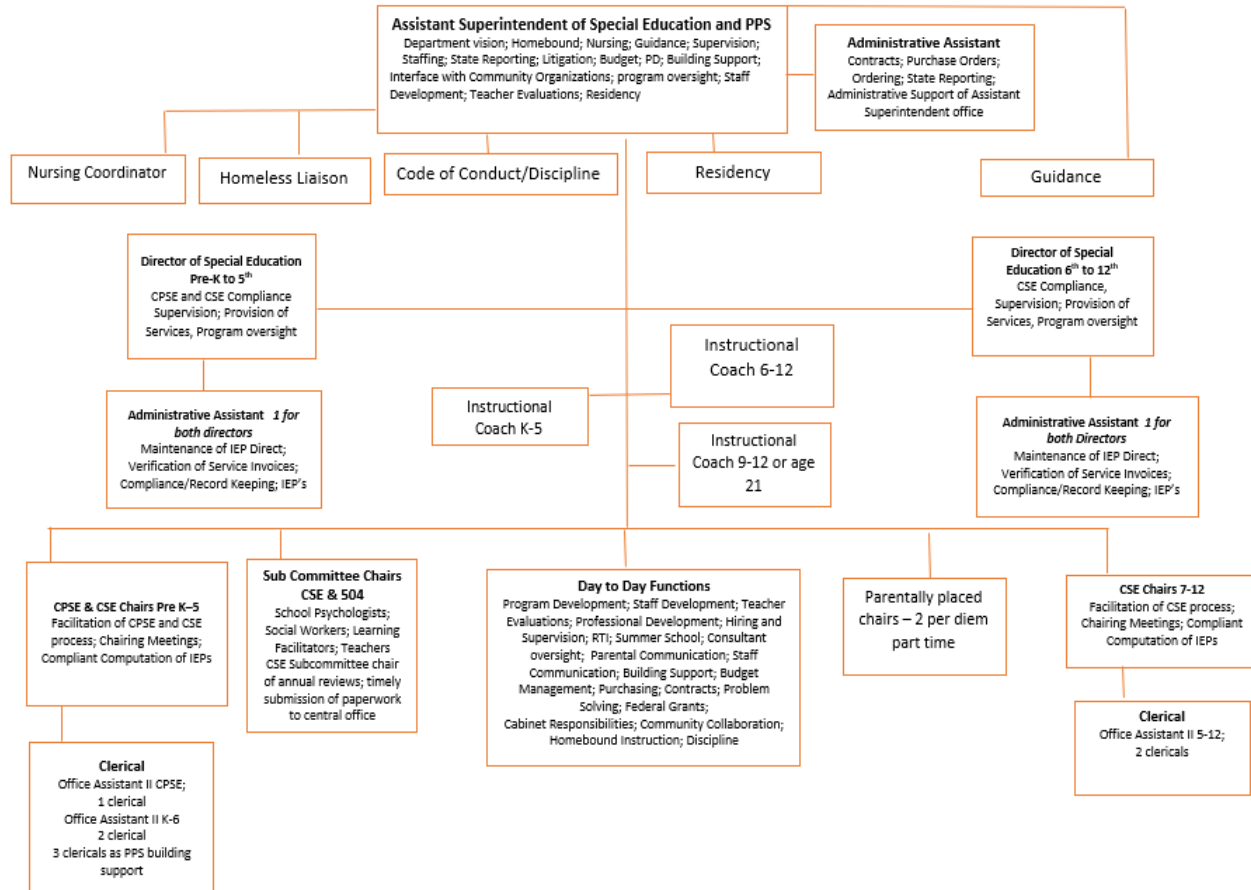
Given the District size and percentage of students with disabilities served (17% for the 2023-24SY), WPCSD is understaffed for long-term sustainability at the special education leadership level. All support roles highlighted above, including CPSE and CSE chairs, follow school-based schedules leaving the critical summer months understaffed. WPCSD senior leadership should consider shifting some or all of the CSE positions to full-time administrative roles. There is limited bandwidth for CSE/CPSE chairs to provide direct support to school-based teams regarding regulation interpretation and to foster collaboration. The addition of 2 administrators within the leadership structure will allow for a more equitable distribution of workload currently managed by CPSE/CSE chairs and the Directors thereby creating opportunity for more direct school support from all special education leaders. As noted throughout the report, the opportunity to foster meaningful collaboration between school-based teams and special education leadership is necessary to support culture changes within WPCSD. Restructuring existing roles and the addition of two new administrators will be critical to fulfil the additional recommendations found in the final section.

The disaggregation of roles and responsibilities within the Department of Special Education and Pupil Personnel has established clear expectations for each staff member. Lack of clarity in role execution for District special education staff did not emerge as a theme when analyzing data as part of this study.

¹⁸³ McLeskey, J., Maheady, L., Billingsley, B., Brownell, M.T., & Lewis, T.J. (Eds.). (2022). High leverage practices for inclusive classrooms. New York, NY: Routledge.

Similarly, school-based staff members did not express concerns about confusion of whom within the leadership structure can provide support or clarity related to special education matters.

EXHIBIT 48. WPCSD DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



The data gathered throughout this study highlights the importance of collaborative structures as a foundational theme. It also suggests opportunities for growth in fostering alignment between district leadership and building-level teams. These findings reflect the need for ongoing dialogue and a unified understanding that special education is a service rather than a place. Emphasizing this cultural shift can help ensure placement decisions align with the individualized needs of students while supporting the District's commitment to inclusive opportunities. By fostering a shared vision and improving communication pathways, the District can further strengthen its inclusive practices while addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

To do this, all staff need to establish a culture of true collaboration, where diverse perspectives are heard and integrated, which is essential for effective teamwork and decision-making. By fostering trust and ensuring that all CSE team members, including families, have a clear role in shaping decisions, the District can enhance its efforts to support students in environments that best meet their individual needs.

The variability in perceptions of support emerged as a key theme of collaboration between district leadership and school-based staff. Some WPCSD school-based staff study participants shared that they have advocated for students with disabilities, particularly those in more inclusive settings, to be provided with additional support. It was reported that those requests for support often go unmet. However, the analysis shows special education leadership has implemented a number of processes (i.e., ICT checklist) to standardize how requests for support are addressed. It is unclear why this approach of providing tools

to guide, along with coaching support, has not resonated with those asking for support. Rather, the addition of more staff or clarity on what data are required for the student to be placed in another setting have been the primary requests from staff.

Findings from this study concluded that increased collaboration between WPCSD District leadership and school-based staff is critical. Forward momentum to foster collaboration and establish expectations around the implementation of inclusive practices is paramount. Additionally, the District special education leadership team should continue to prioritize responding to concerns and facilitating ongoing communication within and between individual buildings.

The data indicates a lack of collaboration and communication between special education leadership and building level staff. While some structures exist, challenges persist in ensuring effective communication and collaboration between special education leadership and building administrators regarding the provision of special education and related services in their respective buildings. Clarity amongst all District leaders will be essential in successfully executing inclusive practices. It is recommended that WPCSD leadership and staff prioritize facilitating a culture that is student-centered, supports all stakeholder voices, and recognizes that special education is a service not a place.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Although WPCSD has made significant investments in a range of professional development workshops and training opportunities for its staff, there remains a critical need for specialized implementation support. Survey responses and focus group discussions revealed gaps in the current PD offerings in WPCSD. Specific requests for support included direct, 1:1 intervention for students and instructional modeling in the classroom. Current instructional and behavioral coaching professional development models in WPCSD focus on building the capacity of educators. To address these gaps, the District can integrate teachers' voices and feedback into decision-making regarding upcoming professional development offerings.

Analysis of data gathered for this section of the report has yielded two key findings: 1) staff genuinely care about students across all roles and levels, and 2) District leadership strived for transparency and buy-in from staff when rolling out student-focused initiatives.

Findings from this study concluded that increased collaboration between WPCSD District leadership and school-based staff is critical. Forward momentum to foster collaboration and establish expectations around the implementation of inclusive practices is paramount. Additionally, the District special education leadership team should continue to prioritize responding to concerns and facilitating ongoing communication within and between individual buildings.

The data indicates a lack of collaboration and communication between special education leadership and building level staff. While some structures exist, challenges persist in ensuring effective communication and collaboration between special education leadership and building administrators regarding the provision of special education and related services in their respective buildings. Clarity amongst all District leaders will be essential in successfully executing inclusive practices. It is recommended that WPCSD leadership and staff prioritize facilitating a culture that is student-centered, supports all stakeholder voices, and recognizes that special education is a service not a place.

Considering these findings, it is recommended that the District take proactive measures to establish clear, collaborative structures to facilitate effective communication and coordination among District and building-level teams. By fostering a culture of collaboration and ensuring consistent messaging across all levels of the organization, the District can better support the needs of students with disabilities and promote inclusive practices districtwide in alignment with the District's vision.

VI. SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

OVERVIEW

This domain in the framework emphasizes the importance of systems and structures within an effective special education system. This includes defining expectations for service delivery, resource allocation, and data management infrastructure to guide data-driven decisions.

This domain includes the following key areas for effective systems and structures in special education:

- Vision and Strategic Plan
- Equitable Funding
- Policy and Procedures
- Data Quality, Culture, and Capacity

The essential questions we answer in this chapter are:

How does WPCSD allocate resources in a way that facilitates a maximum return on district investment?

How does budget management occur? How are grant funds accessed and used?

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision. Teaching staff and building administrators believe in a vision of inclusive education for many students receiving special education services. • Standard Operating Procedures. The District has a robust standard operating procedures manual available on SharePoint for all District employees to access. • Special Education School Based Expenditures. Pupil expenditures for students with disabilities are consistent with comparison districts in Westchester County. • Financial Commitment to Expanding the Continuum of Services. The District is opening additional classrooms for students with autism, with plans to open another 12:1:2 classroom for kindergarteners with level 2:3 autism in the coming year. This marks the third consecutive year of opening such classrooms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision Implementation. Teaching staff and building administrators deviate from the inclusive vision for students with significant disabilities. • Awareness and Use of Standard Operating Procedures. Staff awareness and use of Standard Operating Procedures is limited. • Progress Monitoring Data. There are inconsistent systems and repositories for student progress monitoring data. • MTSS Data Collection. Data collection occurring across buildings is inconsistent. • Data Collection Expectations for CSE Referrals. There is inconsistent understanding around data collection between CSEs and teachers for referrals.

VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN

In a recent article from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the association underscored the importance of developing an instructional vision and strategic plan at the district level.¹⁸⁴ Quality instruction does not happen spontaneously and requires direction and clarity for leaders and educators. Review and revisions to a district's strategic plan should occur every few years and identify district priorities that incorporate school-improvement recommendations from state education agencies and national organizations to identify areas of growth. From this district vision and strategic plan, schools can create their own individual improvement plans in alignment with the district's goals. As noted in the article from ASCD:

When leaders connect school improvement plans to the work of improving student outcomes, they create strategic purpose, helping staff refocus on instruction that supports the district's vision. District leaders could craft a vision of high-quality instruction on their own, but to truly achieve a vision of shared ownership, assembling a team of teachers, instructional leaders, and principals is critical.¹⁸⁵

Developing an instructional vision and strategic plan supports schools in identifying their own priority areas and professional learning to achieve these goals. This should align with one common, overarching instructional vision for the district. Furthermore, an instructional vision will support personalized learning for staff, so staff receive differentiated professional development and coaching needed to meet the district's priority areas while improving student outcomes. The instructional vision and strategic plan become the driver for district conversations and decision-making across all departments and schools.

