

EDCO
COLLABORATIVE

Special Education Program Review:

Essex Elementary School
Manchester Memorial Elementary School

February 7, 2017

Goals (p. 3)

- Provide Manchester Essex Regional School District with a comprehensive report identifying strengths, challenges, and recommendations for their special education programming.
- Specifically:
 - Inclusive practices and climate
 - General education/special education relationships
 - Staff deployment
 - Pull out instruction
 - The role of RTI

Scope of Review (p. 3)

- 20 focus groups/interviews
- Observations of programs and classes
- Student reports – Aspen
- Satisfaction surveys: 45 parents, 59 staff

Background (pp. 3-10)


- Data:
 - Manchester Essex Regional – 12.2% of students eligible for special education (DESE - DART)
 - 82.8% of students in inclusion settings (Aspen)
 - 9.9% of students in substantially separate settings (Aspen)
- Existing Programs and Services: SWING, SAIL, IRWL
- Student Outcomes: Level 2
- Continuum of Service: Strong RTI Programs

Commendations (pp. 25-28)

- Commitment to continuous improvement:
 - RBTs, RTI exit criteria, LBLD screening
- Best practices observed in classrooms:
 - Visuals, objectives, exemplars, accommodations
- Special education administration:
 - “Responsive, supportive”
 - TC – annual reviews, reevaluations
- Placement in LRE (SS: 9.9% ME, 14.4% State, F/P inclusion: 82.8% ME, 78.6% State)


Commendations (pp. 25-28)

- Entry/exit criteria for specialized programs (SWING, SAIL, IRWL)
- High quality staff:
 - Experience
 - Expectations
- Professional Learning opportunities
 - Reaching All Learners
 - Alan Blume: Data-Based Decision Making
 - Wilson, OG, FYT, PBIS, Social Thinking
- Special Education is respected




Recommendations (pp. 28-31)

- Collaboration time: general and special educators, TAs, Related Therapists
- Co-treat model
- RTI services
 - Duration
 - Varied eligibility criteria school to school
 - Need for exit criteria
- Inclusion services
- Teaching Assistants – decision making process – where, when, how, independence plan



Recommendations (pp. 28-31)

- Curriculum:
 - WriteSteps
 - Everyday Math: PD to modify, make accommodations
 - Reading: 29% of elementary students receive support
- Referrals:
 - MM – 80% increase 2014 – present
 - EE – 125% increase 2014 – present
- Professional Learning:
 - Disability specific
 - Modifications and Accommodations
- Special Education Parent Advisory Council



Questions / Comments



**A REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES
FOR
MANCHESTER-ESSEX REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT:
MANCHESTER MEMORIAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND ESSEX ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Presented by Colleen Dolan
February 3, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

EDCO Collaborative was contracted by Manchester Essex Regional School District to conduct a program review of special education services at their two elementary schools, Essex Elementary School and Memorial Elementary School. Through a process that included focus groups, observations, record review, and survey data collection, EDCO's charge was to provide Manchester Essex Regional School District with a comprehensive report identifying strengths, challenges, and recommendations for their special education programming.

Specifically:

- Inclusive practices and climate
- General education/special education relationships
- Staff deployment
- Pull out instruction
- The role of RTI

METHODOLOGY

Data collection procedures were multifaceted, collaborative and chosen to ensure input from multiple stakeholders. They included: focus groups, observations of programs and classes, interviews, review of student records, and satisfaction surveys.

Focus groups were held and included parents, central office administration, the director of student services, principals, general education teachers, special educators from both learning centers and specialized programs, related therapy providers (speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, behaviorists), reading teachers and tutors, and teaching assistants. Observations of specialized programs, learning centers, and general education classrooms were also conducted as part of this evaluation.

Forty-five parents completed the Parent Satisfaction Survey. Of the 45, 4% of respondents were parents of pre-K students, 38% were parents of primary students (K-2), and 58% were parents of elementary students (3-5).

Fifty-nine staff members completed the Staff Satisfaction Survey. The 59 included general and special educators, teaching assistants, administrators, and related therapy providers.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ESSEX ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND MANCHESTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

OVERVIEW

The Data Analysis Review Tool (DART) is provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and allows districts to easily track their data and compare it to similar districts. “Similar districts” are defined as those with similar grades span, total enrollment, and special populations. Data related to students eligible for special education from nine districts similar to Manchester-Essex Regional (DART data 2016) is shown below:

Percentage of Students Eligible For Special Education

Cohasset – 10.9%

Georgetown – 13.3%

Hamilton-Wenham – 14.8%

Harvard – 12.9%

King Philip – 13.6%

Manchester Essex Regional – 12.2%

Medway – 14.4%

Millis – 12.2%

Newburyport – 13.6%

Old Rochester – 13.7%

State – 17.2%

Disability Categories in Manchester Memorial Elementary and Essex Elementary compared to Massachusetts:

Disability Category	MERSD	Massachusetts (FY2014)
Specific Learning Disability	19%	26.4%
Health	14%	11.1%
Developmental Delay	29%	10.7%
Communication	13%	17.2%
Autism	11%	9.9%
Emotional	6%	8.8%
Neurological	6%	5.4%
Multiple Disabilities	1%	2.8%
Sensory	1%	1.2%
Physical	0.0%	0.8%

Educational environments for students age 6 -21 in Manchester Essex Regional School District compared to Massachusetts: (DESE 2015)

Educational Placement	MERSD	Massachusetts
Full inclusion	72.3%	61.9%
Partial Inclusion	10.5%	16.7%
Substantially separate	9.9%	14.4%
Separate Schools, Residential / Homebound/Hospital Placements	7.3%	6.9%

Educational environments for students ages 3-5 in Manchester Essex Regional School District compared to Massachusetts: (DESE 2015)

Educational Placement	MERSD	Massachusetts
Full inclusion	52.6%	48.9%
Partial Inclusion	0%	25.2%
Substantially separate	0%	15.3%
At service provider	47.4%	10.5%

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFFING

Department Staffing Structure

Dr. Allison Collins is the Director of Student Services for Manchester-Essex. There are two Team Chairpersons for the district, one for the two elementary schools and one for the middle and high schools. The Director of Student Services also acts as elementary Out of District Coordinator.

Essex Elementary School:

Total school population PK-5: 225

Percentage of students with disabilities: 10.4%

Special Education Teachers:

Learning Center: 2.6 FTE

SWING Program teachers: 2

Teaching Assistants:

Learning Center: 2

SWING Program: 8

Related Service Providers: Team Chairperson (shared w/ Manchester Memorial Elementary), School Psychologist, Speech and Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist (.4 FTE), Physical Therapist (shared)

Manchester Memorial Elementary School:

Total school population PK-5: 361

Percentage of students with disabilities: 11.9%

Special Education Teachers

Learning Center: 3

SAIL Program: 2

IRWL Program: 2 (one holds Reading and SLP certification)

Teaching Assistants:

Learning Center: 3

SAIL Program: 7

Related Service Providers: Team Chairperson (shared w/ Essex Elementary), School Psychologist, Speech and Language Pathologist (.8 FTE), Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist (.4 FTE), and 2 part time Orton-Gillingham Tutors contracted to work with IRWL students

GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT SUPPORTS/CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

Both Manchester Memorial and Essex Elementary utilize the RTI (Response to Intervention) model. At Memorial Elementary School, there are 3 specialists, two focusing on reading, the third providing math support. At the time of the RTI focus group 91 students were receiving reading support.

Universal screening in reading and math occurs at the beginning of the school year. Students are screened using age appropriate assessments. Once data is available for all

students grade level meetings are held including the reading specialists, math specialist, school psychologists, general education and special education teachers. The grade level team determines who will receive support and at which level. Students are not taken out of general education classes for reading support, specialists provide in-class support during the class's reading time five days each week. Tier II students receive 20 minutes of support daily, tier III students receive 45 minutes of support daily. Data driven materials such as *Lively Letters* and *Project Read* are used.

Most students who qualify for math support see the specialist two to three times per week. Students in Kindergarten are seen four times per week when possible. Foundational skills are the focus; students may be working on different skills than their classroom peers.

At Manchester Memorial, older students have reading instruction in the afternoon, younger students in the morning. Progress monitoring takes place on a regular basis. Results are shared using software and the team meets three times during the year formally.

Students may remain in RTI groups if they are within 5 words of the grade level benchmark; there is no limit to the length of time students may receive RTI services, however, If they are “really struggling or not hitting benchmarks, or the rate of increase is deemed to be inadequate, they are referred for special education eligibility.”

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES (www.mersd.org)

There are three specialized programs at the elementary level:

The **SAIL Program**, Social and Academic Integrated Learning, is located at Manchester Memorial Elementary School. SAIL provides a comprehensive social support model for students who require specialized assistance and ongoing case management. Program staffing consists of an interdisciplinary team that includes a certified special education teacher, teaching assistants, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, school psychologist, and guidance counselor. Students accessing the SAIL Program participate in mainstream classes throughout the school day in addition to therapies, social skills groups, and academic support, and specialized case management. In addition, students often receive additional supervision and support during unstructured times when social challenges are greatest, including lunch, recess, and transition times.

Specialized instruction and methodologies in the SIL Program include

- Positive Behavior Intervention Supports
- Social Thinking Groups
- Thinking Maps
- Structured Study Skills Development
- Anxiety/Stress Management Strategies

The **SWING Program**, Students with Integrated Goals, is located at Essex Elementary School. SWING program staffing consists of an interdisciplinary team that includes a certified special education teacher and behavioral specialist, teaching assistants, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, and physical therapist. Students participate in a combination of mainstream classes, small group instruction, and individual tutorials in addition to therapies, social skills groups, and specialized case management. In addition, students receive additional supervision and support during unstructured times, including lunch, recess, and transitions.

Specialized Program Components include:

- Self