District Practices

NYSED has published the "Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities" to serve as a "framework of expectations to lay the foundation for improved instruction and results for students with disabilities." It is the mission of NYSED, Office of Special Education, in partnership with all offices with NYSED to "ensure that students with disabilities have opportunities to benefit from high-quality instruction, to reach the same standards as all students, and to leave school prepared to successful transition to post school learning, living, and working."¹⁸⁶ Procedural rights and protections afforded to students with disabilities and their parents, at the state and federal level, must be adhered to when executing the seven research and evidence-based core principles and practices in the Blueprint. It is advised that "school districts and school are encouraged to use these principles to review practice and to identify and act on areas where improvement is needed."¹⁸⁷

The seven "Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities" Guiding Principles include:

1. Students engage in self-advocacy and are involved in determining their own educational goals and plans.
2. Parents, and other family members, are engaged as meaningful partners in the special education process and the education of their child.
3. Teachers design, provide and assess the effectiveness of specially designed instruction to provide access for students with disabilities to participate and progress in the general education curriculum.
4. Teachers provide research-based instructional teaching and learning strategies and supports for students with disabilities.
5. Schools provide multi-tiered systems of behavioral and academic support.
6. Schools provide high-quality inclusive programs and activities.
7. Schools provide appropriate instruction for students with disabilities in career development and opportunities to participate in work-based learning.

¹⁸⁴ Burroughs, S. (2023, January 4). *Articulating an instructional vision for your district*. ASCD. <https://ascd.org/blogs/articulating-an-instructional-vision-for-your-district>

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ New York State Education Department. (n.d.). *Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities*, Office of Special Education.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

Throughout this engagement, WPCSD staff have referenced the Blueprint. Likewise, WPCSD special education leadership and support team often refer to the Blueprint and regulatory guidance when providing a basis for student-led decision-making. These seven principles serve as a cornerstone for WPCSD and NY State in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. WPCSD's intention to create connections is a practice to be celebrated and maintained as it provides the purpose for foundational work.

At WPCSD, the Office of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services has a vision that emphasizes inclusion and the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. As noted on the Office's webpage:

Our office provides programs and services for students ages 3 - 21. We strive to build an inclusive school setting where students with learning differences, receive their specialized instruction, to the extent possible, alongside their general education peers. Collaboration with District staff, parents and community ensure quality programs and services.

Districtwide, many staff agree with this vision. At the same time, a disconnect exists between this departmental vision and the beliefs of some staff members, both teachers and administrators. This discrepancy is particularly evident when it comes to students with more significant disabilities. As noted in other parts of this report, some staff members feel these students would be better served in more restrictive educational settings. The beliefs shared did not appear to be opposed to the concept of inclusion, rather individuals believing that students with disabilities who have more complex needs are not being met through inclusive practices.

The following information was gathered from survey data with both teachers and administrators.

Based on survey data:

- Many comments highlight the District's commitment and vision to creating an inclusive environment for students with disabilities.
- There is a strong culture of acceptance and inclusion across schools.
- Students with disabilities are treated respectfully and included as part of the WPCSD community.
- There is a move towards more inclusive models and co-teaching arrangements that are seen as beneficial.
- Multiple comments mention the District's focus on providing services in the least restrictive environment possible for students.

Based on data gathered from surveys, staff shared the following concerns specific to, and sometimes contradictory of, the District's vision of inclusion:

- Students with disabilities are placed in general education settings without adequate support.
- There is a need for a broader continuum of services and more specialized program options similar to the former continuum of alternative placements offered in WPCSD.
- Some staff have expressed concerns that administrative decisions may not always fully incorporate teacher input, leading to a perception that these decisions may not align with the realities of the classroom.
- There is a need for equitable access to resources and services for all students, particularly ELLs.

To articulate the District's vision for inclusive practices, special education leadership developed a framework in August 2018 titled "Three Year Expectations" to guide the implementation and expansion of the ICT model. This framework targeted three key areas: skill-specific professional development, fostering mindset shifts, and enhancing instructional practices. While additional steps taken to execute the framework were not available for analysis as part of this study, the document reflects a collaborative vision for how the ICT model should function within WPCSD.

As part of this initiative, staff participated in a team-building retreat in August 2018, which included a Ropes Course activity. This experience served as a foundation for discussions about parallels between

the challenges and teamwork required in the course and those necessary for successful ICT implementation. These conversations led staff to collaboratively design a three-year rollout plan outlining expectations for ICT classrooms.

Although the framework has not been widely shared since its development, it remains a reference tool for staff supporting ICT. The table below provides a snapshot of the framework created in 2018, highlighting key elements identified by staff to support the successful implementation of the model.

EXHIBIT 49. WPCSD INCLUSIVE PRACTICES 3-YEAR EXPECTATIONS FRAMEWORK

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-teaching models-focus on Station and Parallel Heterogeneous groupings Multi-disciplinary team approach-related service providers in classrooms Mindset shift away from “student needs to be ready for ICT” “student doesn’t belong Mindset shift to environmental changes to support students Classroom management- tight transitions, classroom wide behavior plan and differentiation of behavior plans Growth Mindset –all students can learn and belong Develop co-teaching relationship between staff Utilizing all adults in the room Differentiated Learning goals Differentiation of materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mindset shift from the student doesn’t belong or needs to be ready for ICT to what can I do to help the student succeed Modifying and differentiating within stations Data collection to inform instruction and monitor progress Data collection to manage challenging behaviors Use of technology to support instruction Equal responsibility and sharing of classroom instruction Increased environmental adaptations to support a broad range of student need Increased curricular adaptations to support a broad range of student Almost solely small group, heterogeneous instruction (parallel and station teaching) Fluid transitions Mindfulness integrated into classroom instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialized small group instruction to meet IEP Goals All means all mindset Use of individualized student technology to support UDL and differentiation Pairing students to learn from each other Increased toolkit of instructional strategies Reflecting on year 1 & 2 and make appropriate changes Multiple entry points for each lesson Teams that are able to model and turn-key train new teams- inter-classroom visitations Apply skills and knowledge independent of consultants More opportunities to engage families/communities Classroom management-tight transitions, classroom wide behavior plan and differentiation of behavior plans Develop co-teaching relationship among all the co-teaching teams Utilizing all adults in the room

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Design for learning • Special Area Teacher Training • Goal Writing • Inclusive beliefs in buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better/improved articulation with special area • Flexibility in classroom layout and instruction throughout the year- • Multi-disciplinary team approach- related service providers in classrooms • Continue building school and parent community education/capacity • Mindset shift to environmental changes to support students • Classroom management- tight transitions, classroom wide behavior plan and differentiation of behavior plans • Fully differentiated materials and UDL strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiated Learning goals • Differentiation of materials for all students • Universal Design for learning for all students
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WPCSD’s commitment to inclusion and meaningful, positive outcomes for students with disabilities cannot be understated. The framework referenced highlights research-based best practices. The growth curve for WPCSD likely lies between the conceptualization of this framework and the subsequent execution of each step within. Classrooms and buildings throughout the district appear to be in varying stages of adopting inclusive practices. Leveraging existing resources offered, such as instructional coaches and professional development, will be critical in aligning inclusive practices across WPCSD. Non-special education staff within the district are not required to engage with resources and support which may inadvertently inhibit the consistent adoption of inclusive practices. Staying grounded in the Blueprint and in the Office’s vision is critical in best serving students with disabilities.

To achieve what is referenced above would require a considerable amount of time, financial resources, and districtwide buy-in over many years. The District has spent a considerable amount of time shifting towards inclusive practices already over the last ten years. Several of the elements listed above were observed during onsite visits, including co-teaching models with a focus on parallel and station teaching, use of technology to support instruction, fluid and tight transitions, flexibility in classroom layout, utilizing all adults in the room, and differentiated materials in some classrooms observed.

It is advised that WPCSD continue to evolve their inclusive practices and services, in collaboration with district leadership and building level staff, to create more tangible timebound expectations. One consideration is to strengthen general education and special education partnerships by identifying model classrooms that currently exist in WPCSD and that demonstrate high yield academic growth for students with disabilities. The model classrooms would be most in alignment with practices highlighted in “Year 3” in the framework above.

SPECIAL EDUCATION BUDGET TRANSPARENCY

Transparent special education budgeting is crucial for ensuring equitable and effective resource allocation for students with disabilities. By clearly delineating how funds are distributed and utilized, schools and districts can better meet the individualized needs of special education students as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Transparency promotes accountability, helping to ensure that allocated funds are used efficiently and as intended.

Comparison Districts

NYSED publishes district Financial Transparency Reports on its website, which include a detailed breakdown of per-pupil expenditures by district. Within these reports, special education expenditures are presented as a subset expenditure by program area, further divided into 'school-based expenditures' and district-specific 'central expenditures.'

EXHIBIT 50. SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPENDITURE COMPARISONS

	Special Education School Based Expenditures	Special Education District Specific Central Expenditures	Students with Disabilities
White Plains City SD	\$20,144.46	\$804.38	1105
Mamaroneck UFSD	\$21,077.04	\$3,664.45	660
New Rochelle City SD	\$23,882.99	\$0	1633
Scarsdale UFSD	\$24,232.71	\$5,164.06	633

PCG conducted an analysis of the most recent data (2022-23) for special education expenditures in four Westchester County School Districts¹⁸⁸: White Plains City SD, Mamaroneck UFSD, New Rochelle City SD, and Scarsdale UFSD. The review encompassed both school-specific and central expenditures for special education. When examining special education expenditures as a portion of total per-pupil expenditures, WPCSD emerged as the lowest among the four districts in terms of Special Education School Based Expenditures, with \$20,144.46 per pupil by program area. Overall, there was a difference of less than \$4,000 per pupil by program area between the highest and lowest districts, showing WPCSD's expenditures to be consistent with comparison districts in Westchester County.

Additionally, WPCSD is second-lowest in Special Education District Specific Central Expenditures, expending \$804.38 per pupil by program area for this category.

EXHIBIT 51. WPCSD SPECIAL EDUCATION BUDGET^{189 190}

	2022-23 State and Local	2023-24 State and Local	2024-25 State and Local
Allocation of Fringes	\$7,565,488.00	\$8,162,482.00	\$8,811,567.00
Special Education Instructional Salaries	\$16,734,042.00	\$17,572,246.00	\$18,438,152.00
Special Education Non-Instructional Salaries	\$97,032.00	\$104,425.00	\$142,052.00
Special Education Contractual	\$746,101.00	\$953,982.00	\$962,298.00
Special Education Supplies	\$187,909.00	\$189,065.00	\$203,976.00
Special Education Tuition Paid to Public Districts	\$464,241.00	\$200,000.00	\$280,211.00

¹⁸⁸ All four districts are located in Westchester County, NY, have between 600 to 1100 students with disabilities, and are rated as Local Support and Improvement (LSI) by NYSED.

¹⁸⁹ Budget provided by WPCSD administration, Eligibility Standard, LEA Effort, Budgeted Amounts

¹⁹⁰ The budget nomenclature includes S/E for Special Education Programming and S/H for summer handicapped programming, also known as extended school year summer programming.

Special Education Tuition - Other	\$2,486,156.00	\$4,057,809.00	\$3,231,833.00
Special Education Textbooks	\$12,638.00	\$19,947.00	\$19,949.00
Special Education BOCES	\$4,443,874.00	\$3,845,917.00	\$4,513,461.00
Summer Handicapped Instructional Salaries	\$279,120.00	\$269,740.00	\$380,200.00
Summer Handicapped Non-Instructional Salaries	\$11,662.00	\$17,900.00	\$14,000.00
Summer Handicapped Contractual	\$43,711.00	\$26,000.00	\$64,000.00
Summer Handicapped Supplies	\$737.00	\$11,000.00	\$7,000.00
Summer Handicapped Tuition Paid to Public Districts	\$8,972.00	\$16,230.00	\$12,000.00
Summer Handicapped Tuition - Other	\$311,453.00	\$524,770.00	\$388,000.00
Summer Handicapped BOCES	\$99,982.00	\$78,325.00	\$119,324.00
Summer Handicapped Fringes	\$45,780.00	\$47,805.00	\$69,500.00
Summer Handicapped Contract Transportation	\$119,133.00	\$344,000.00	\$383,000.00
Grand Totals	<u>\$ 33,658,031.00</u>	<u>\$ 36,441,643.00</u>	<u>\$ 38,040,523.00</u>

Special Education Budget Trends

The total budget has shown a consistent increase over the three-year period:

- 2022-23: \$33,658,031
- 2023-24: \$36,441,643
- 2024-25: \$38,040,523

This represents growth in the overall budget. The year-over-year percentage increases were:

- 2022-23 to 2023-24: 8.27%
- 2023-24 to 2024-25: 4.39%

While the budget continues to grow, the rate of increase has slowed down in the most recent year.

Key Areas of Change

Largest Increases

1. Special Education Instructional Salaries: This category has seen the largest increase over the three years, growing from \$16,734,042 in 2022-23 to \$18,438,152 in 2024-25. This suggests a continued investment in teaching staff.
2. Allocation of Fringes: This has increased steadily from \$7,565,488 to \$8,811,567, indicating rising costs for employee benefits.
3. Special Education Tuition - Other: This category saw a significant jump from \$2,486,156 in 2022-23 to \$4,057,809 in 2023-24, but then decreased to \$3,231,833 in 2024-25.
4. Summer Handicapped Contract Transportation: There was a substantial increase from \$119,133 in 2022-23 to \$344,000 in 2023-24, with a further increase to \$383,000 in 2024-25.

Notable Fluctuations

1. Special Education BOCES: This category showed a decrease from \$4,443,874 in 2022-23 to \$3,845,917 in 2023-24, but then increased again to \$4,513,461 in 2024-25.

2. Special Education Tuition Paid to Public Districts: This category saw a significant decrease from \$464,241 in 2022-23 to \$200,000 in 2023-24, followed by a slight increase to \$280,211 in 2024-25.
3. Summer Handicapped Supplies: This category saw a large increase from \$737 in 2022-23 to \$11,000 in 2023-24, but then decreased to \$7,000 in 2024-25.
4. Summer Handicapped Tuition - Other: There was a significant increase from \$311,453 in 2022-23 to \$524,770 in 2023-24, followed by a decrease to \$388,000 in 2024-25.

District Practices

The Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Pupil Personnel develops the special education budget, starting with actual costs from the current year as a baseline. As noted through interviews, the most significant component of the budget is out-of-district tuition, which is projected based on students aging out, anticipated new placements, and contingency positions. This was noted as critical as each out-of-district student can cost \$150,000-\$200,000 with related services. The next major budget-planning component is contracted services, including occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, behavioral consultants, and professional development.

The most significant recent cost drivers were identified as increases in tuition and related service costs, as well as the increased need for classrooms to open in the District. Specifically, the District has had to open additional classrooms for students with autism, with plans to open another 12:1:2 classroom for kindergarteners with level 2:3 autism in the coming year. This marks the third consecutive year of opening such classrooms. Expanding Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) programs has also been needed. About three to four years ago, the District expanded its continuum of ICT programs, starting with two and then expanding to a third. The current school year marks the fourth year of operating the expanded continuum with these ICT classrooms. This expansion is a signal of the District's commitment to providing a continuum of services for its students. WPCSD continues to remain responsive to programming needs of students with disabilities as evidenced in the budgetary shifts from year to year.

The District's IDEA Part B grant, part 611, which funds children with disabilities ages 6-21 for the 2023-24 school year is \$2,311,958.00¹⁹¹. The District's IDEA Part B grant, part 619, which funds children with disabilities ages 3-5 is \$86,639.00¹⁹². The District does not process any other special education grants as part of its special education budget. IDEA Part B grant funds, part 611, are primarily used to fund personnel, technology, professional development, and reading programs.

The Office of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services presents its department budget to the Board of Education annually.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Effective special education systems require clearly outlined policies and procedures for staff. Clearly outlined policies and procedures form the foundation of a fully functional and transparent special education system within a district. Furthermore, these guidelines provide a roadmap for educators, administrators, families, and stakeholders, ensuring consistency, accountability, and equitable access to services. By clearly defining processes for identification, evaluation, placement, and the delivery of special education services, these policies establish a standardized framework that fosters fairness and clarity for all involved. Transparent policies not only facilitate compliance with legal mandates but also promote open communication, mutual understanding, and collaboration across all stakeholders. They serve as a guiding compass ensuring every student with disabilities receives the support and services they require in an environment that is inclusive and supportive for all.

District Practices

The District's standard operating procedures for special education are stored on the Special Education SharePoint site and accessible to all employees. However, despite this widespread availability, it appears

¹⁹¹ NYSED. (2024, November 13). *Agency Summary of Approved Projects*. Grants Finance. <https://www2.nysed.gov/CAFE/24/CF300/662200010000.HTML>

¹⁹² Ibid.

that the document is not widely utilized by all staff members. Based on information gathered from focus groups, the CSE chairpersons were identified as the most frequent users of these procedures.

Some staff within the Office of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services also refer to the document, particularly when meeting with other staff members, as it outlines expectations for the beginning of the year.

DATA QUALITY, CULTURE, AND CAPACITY

IEP Case Management

The District uses Frontline IEP Direct as its IEP case management system. It was reported this system has evolved with the District's needs over time, allowing for customization of goals and adding features like document repositories for storing student records and progress monitoring data.

Study participants shared the District attempts to use IEP Direct comprehensively to track the progress of student cases, from evaluation assignments to IEP finalization and distribution. However, the effectiveness of this tracking depends on the accuracy of data input by staff members. It was noted that most staff use the system appropriately, while some resist the processes and procedures.

The District uses the "open draft forms" feature in IEP Direct to track and monitor compliance data points, such as the completion of evaluations. The system also has an audit function, but its accuracy relies on correct data input. To minimize errors in document creation, the District has implemented systems like an annual service guide that outlines how services should be described.

A key finding in IEP case management is that teachers use their own systems rather than IEP Direct for the progress monitoring of IEP goals. In addition to IEP Direct, the District has a centralized location for gathering and reporting on student interventions called RTI Direct, which is a part of the IEP Direct case management solution. Overall, while the IEP Direct system seems to meet most of the District's needs, ongoing efforts are being made to improve its usage and accuracy across all staff members.

MTSS to the CSE Referral

Some noted the data collection for MTSS as cumbersome and inconsistent. Although the District uses RTI Direct as the repository for MTSS interventions, some staff expressed frustration during focus groups over the amount of data being collected, the inconsistent nature, and the duration of time it took to collect the data for children receiving MTSS support. Ambiguity in what data is required for a student to transition from MTSS to a CSE referral was a notable concern for WPCSD study participants. Decision-making to transition from MTSS to a CSE referral falls within the scope of building-level leaders and outside the purview of district special education leaders. It was acknowledged earlier in this report that clarity in roles and decision-making is needed to ensure concerns and feedback are properly routed to the appropriate leaders within the district.

According to information from focus groups, CSEs consistently emphasize the need for data-driven special education referrals. However, teachers reported experiencing pushback when making referrals, citing increased demands for quantitative data from special education administrators when presenting anecdotal evidence about students. It is important to note that special education referral, and the data to accompany that referral, are included in the District's special education standard operating procedures manual.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The Office of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services' vision for inclusion has been widely adopted throughout the District, but only for some students receiving special education services. Focus groups and surveys revealed that some study participants believe students with more significant disabilities currently in less restrictive settings should be placed in more restrictive environments. This belief undermines the District's vision for inclusion and promotes an "us versus them" structure between some staff and the Office of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services. The structure of the implementation of the District's inclusive vision suggests a need for continuity across the district.

While the special education budget shows increases in tuition for out-of-district programming, overall special education per-pupil expenditures are consistent with comparable Westchester County school

districts with similar characteristics. The District has also continued to expand its continuum, including ICT classrooms. As the District continues to expand its continuum within its schools, an effort that requires additional personnel, it will need to continue to factor these considerations into its future budgets.

The District has a comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures Manual (SOPM) located on the department's SharePoint site, but it is underutilized by most staff. The underutilization of the SOPM points to an opportunity to improve awareness and utilization of this resource.

Additionally, while the District has a repository for its MTSS data, the data collection process could be more consistent across buildings. Furthermore, teachers and CSE members appear to have different expectations regarding data collection for CSE referrals. Inconsistencies in MTSS data collection practices highlight the need for standardized protocols and clearer communication of expectations between teachers and CSE members.

VII. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW



This section of the framework focuses on family and community engagement as part of a high-performing system that includes all stakeholders in the education process by embracing partnerships to make informed decisions and provide equitable opportunities for all students.

This domain includes the following key areas for effective family and community engagement in special education:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Resource Center and Training
- Access
- Community Partnerships

A focus on these five areas fosters partnerships between students, staff, and families and creates a cohesive system focused on student-centered learning and outcomes. This section of the report summarizes findings from WPCSD families from focus groups and survey responses.

The following essential questions we answer in this chapter are:

-  To what extent are parents of children with IEPs satisfied with their child's educational program?
-  How do community relations and customer service function to support parents in the special education process?

Parents are a child's first teachers and are important partners as their children progress through school. Their vital role is acknowledged in IDEA, which requires parental input in writing IEPs, the provision of related services, and placement. IDEA also requires collaboration with parents and students with disabilities, as appropriate, to design special education along with related and supplementary services. As part of this review, the parent's role and satisfaction with special education processes and instructional/service delivery within WPCSD were evaluated.

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Satisfaction with IEP Services. Most parent survey respondents (72%) are satisfied with their child's IEP services. • Teachers Dedication and Care. Most parents feel their child's teacher(s) are caring and committed. • Parent Voice at CSE Meetings. Most parents feel their input is considered at CSE meetings and feel comfortable asking questions about their child's program. • Special Education Trainings. The District offers a variety of special education trainings for parents at the elementary and secondary level and for parents that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with Families. Parents expressed concern about not being informed when service providers change, leading to frustration and disruption in services. • Increase Transparency from District Leadership. Parents felt lack of follow-through and transparency in decision-making hinders collaboration between parents and the District. • Related Service Delivery. There is a perception that related services appear to be driven by staff availability rather than student needs, raising concerns about equity in provision.

<p>attended special education trainings or information sessions provided by the District, most felt they provided valuable information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transition Planning. Not all parents feel their child’s transition plan contains individualized goals that are preparing them for life after high school.• Progress Reports. Some parents reported they did not receive progress reports on their child’s progress toward their IEP goals.• Staff Perception of Parent Engagement and Support. Many staff feel they have not been properly trained to communicate with parents/caregivers of students with IEPs and lack support from district-level leadership in working with parents/caregivers.• Access. Special education trainings for SY24-25 are offered during the day which impacts the ability for more families to attend sessions.
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COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Developing strong communication and collaboration with families of students with disabilities is essential for improving student outcomes and fostering a positive, transparent educational experience. Research indicates that when districts establish open and consistent communication with families, it enhances parents’ understanding of the IEP process and increases their involvement in decision-making, which directly benefits students.¹⁹³ Effective collaboration between families and schools leads to more personalized and appropriate supports for students, which results in improved academic achievement, social-emotional development, and overall school success.¹⁹⁴ Clear, consistent communication builds trust, helping families feel valued and more engaged in their child’s educational journey.

- 71% of parents are satisfied with their child’s overall special education services.
- 85% of parents feel they have a good working relationship with their child’s teacher.
- 70% of parents feel building administrators do everything possible to support special education in their school.

Parent Survey

Furthermore, strong family-school partnerships reduce misunderstandings and conflicts, leading to fewer due process complaints and more efficient resolution of concerns. One study found that when parents feel heard and involved in their child’s education, disputes are less likely to escalate to formal complaints, as there is mutual trust and transparency throughout the IEP process.¹⁹⁵ This collaborative dynamic not only strengthens relationships between parents and educators but also contributes to better student outcomes and greater stakeholder engagement. By prioritizing communication and collaboration, districts can create

¹⁹³ Fish, W. W. (2020). Parents and special education: What they expect from school and how collaboration improves outcomes. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Mueller, T. G., & Carranza, F. D. (2019). The importance of family–school collaboration in special education: Building trust and transparency for improved outcomes. *International Journal of Special Education*.

a more inclusive, supportive environment for students with disabilities, ensuring that all parties are working together to meet the student's needs.

District Practices

A review of the District's special education programming identified both strengths and opportunities for improvement in parent and community engagement to support students with disabilities in WPCSD. Overall, 72 percent of parent survey respondents were satisfied with their child's IEP services. Many parents expressed appreciation for their children's teachers, describing them as caring, hardworking, and dedicated to meeting student needs. Parents also identified several critical areas where enhancements are necessary to improve the overall experience and effectiveness of special education services in WPCSD.

One consistent theme raised by parents is the need for greater follow-through and transparency regarding special education. Some parents reported that challenges in collaboration often stemmed from a lack of clear communication and a perception that decisions were not always made with their child's best interests in mind. Additionally, several parents voiced concerns that services, particularly related services, seemed to be driven by staff availability rather than what their child genuinely required. This led to a perception by some parents that student needs are not being prioritized, and more staffing resources are called for to address service gaps. While the District has reported this is not the case, it is the perception that some parents hold, therefore, greater transparency around this for families will help to shift that perception.

Communication around changes in service providers and missed services emerged as an area where parents identified room for improvement. Several parents shared instances where their child's service provider or teacher changed multiple times during the school year, yet they were not informed of these changes. This lack of transparency left families feeling disconnected from critical aspects of their child's education and uncertain about the continuity of services.

Parents also emphasized the need for greater consistency and openness in sharing information, particularly regarding missed services or provider availability. To address these concerns, a clear protocol should be developed and implemented at the building level in collaboration with District leadership. This protocol should establish processes for promptly notifying families about staffing changes or disruptions in services and ensure consistent monitoring to maintain accountability. By enhancing communication and transparency, WPCSD can strengthen trust with families and provide them with the information they need to stay engaged in their child's education.

A notable area of concern for many parents was the training of non-special education staff. Parents emphasized the importance of ensuring that all school personnel are adequately trained in the implementation of IEPs, as well as how to support accommodations and modifications. They felt that this would foster a more inclusive environment, particularly in terms of supporting the socialization of students with disabilities and ensuring that they feel fully integrated into their school communities.

- *75% of parents feel their child's special education teacher(s) has high expectations for their child.*
- *77% of parents feel their child's general education teacher(s) has high expectations for their child.*
- *80% of parents feel their child is a valued member of the school and is generally included in all academic and non-academic activities.*

Parent Survey

- *60% of parents feel there are an adequate number of special educators to implement their child's IEP.*
- *61% of parents feel there are an adequate number of related service providers to implement their child's IEP with consistency.*
- *51% of parents feel there are an adequate number of paraprofessionals to implement their child's IEP with consistency.*
- *59% of parents feel there are sufficient special education and related services and placements to serve their child.*

Parent Survey

Despite these concerns, several positive aspects were identified as well. Many parents praised the District's Support for Academic Learning (SAL) program, describing it as a beneficial resource that serves students well. There were also examples of parents having strong, collaborative working relationships with school and District staff, which allowed for effective advocacy and communication.

Parents of students eligible for ELL services largely expressed satisfaction with the support provided to their children. Additionally, parents across the board reported feeling that their input was valued during CSE meetings, and most were comfortable asking questions, indicating a generally collaborative atmosphere in these meetings.

While PCG wants to highlight these strengths, WPCSD should address certain gaps to ensure more consistent and equitable experiences. Most parents (79%) reported receiving progress reports on their child's IEP goals, but as this is a legal requirement, it is crucial for the District to establish a system that guarantees all parents receive these reports regularly and promptly. Some parents reported progress reports did not provide data or valuable information for them to fully understand how their child was progressing toward their IEP goals, and they advocated for better data and more parent-friendly language in progress reports moving forward. Improving this aspect of communication will not only meet legal obligations but also build greater trust between families and the District as parents can understand how their child is progressing.

Language access was also identified as a key area needing improvement. Of the 59 parents who responded they required interpretation services during CSE meetings, a small group (three parents) reported that they were not asked if they needed an interpreter, and 16 parents indicated they did not receive a translated IEP document. Furthermore, nine parents were unsure about whether their documents were translated. Ensuring that all parents, regardless of language needs, have full access to information and communication about their child's education is vital for promoting equity.

Survey respondents of transition-age students voiced concerns about post-secondary preparation. Only 58 percent of these parents believed that individualized post-secondary goals were being developed, and just 41 percent felt that their child's transition plan was adequately preparing them for adulthood. This presents a clear opportunity for WPCSD to improve its support for transition planning and to better equip families with the resources and understanding needed to ensure successful post-high school outcomes.

- *83% of parents agree their input is considered at CSE meetings.*
- *87% of parents feel comfortable asking questions at CSE meetings.*
- *79% of parents agree they receive reports on their child's progress toward meeting their IEP goals.*

Parent Survey

An analysis of staff survey data regarding their perspectives on family and community engagement, staff responses varied widely. The data from the staff survey highlights several important insights regarding parent and caregiver engagement for students with disabilities.

While 63 percent of staff agree that their school is engaged with parents and caregivers of students with disabilities on an ongoing basis, one third of staff (34%) feel that this engagement is insufficient. This gap in engagement presents an opportunity for District and building leadership to explore ways to enhance consistent and meaningful interactions with families. Given the vital role that family partnerships play in supporting student success, efforts from leadership to strengthen ongoing communication and collaboration with parents/caregivers should be prioritized.

Just over half (59%) of WPCSD staff agree that their school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents and caregivers of students with IEPs. This varied slightly as half (49%) of general educators expressed agreement with this statement. The implications of this are significant, as it suggests that nearly half of the staff survey respondents believe there is room for improvement in how the concerns of parents of students with IEPs are addressed. WPCSD should consider this as an opportunity to create clear protocols, communication channels, and support mechanisms to ensure timely and responsive actions to family concerns.

Only 32 percent of staff survey respondents feel they have been provided with adequate training in communicating with parents and caregivers of students with disabilities. This low percentage highlights a critical area for professional development. WPCSD should consider implementing targeted training opportunities for staff that focus on effective communication strategies, particularly for conversations with families of students with disabilities. Improving staff capacity in this area is essential to fostering productive and positive relationships between schools and families and ensuring that parents feel heard and supported.

Approximately, 28 percent of WPCSD school-based staff survey respondents agree that the District's special education office effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents and caregivers of students with IEPs. Perceptions of WPCSD special education leadership by school-based staff completing this potentially influenced this low rating. Alternatively, District leadership should evaluate the responsiveness of the special education office, potentially restructuring processes or enhancing support systems to ensure that families' concerns are addressed in a timely and effective manner to shift this perception from staff.

While WPCSD has established positive foundations in areas such as teacher dedication, ELL services, and collaborative CSE meetings, there remain critical areas for growth. Enhancing transparency, communication, service delivery, staff training, language access, and transition planning will strengthen WPCSD's special education system and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

WPCSD leadership should consider a multi-faceted approach that includes increasing professional development opportunities for staff in communicating with families of students with IEPs, improving responsiveness from leadership at the District and building levels, and developing robust, transparent communication systems that ensure families feel supported and their concerns are addressed. Strengthening these areas can lead to more effective family-school partnerships and improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

PARENT TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Districts should offer a variety of parent training and resources specifically tailored to families of students with disabilities to foster stronger home-school collaboration and build meaningful relationships with families. Research shows that when parents are well-informed and equipped with resources, they are better able to advocate for their child's needs, actively participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to developing more effective IEPs. A study conducted on this topic highlights that parent involvement in a child's education, particularly when parents receive targeted training, leads to higher levels of student success and better educational outcomes.¹⁹⁶ When schools provide parents with knowledge about special education rights, services, and strategies for supporting their child's learning, it strengthens the partnership between home and school, ensuring that both environments are working toward shared goals.

- *58% of parents agree the CSE team developed individualized goals related to post-secondary education that are focused on academic development and growth.*
- *41% of parents feel their child's transition plan is preparing them for life after high school.*

Parent Survey

- *63% of staff agree their school is engaged with parents/caregivers of students with disabilities on an ongoing basis.*
- *59% of staff agree their school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents/caregivers of students with IEPs.*
- *28% of staff agree the district special education office effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents/caregivers of students with IEPs.*

Staff Survey

¹⁹⁶ Epstein, J. L. (2018). School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools. Westview Press.

Moreover, offering these resources empowers parents and creates trust, which is essential for positive family-school relationships. Research shows parents of students with disabilities who are involved and supported by the school are more likely to feel confident in advocating for their child and collaborating with educators.¹⁹⁷ This collaborative approach leads to a more inclusive, understanding environment where the unique needs of students with disabilities are met through shared responsibility. By providing families with the necessary tools and information, districts not only promote student success but also build stronger, more supportive school communities.

District Practices

Parent training provided by the WPCSD includes a program called *Friends of White Plains Schools – Parent Support Workshop*. This program is designed to support parents in helping their child experience success in the school environment, at home, and in the community. Monthly workshops offered by the university can be accessed in both English and Spanish. These workshops are 1 hour and are provided either in-person or via Zoom. A review of District documents showed the following workshop offerings for the 2022-2023 school year:

1. Positive Parenting Practices
2. Children’s Social Emotional Development
3. Mental Health and Wellness
4. Tools to Help Your Child Cope with Stress and Anxiety
5. Effective Communication
6. Implementing Limit Setting to Support Healthy Development
7. Tolerating Frustrations
8. Parenting in the Age of Technology
9. Stress Management and Self Care for the Parent
10. Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Vaping Awareness and Prevention

Based on document reviews, there were also special education specific trainings WPCSD offered to families that focus on the special education process or ways to support students with disabilities specifically. It was reported in focus groups that the special education leadership team conducted listening tours and coffee talks for parents to better understand special education processes. This approach should continue regularly to engage parents and to support collaboration with leaders at both the District and building levels. The trainings offered to families included the following:

EXHIBIT 52. SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT TRAININGS PROVIDED BY WPCSD FROM 2013-2020

Topic of Training/Date	Topic of Training/Date
Transitioning from CPSE to Kindergarten (2016)	ICT Model and Collaborative Teaching Models (2017)
What Every Parent Needs to Know about Special Education (2017)	Building and Inclusive Educational Environment (2018)
Understanding Your Child’s Evaluations (2018)	Integrated Support Services (2019)

- 61% of parents reported WPCSD offers opportunities for parent trainings or information sessions about special education.
- 23% of parents reported attending these information sessions in the past year.
- 79% of parents that attended information found them helpful.

Parent Survey

¹⁹⁷ Lake, J., & Billingsley, B. (2020). Family-professional partnerships in special education services: Moving towards trust and collaboration. *Special Education Research*.

Transition to Eastview Middle School (N.D)	Preparing for the Annual Review (2016)
Eligibility Under Committee on Special Education and Section 504 (2020)	Understanding the CSE Process (2013)

PCG analyzed a parent training schedule for the 2024-2025 school year. Monthly trainings include a variety of topics related to special education and opportunities for families to support their child at home. It was noted on the documents provided by the District that information regarding parent training is emailed to families at the email addresses available to the District and emails for trainings are sent 10-14 days before the training date. The exhibit below shows the training schedules for parents for the 2024-2025 school year:

EXHIBIT 53. SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAININGS SY2024-25 – ELEMENTARY

Date	Time	Topic
September 27, 2024	11:30 AM	Introductions and Interest Survey
October 24, 2024	11:00 AM	OPWDD Application & Process
November 22, 2024	11:00 AM	Anxiety, Fears, and Phobias Pt. 2
December 16, 2024	11:00 AM	Executive Functioning
January 3, 2025	11:30 AM	Parenting Neurodivergent and Neurotypical Siblings
February 24th	11:30 AM	Mind - Up Curriculum
March 18, 2024	11:30 AM	Fostering Independence at Home
April 9, 2025	11:00 AM	Incentivization Systems for Building Desired Behaviors
May 9, 2025	11:00 AM	Behavioral Strategies for Parents
June 9, 2025	11:00 AM	Summer Wrap-Up and Q & A

EXHIBIT 54. SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT TRAININGS SY2024-25 – HIGH SCHOOL

Date	Time	Topic
September 30, 2024	10:00 – 11:00 AM	Understanding Your Child’s IEP
October 28, 2024	10:00 – 11:00 AM	DBT Skills for Students with ASD
November 25, 2024	10:00 – 11:00 AM	Social Media Literacy & Safety
December 16, 2024	10:00 – 11:00 AM	Modified Leisure
January 27, 2025	10:00 – 11:00 AM	Accessing Resources in the Community
February 10, 2025	10:00 – 11:00 AM	OPWDD & Access-VR Information

March 24, 2025	10:00 – 11:00 AM	Understanding and Supporting Adolescent Emotional and Physical Changes
April 28, 2025	10:00 – 11:00 AM	TBD
May 19, 2025	10:00 – 11:00 AM	TBD
June 9, 2025	10:00 – 11:00 AM	End of year Wrap Up/ Training Topic Suggestions

Survey data show that 61 percent of parents report WPCSD offers parent training and information sessions about special education but only 23 percent of survey respondents reported they attended them. Of the parents that did attend, 79 percent found the information provided at these trainings or information sessions to be helpful. There is an opportunity for WPCSD to advertise these sessions and provide options for parents to increase attendance as parents who have attended found these sessions to be helpful. WPCSD offers a robust number and variety of parent training opportunities which support parents in learning about a variety of topics. One option would be for the District to consider recording these sessions so they can be shared with families that cannot attend.

Most survey respondents reported they heard about these trainings either through their child’s teacher, a newsletter, or a District email. Some parents felt these trainings were not offered at times that allowed for working parents to attend and recommended the District conduct a stakeholder survey to see what times work best for parents and what topics they would like to learn more about. The PCG team supports this recommendation that WPCSD should gather parent feedback and develop training sessions that align with parents’ schedules and topics of relevance.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Parents of children with IEPs expressed a mixed level of satisfaction with WPCSD’s special education program. While 72 percent of parents reported being satisfied with the IEP services, many pointed out areas needing improvement. Parents generally praised their children’s teachers, describing them as caring and dedicated to meeting student needs. Concerns were raised about the adequacy of service delivery, particularly related services, which some parents felt were based more on staff availability than on students’ actual needs. While the District clarified this is not the case, greater transparency around related services and staffing could help to shift this perception. Additionally, issues like lack of follow-through from leadership, and insufficient training for general education staff contributed to frustration among some families. These gaps left parents of students with IEPs feeling that WPCSD isn’t always prioritizing their child’s education.

A common theme in the feedback was the inconsistency of communication and service delivery across families. While some parents reported positive interactions with teachers and staff, others felt that WPCSD’s lack of transparency—especially around changes in service providers and missed services—hindered collaboration. For example, several parents shared they are not informed when their child’s provider changes multiple times during the school year, which disrupts continuity of services and raises concerns about the quality of support. There is an opportunity for District and building leadership to collaborate in developing a protocol that can be managed at the building level, so parents are informed of changes in staffing and/or missed services to increase transparency. The need for better training for general education staff to ensure proper IEP implementation and foster a more inclusive environment for students with disabilities is also an area of consideration for the District that should include both general and special education leadership.

Community relations and customer service play an important role in supporting parents through the special education process. Programs like *Friends of White Plains Schools – Parent Support Workshop*, which offers workshops on parenting and emotional support in both English and Spanish, demonstrate WPCSD’s effort to engage parents. Survey data showed that only 23 percent of parents attended sessions, even though 79 percent of attendees found them helpful. Parents who did not attend cited scheduling conflicts, particularly for working families, as a barrier. Many recommended that WPCSD

survey parents better to align training times and topics with their needs. While 61 percent of parents acknowledged that the District offers special education-related sessions, there is a clear opportunity to improve outreach, increase attendance, and provide more targeted special education-specific trainings based on feedback from a parent survey to help parents engage more with these opportunities.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

PCG was contracted to provide an objective view of the special education program in WPCSD and has identified in this report both strengths and areas of improvement that require focus in the coming years. PCG saw ample evidence that WPCSD has a solid foundation on which to build. WPCSD has many notable strengths, including its commitment to inclusive practices for students with disabilities and its willingness to undertake this review and act on the recommendations as part of a continuous improvement cycle.

The recommendations listed below serve as a roadmap to address areas of improvement, leading to the future growth of the special education program. Each is interrelated and will require a significant investment on the part of WPCSD. Implementation of these recommendations will set the foundation for all other action steps that emerge from this report. The action steps listed under each recommendation below are organized in a manner that provides a comprehensive view of the activities required to initiate change. Although components of the action steps can be implemented within a shorter timeframe, full-scale implementation of the recommendations may take three to five years.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND SPECIALIZED SERVICES

1. MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (MTSS)

- **Establish a districtwide MTSS team.** This team should include representation of all staff and support personnel (district-level staff, school-based administrator, general education teacher, special education teacher, support personnel, school psychologist, counselors, etc.). This team should focus on both academic and behavioral interventions as it relates to a comprehensive MTSS model. It is recommended this team meet monthly to ensure fidelity to the process and consistency across the District.
- **Entry and Exit Criteria for MTSS:** Identify timeframes and criteria that clearly outline entry and exit MTSS interventions. Align with special education referral processes to clarify for staff the functional differences between MTSS and special education and related services. District level general education and special education leadership publish a shared statement, and additional guidance as needed, to clarify the transition from an MTSS to a CSE referral.
- **Implement Universal Design for Learning.** Provide clear guidance and mandatory training for all staff on the principles of UDL and how these principles can be applied in the development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. A greater understanding and implementation of UDL can make learning accessible to all students and can help close opportunity gaps between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers while building inclusive classrooms.
- **Expectations.** Establish, communicate, support, and monitor clear expectations for MTSS, with clear lines of accountability and responsibility across departments and schools, aligning them with relevant standards and guidelines. Develop additional guidance and shared expectations related to serving ELL students within the MTSS framework.

2. INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

- **Expand on the Foundation.** Build upon current inclusive practices using the steps below to establish structures that align with the District's overarching instructional framework and

include best practices for developing inclusive schools with District leaders, building leaders, and all staff.

- **Create a Districtwide Inclusive Practices Leadership Team.** Develop a districtwide inclusive practices leadership team to include representation of staff and support personnel (central office staff, school-based administrator, general ed teacher, special ed teacher, support personnel, related services, etc...) that meets regularly to ensure adherence to the plan and monitor implementation goals and strategies across the District. This team should also focus on shifting the mindset from education being a place where students go for services, to services being brought to a student.
- **Inclusive Practices Continuous Improvement Plan.** Task the leadership team with creating an Inclusive Practices Continuous Improvement Plan, in alignment with the “Three Year Inclusive Practices Expectations framework. This will be ongoing over a several year period and will include measurable goals, objectives, timelines, and staff responsibilities to be reviewed and monitored regularly with the inclusive practices’ leadership team.
- **Implementation Guide.** Build a clearly defined District inclusive practices implementation guide, in alignment with the “Three Year Inclusive Practices Expectations framework, including guidance on expected procedures and practices.
 - Engage the leadership team in determining the role of schools to adapt the guidance to their unique needs including master scheduling procedures, common planning time for co-teaching/co-serving, and engagement with professional learning communities.
 - Utilize the model classroom strategy to demonstrate how WPCSD peers are successfully implementing inclusive practices and demonstrating high-yield academic gains for all students, including students with disabilities.
- **Scheduled Time for Collaboration.** Expand upon dedicated time for collaboration, especially grade-level or content area planning that is shared between the general education and special education teachers.
- **Strengthen Collaborative Structure for General Educators, Special Educators, and Related Services Providers.**
 - Foster collaborative structures that enhance the relationship and coordination between general and special education staff to improve student outcomes. Implement dedicated time for collaborative planning and co-teaching sessions, focusing on shared goals and joint responsibilities.
 - Encourage cross-department professional development opportunities, including training in collaborative practices and communication strategies.
 - Develop feedback loops where teachers can provide feedback on the effectiveness of collaborative practices and suggest areas for improvement.
- **Highlight Principal Voice in the Expansion of Inclusive Practices throughout WPCSD.** Prioritize the role of principals when creating “pathways for inclusion through the distribution of leadership responsibilities” aligned to the execution of inclusive practices.
 - Adopt the perspective that creating a high performing, inclusive school requires principals to “[call upon school staff to support inclusive reform and to distribute leadership responsibility to enhance school capacity to serve all children.](#)”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ “Clearing a Path for Inclusion” Distributing Leadership in a High Performing Elementary School.” (2015). DeMatthews, David, E. Retrieved from: <https://mcie.org/download/clearing-a-path-for-inclusion-distributing-leadership-in-a-high-performing-elementary-school/?wpdmdl=908>

3. SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Enhance SDI Guidance for Behavioral Services and Support.** Enhance current SDI guidance and resources available to help teachers and administrators make stronger connections on where SDI is addressed in the IEP process for students with behavioral challenges, including how to utilize the information from FBAs to inform the development of high-quality BIPs that are continuously monitored and adjusted based on students' responses to interventions.
- **Enhance Specialized Programming and Develop Entry and Exit Guidance.**
 - Review current evidence-based methodologies and curricula to support student outcomes for students that require highly specialized programming, including a more current understanding of "[functional life skills](#)."¹⁹⁹
 - Establish clear and transparent guidance for special education placements so that student placement aligns with individual needs, program goals, and appropriate methodologies.
 - Regularly review and update placement guidance to reflect best practices and meet evolving student needs.
- **Provide Clarity on the District's Approach on Challenging Behavior in the Classroom.**
 - Create a uniform set of positive behavioral expectations to use districtwide with research-based interventions available for staff to reference and use.
 - Develop internal practices to monitor and discuss the overlap between suspension rates for students with disabilities and eligibility for free and reduced lunch.
 - Create a tiered approach to supporting behavior challenges prior to special education referral.
 - Offer more training and PD around positive behavior strategies and behavior management that includes classroom modeling for educators.
 - Clarify expectations for classroom and building staff for the purpose(s) of gathering data on challenging behavior. Established shared expectations prior to data-gathering on the potential outcomes to avoid confusion.
- **Strengthen Instructional Differentiation in all Classrooms.**
 - Strengthen instructional differentiation practices to meet the needs of all learners, creating personalized support for students that enhances their academic growth. Offer coaching for general and special education teachers on effective differentiation strategies, such as tiered assignments, flexible grouping, and scaffolded supports.
 - Conduct collaborative (general education and special education district specialists) regular classroom observations to support teachers in implementing and refining differentiation techniques. Utilize [research-based resources](#)²⁰⁰ to inform how high-leverage practices and evidenced-based practices are being implemented simultaneously to increase academic achievement in classrooms.

¹⁹⁹ "21st Century Functional Life Skills: Educating Learners who need Intensive or Extensive Supports. A Historical View and Implications for Schools." Maryland Coalition of Inclusive Education. 2022.

²⁰⁰ "High-Leverage Practices and Evidence-Based Practices: A Promising Pair", McCray, Kamman, Brownell, & Robinson, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/HLPs-and-EBPs-A-Promising-Pair.pdf>

- Leverage existing data points and supports, such as coaches, to determine which instructional practices are yielding the greatest academic gains for students with disabilities in the inclusive setting.
- Prioritize building strong foundational skills in ELA and Mathematics for all students in early years to proactively minimize critical gaps impacting more complex skill mastery.
- **Increase Implementation of Accommodations and Modifications in the General Education Setting.**
 - Maintain consistent use of accommodations and modifications in general education classrooms to enable special education students to access the curriculum effectively. Provide professional development on accommodations and modifications for both general and special education teachers, highlighting techniques that promote student independence.
 - Establish a system for monitoring the application of accommodations and modification in classrooms, with regular feedback to teachers. Include accommodations and modifications as a topic in collaborative meetings between general and special education staff to reinforce consistency and support.
 - Utilize resources such as, [“Specially Designed Instruction and More: Adaptations and Modifications Supplementary Aids and Services Accommodations”](#), to clarify expectations for implementing accommodations and modifications.
- **Post-Secondary Transition Planning.**
 - Strengthen transition planning by developing both individualized transition plans and meaningful goals that effectively prepare students for life after high school.
 - Create individualized transition plans with input from parents, focusing on realistic and measurable goals for post-secondary education, employment, and independent living.
 - Offer parent workshops focused on transition planning and available community resources for post-high school options. Regularly update parents on their child’s progress toward transition goals and revise plans as necessary.

4. REDEFINE THE CONTINUUM OF ALTERNATIVE PLACEMENTS

- **Offer the Continuum of Services on each Campus to the Greatest Extent Possible.**
 - Conduct a workload analysis for all special educators, at each building, to determine if an expansion of the continuum of services is feasible. This will likely impact how caseload assignments are made particularly at the secondary level.
 - At the secondary level, reconceptualize the resource room setting for students who are in there for task completion.
 - Determine the need for special educators to provide specially designed instruction within the “Strategies for Success” model.
 - Audit service options to ensure that what is offered is meeting the needs of students vs. what is available.
 - Use data and support to improve postsecondary outcomes for students graduating with IEPs.
- **Expand Behavior Services for Students with IEPs.**

- Duplicate behavior services from the secondary level down to elementary level and support students struggling with behaviors in this manner with consistent structure and strategies.
 - Assign a dedicated behavior support team to campus to provide support and wraparound services.
 - Offer support and services that differentiate behavior from mental health needs.
 - Ongoing monitoring of suspension and expulsion rates for students with disabilities by school.
- **Optimize the Consultant Teacher Model.**
 - Increase the effectiveness of the consultant teacher model by defining roles and responsibilities, focusing on integrating special education teachers in the general education setting.
 - Clarify the role of the consultant teachers in general education settings, emphasizing strategies that enhance the instructional quality for all students.
 - Provide training for consultant teachers on strategies to maximize their impact in the general education classroom and review scheduling for consultant teachers to allow for direct instruction for students with disabilities.
 - Leverage findings from the workload analysis to optimize scheduling for special educators serving in the Consultant Teacher capacity.
 - Use existing formative data points to inform instructional practices and student growth. Current data suggests students with disabilities in the CT model at some schools are making considerably more progress than peers in assessments when beginning the school year at comparable levels.

ACADEMIC OPTIMISM, RIGOR, AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS

5. ACADEMIC OPTIMISM, RIGOR, AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS

- **Strengthen Culture to Support Inclusive Practices.** Emphasize during trainings and support provided to principals the importance of building structures and processes in their schools to increase academic optimism and nurture a climate of high expectations and opportunity for all students, underscoring that special education is service and not a place for students with disabilities. This includes prioritizing academic rigor for all students with disabilities to ensure there is a laser focus on closing the performance gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.
- **Increase Performance of SWDs on Statewide Assessments.**
 - Monitor and refine general education supports and specially designed instruction (SDI) to effectively address the achievement gap for students with IEPs in Grades 4 and high school, focusing on building proficiency in ELA and math to meet state targets.
 - Regularly review and adjust the SDI provided in IEPs to ensure alignment with grade-level expectations and individual learning needs in ELA and Math.
 - Implement ongoing progress monitoring of students' response to general education supports and SDI, making necessary adjustments based on data from IEP goal progress and formative assessments.

- Facilitate collaborative planning sessions between general and special education teachers, where they can coordinate supports, share effective strategies, and discuss student progress towards IEP goals and grade-level standards.
- **Provide Outcome-Driven Professional Development.**
 - Design all professional development so that it is coherent, relevant, and useful professional learning that is measurable by indicators and provides professional learning and ongoing support, beyond compliance, to support instruction and transfer that learning to practice.
 - Enhance the skillset of resource teachers and those in specialized programs so that they can work together to extend the opportunities for students with significant needs to access and succeed in more inclusive settings.
- **Implement Evidence-Based Practices that Enable Student Success.** Implement evidence-based instructional practices that will impact increasing expectations, provide high levels of engagement, and integrate appropriate support and scaffolding to increase students' motivation. This includes scheduling for students with disabilities served in the general education setting to have a balance between mastery of foundational skills and consistent access to Tier 1 instruction.
- **Discuss Instructional Beliefs and Practices.** Consider creating opportunities for school-based staff to discuss instructional beliefs and practices related to inclusion using resources such as, "[Structures for Belonging: A Synthesis of Research on Belonging-Supportive Learning Environments.](#)"²⁰¹ This can provide opportunities for WPCSD staff to begin working collaboratively to evolve perspectives on the District's approach to inclusion.

LEADERSHIP AND HUMAN CAPITAL

6. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

- **Encourage the Use of Standard Operating Procedures.**
 - Promote adherence and accountability to the District's special education standard operating procedures.
 - Require all teaching staff to review and acknowledge receipt of Standard Operating Procedures. Include training on standard operating procedures as part of annual back-to-school orientation for teachers.
 - Continue to highlight how the District's Standard Operating Procedures are in alignment with state expectations set for in the "Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities."
 - Establish consistency in messaging and practice between general and special education leadership on the use of Standard Operating Procedures for supporting students with disabilities in WPCSD.
- **Align and Improve Data Collection Procedures.**
 - Adopt consistent practices around the progress monitoring of IEP goals and the storing of progress monitoring data.

²⁰¹ "Structures for Belonging: A Synthesis of Research on Belonging- Supportive Learning Environments" (2021). Healey and Stroman. Retrieved from: <https://mcie.org/download/structures-for-belonging-2021/?wpdmdl=1463>

- Assess how the IEP case management system presently supports the documentation of progress monitoring of IEP goals.
- Adopt and adhere to standard protocols around the progress monitoring of IEP goals, and the storing of that data, including how it can be stored within the District's IEP Direct case management system.
- **Special Education Referrals.**
 - Ensure all staff adhere to the Standard Operating Procedures Manual when making a CSE referral, ensuring necessary qualitative and quantitative data are collected and that referrals are data informed.
 - Conduct professional development for general education teachers and school leaders on data-informed CSE referrals and best practices around data collection for CSE referrals per the Standard Operating Procedures manual.
 - Provide nuanced feedback on each referral that is not moving forward to evaluation.
 - Create opportunities for discussion in referral practices.
 - Clarify expectations for the transition from an MTSS to a CSE referral, and other avenues for CSE referral generation.
- **Staffing Allocations.**
 - Conduct a workload analysis for all special educators, at each building, to determine if current caseload structures best meet the needs of students with disabilities. This will likely impact how caseload assignments are made particularly at the secondary level.
 - Leverage workload analysis findings to determine how staffing allocations can be maximized when comparing the various service delivery models available across all grade bands within WPCSD.
 - Utilize [high-quality tools](#)²⁰² to maximize the impact of paraprofessionals supporting students with disabilities throughout WPCSD.
 - Consider flexible staffing models that are fluid to remain responsive to the needs of students with disabilities. This would include a balance between maintaining a primary mode of specially designed instruction delivery for special educators when possible (e.g., CT or ICT) and maximizing special educator availability within the Master Schedule.
 - Prioritize scheduling students with disabilities in classrooms when creating the Master Schedule at both the elementary and secondary level. Include special educators in building level teams responsible for Master Schedule development.
 - Leverage resources such as the "[Inclusive Practice Tool: A Master Schedule Review](#)" created by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
 - Align related services with student needs rather than staff availability.
 - Train service providers and CSE Chairs on equitable service provision to ensure all students have access to necessary services.
 - Communicate the scheduling process for related services to parents to promote transparency and address concerns about availability.

7. IMPROVE DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TRANSPARENCY AND COLLABORATION

²⁰² "Paraprofessional Roles and Responsibilities", Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education. Retrieved from: <https://mcie.org/?wpdmdl=1479>

- **Prioritize Improving the Relationships between District Leaders and School-based Staff.**
 - Restructure the roles of CSE/CPSE chairs to year-round positions. School-based team members would benefit from the assignment of a district special education leader to provide clarity on regulations, WPCSD special education processes, and to prioritize relationship building.
 - Add two full-time administrator positions within the Special Education & Pupil Personnel Services district office. These roles would be designed to provide differentiated levels of support to building leadership and support a more equitable distribution of the workload currently managed by CSE/CPSE chairs. That is critical to ensure CSE/CPSE chairs have the opportunity to facilitate relationship building.
 - Hold forums where District level general and special education leaders share updates and discuss long-term goals for inclusive practices including the progress on the “Three Year Inclusive Practices” framework and action steps from this report.
 - Consider hosting in person CSE meetings at schools to positively influence relationship building between district and school-based teams supporting students with disabilities.
- **Mediate Special Education Concerns.** Partner with a neutral, third-party mediator for District special education leaders and school-based staff to discuss how to collectively move forward in the pursuit of inclusive practices.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

8. PARENT PARTNERSHIPS

- **Clarify Parent Communication Expectations.**
 - Develop a tracking system for parent inquiries and concerns to ensure timely responses and resolution.
 - Establish clear and consistent communication protocols between parents and service providers.
 - Create a notification system to inform parents when there is a change in service providers or services.
 - Send out regular updates to parents on their child’s IEP service delivery that highlights any potential delays or staffing changes when these changes occur.
 - Develop a system that allows for periodic check-ins with parents to address any concerns and ensure continuity of special education services.
 - Ensure all WPCSD staff are aware of and engage in these processes, as needed, to mitigate concerns surrounding parent engagement.
- **Parent Communication Plan.** Implement a comprehensive plan to improve communication and collaboration between staff and the parents/caregivers of students with disabilities. This plan should focus on increasing staff capacity through targeted professional development and strengthening communication systems that foster trust and responsiveness.
- **Family Engagement Task Force with a Focus on Bilingual Families.** Create a family a Family Engagement Task Force that includes District leaders, school staff, and parent representatives to meet regularly and review the effectiveness of the District’s family engagement practices. This group can offer real-time feedback on challenges and successes, helping to continuously improve communication systems between staff and families.

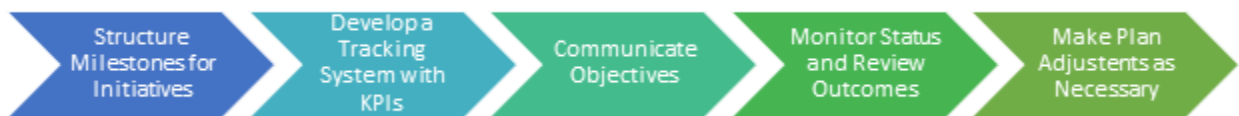
FROM STRATEGY TO EXECUTION

The secret to successful strategy execution is in translating strategies into actions. Further, tracking progress made on an organization's strategy execution is integral to understanding whether it will reach its desired future state. From our experience, the most challenging part of a comprehensive program evaluation for a school district is moving from the recommendations to a concrete action plan, then to a change in practice. These steps require significant focus, in addition to organization, communication, and collaboration across departments. Implementing change across often siloed and independent departments, with differing priorities and reporting structures, requires out-of-the-box thinking and a commitment to approaching issues and solutions in a new light.

While there are different approaches that school districts take to managing this process, the most successful ones create a sustainable structure, with internal and external accountability measures and strong cross-departmental advocates. PCG recommends a five-step Strategy Execution process, which we have found results in grounded, sustainable change within an organization.

PCG recommends that WPCSD address each component of our Strategy Execution Process to position the district to make lasting and impactful changes.

EXHIBIT 55. PCG'S STRATEGY EXECUTION PROCESS



Structure Milestones for Initiatives

Action plans must include concrete, measurable milestones that can be assessed regularly. These milestones break down initiatives into manageable steps and timelines. This structure is essential, especially given the school year cycle and the urgency by which WPCSD would like to move these critical initiatives forward. At a minimum, given the nature of the initiatives, progress toward milestones should be reviewed monthly through the 2025-26 and 2026-27 school years.

Develop a Tracking System with KPIs

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) must be established for each measurable milestone. Reviewing these KPIs will help WPCSD assess where each initiative stands. By monitoring these KPIs frequently, WPCSD will be able to assess barriers and adjust plans early in the process if needed. It is often the case that defining metrics or KPIs is the step that allows teams to recognize challenges within the theory of action that undergirds their action plan.

Communicate the Objectives

To implement new policies and procedures, organizational changes, or new approaches, stakeholders need a solid grasp of the initiatives, the objectives, and the benefits the plan will bring to bear. Communicating progress made on each key initiative is equally important to ensure continued support from those impacted by the changes, as well as the associated stakeholders.

Monitor Progress and Review Outcomes

Action plans are more likely to succeed when staff are deeply involved with the implementation process and there are monthly status checks on progress made toward established objectives. It is also critical at this point to celebrate real progress and hold individuals who have not "delivered" accountable.

Make Plan Adjustments as Necessary

An action plan is not an unchangeable document. It is a fluid plan that should be revised and updated as the WPCSD environment changes and grows. Openness to revising the action plans will enable WPCSD to adjust to shifting fiscal and regulatory realities as well as changing priorities. If WPCSD's core leadership team sees progress on certain initiatives falling short of expectations, a reevaluation of the

original objectives and approach may be needed. However, it is also important to assess the causes of discrepancies between actual and planned results.

IX. APPENDIX

RATE OF GROWTH FOR DIBELS

EXHIBIT 56. RATE OF GROWTH BY PROGRAM TYPE 23-24 DIBELS (KINDERGARTEN)²⁰³

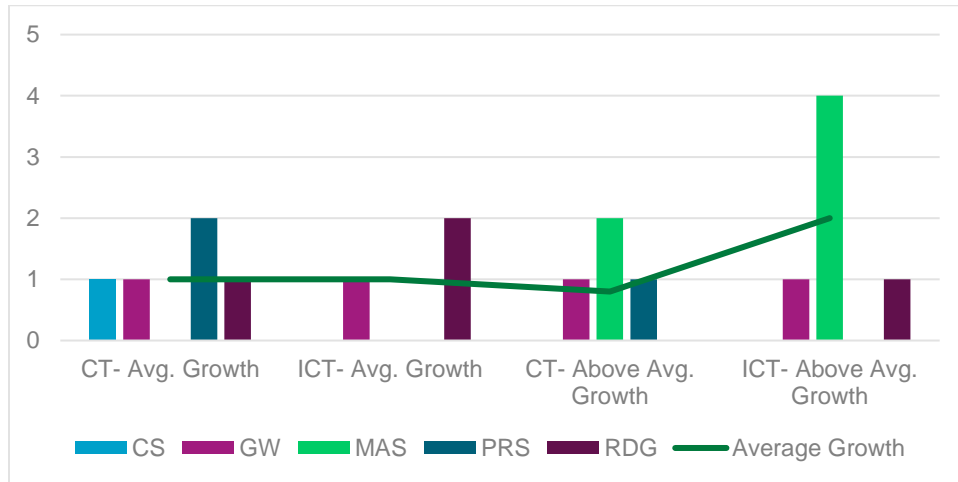


EXHIBIT 57. RATE OF GROWTH BY PROGRAM TYPE 23-24 DIBELS (FIRST GRADE)²⁰⁴

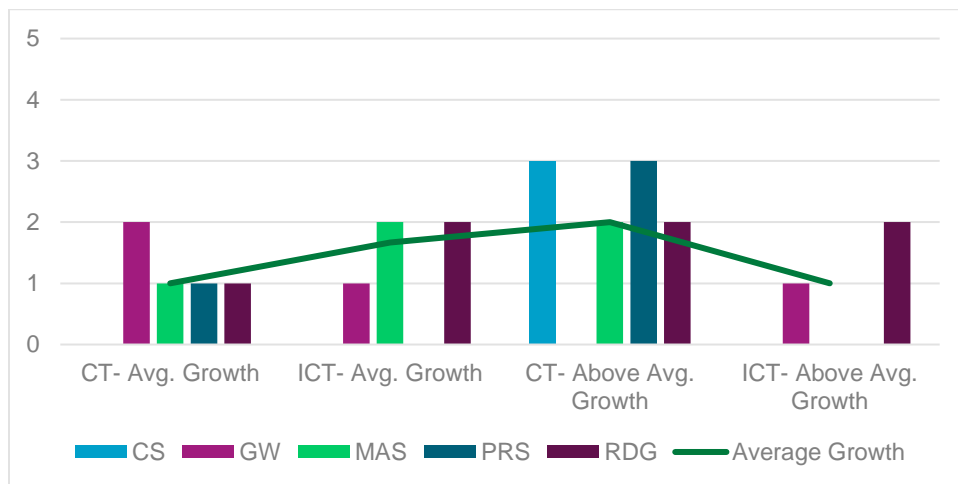


EXHIBIT 58. RATE OF GROWTH BY PROGRAM TYPE 23-24 DIBELS (SECOND GRADE)²⁰⁵

²⁰³ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year).

²⁰⁴ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year).

²⁰⁵ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year).

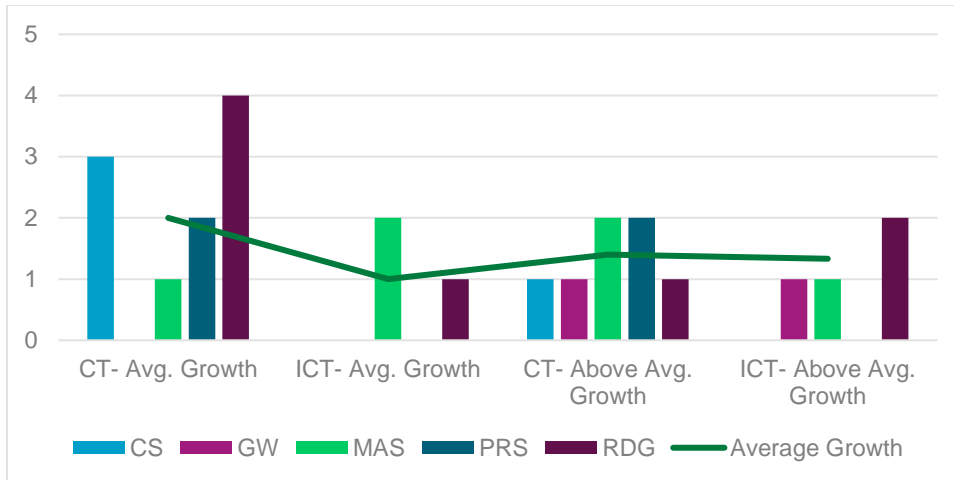


EXHIBIT 59. RATE OF GROWTH BY PROGRAM TYPE 23-24 DIBELS (THIRD GRADE) ²⁰⁶

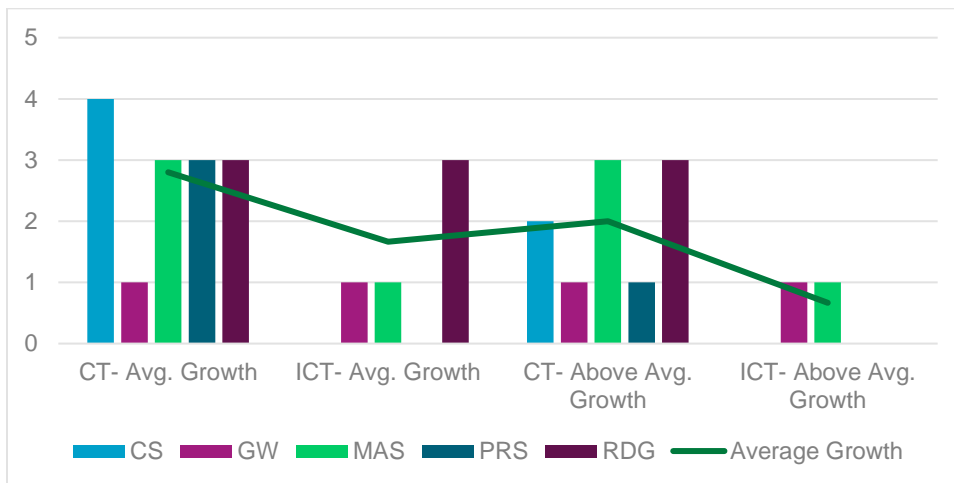
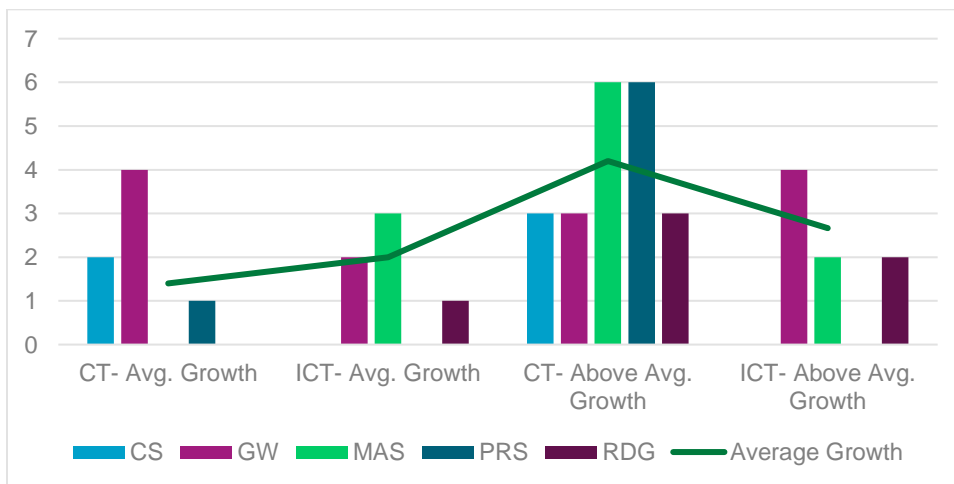


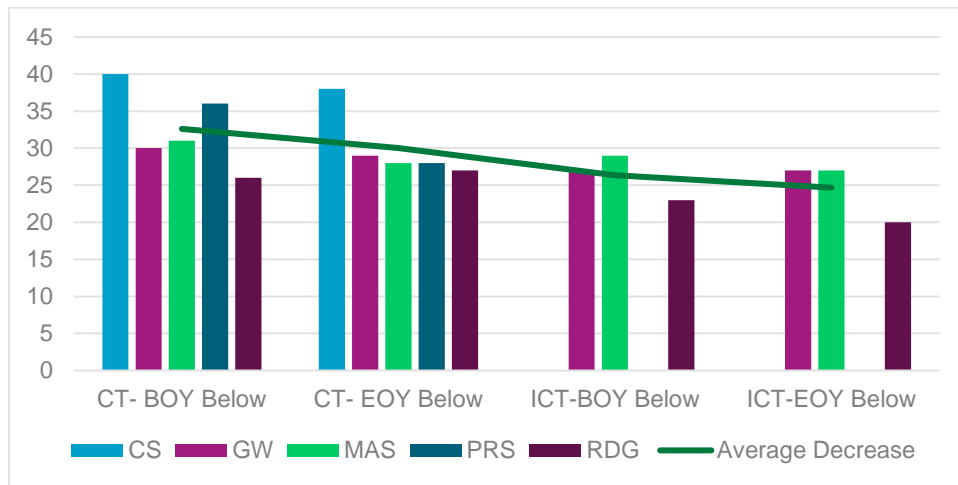
EXHIBIT 60. RATE OF GROWTH BY PROGRAM TYPE 23-24 DIBELS (FOURTH GRADE) ²⁰⁷



²⁰⁶ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year).

²⁰⁷ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year).

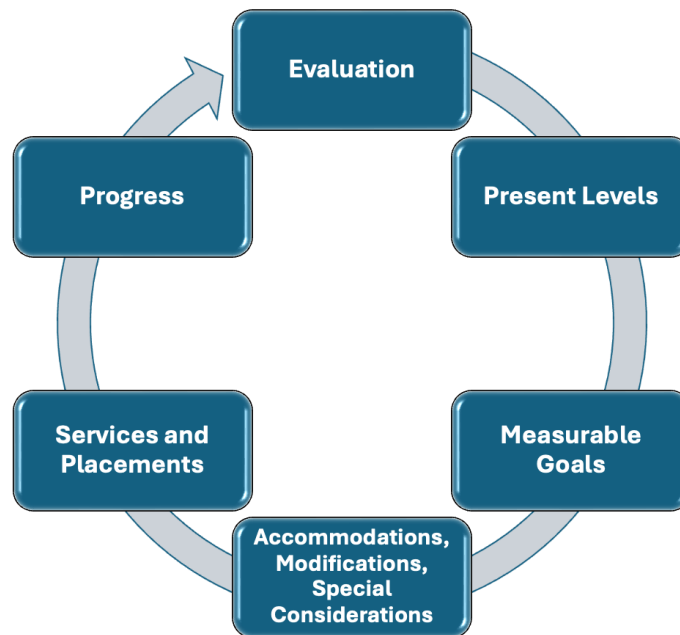
EXHIBIT 61. RATE OF GROWTH BY PROGRAM TYPE 23-24 DIBELS (FIFTH GRADE)²⁰⁸



GOLDEN THREAD FRAMEWORK

For a student with a disability, his or her IEP team is charged with ensuring that the evaluation supports the existence of a disability and shows a clear connection to the Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPS) statement, identified learner characteristics, least restrictive environment considerations, and selected accommodations for instruction and assessment. This logical progression through the body of evidence, known as the **Golden Thread**, should connect the pieces to tell a student’s complete educational story.

EXHIBIT 62. PCG’S GOLDEN THREAD FRAMEWORK



²⁰⁸ WPCSD Elementary DIBELS Assessment Data for SWDs in ICT and CT. (2023-24 school year).

Evaluation - What are the student's characteristics as a learner? What is his/her documented disability? How do the evaluation results inform an instructional plan?

Present Levels - What is the student's present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFPs)? How can access to grade-level standards be ensured regardless of the disability or language barrier? *Language within this report reflects New York terminology of PLEPs.*

Measurable Annual Goals - What can the child reasonably be expected to accomplish within one year? What types of instructional tasks are expected of the student to demonstrate proficiency in grade-level content? Are goals reasonably ambitious and achievable, and do they address all areas of need?

Services and Placement - What services will be provided? By whom and for how frequent? What accommodations are needed for learning in multiple settings? What services and supports are needed for the student to progress in all identified areas? Are accommodations documented and used as a foundation for classroom instruction and assessment? Where and how will the student receive services?

Progress Reports - What data are being collected on the fidelity of IEP implementation as well as on student progress toward meeting IEP goals? Is the student making progress?

Quality Indicator Review

This Quality Indicator Review, based on the tenets of the Golden Thread Framework, focuses on areas essential to the development of quality Evaluation, IEP, and Progress Monitoring documentation. Taken together, these documents for students with disabilities provide a comprehensive view of their access, participation, and progress in the general education curriculum and address other disability needs.

The quality indicators are based on these foundational assumptions:

- Results of individual evaluations provide the information the IEP team needs to make its recommendations.
- The student's strengths and needs guide IEP development.
- The IEP team considers the interrelationship of the impact of the student's disability and the components of the IEP.
- IEP development occurs in a structured, sequential manner.
- IEPs include documentation of recommendations in a clear and specific manner so the IEP can be implemented consistent with the evaluation team's recommendations.
- Annual goals are identified to enable the student to progress in the general education curriculum and meet other disability-related needs.
- The IEP team determines how student needs will be met in the least restrictive environment.
- The IEP team demonstrates knowledge of grade-level general education curricular and behavioral expectations and benchmarks.
- IEPs are implemented with fidelity and adjusted based on student response to instruction.
- Ongoing progress monitoring and formative assessment of student progress, goals, and objectives are consistently implemented.
- Revisions to the IEP are made based on data indicating changes in student needs or abilities.
- IEPs for students with disabilities developed by the evaluation team result in students' access, participation, and progress in the general education curriculum and address a student's other disability-related needs.²⁰

PCG used six overarching quality indicators to assess files. The rubric included specific elements and classifications of evidence under each indicator.

EXHIBIT 64: PCG'S GOLDEN THREAD EVIDENCE RUBRIC

<p>Evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluations used to assess the student are comprehensive, reliable, and culturally and linguistically responsive and help to determine the unique needs of the student in all areas of suspected disability. • The evaluations consider the student’s developmental and educational history, general education performance, sociological and health factors, and any additional sources of data that support the findings in the evaluation. • The evaluations specifically state how the manifestations of the disability interact with environmental and instructional barriers to access, participation, and/or progress in the general education curriculum. • The evaluation includes information from the family, such as student strengths, preferences, interests, health, behavior in settings outside of school, changes in the home environment, outside services, community activities, etc.
<p>Present Levels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PLAAFP (PLEPS) includes observable and measurable baseline data from multiple sources that identify the student’s strengths and critical areas of need. • In the PLAAFP (PLEPS) there is evidence of all team members’ input, including parents/caregivers. • The PLAAFP (PLEPS) reflects the strengths and critical areas of need in the enrolled grade-level curriculum and functional areas if needed (i.e., communication, behavior, social skills, self-help skills) • If the student is dually identified, there is evidence that ELL services and supports have been considered and/or included in the IEP, including transition services, where appropriate. • For transition-age students, the PLAAFP includes key areas of transition planning (i.e., training, education, employment, independent living, etc.)
<p>Measurable Annual Goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEP goals and objectives are: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time Specific (SMART) • IEP goals are driven by grade-level curriculum and aligned to standards. • If objectives are included with the goal, the objectives are aligned and targeted to support the student’s progress toward the annual goal. • The student’s IEP clearly states how progress will be monitored and how often parents will receive progress reports. • IEP goals and objectives directly connect specially designed instruction with areas that need to be taught for the student to make progress in the general education curriculum.
<p>Accommodations, Modifications, and Special Considerations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IEP includes explicit accommodations, modifications, and/or supports that directly connect with the student’s disability-related needs. • The IEP specifically includes supports, such as consultation, professional learning, or indirect supports that are needed for school personnel to effectively implement the IEP.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The IEP provides specific details on how and to what degree accommodations, assistive technology, and/or AAC will be used to support access to the general education curriculum.• The accommodations and modifications in the IEP align to the disability, student-need, and state requirements for classroom, state, and/or districtwide assessments.
Services and Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The IEP provides evidence that the IEP goals and objectives drive the service delivery options.• The IEP provides a clear and explicit rationale for the selected LRE, including justification for the removal from the general education setting for any services.
Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progress reports provide specific data, in measurable terms, about the student's progress toward each annual IEP goal, and supporting objectives, where appropriate.• Progress reports to parents/caregivers are written in plain language (i.e., jargon-free, objective not subjective, etc.) and provided to the parent/caregiver within the required timeline.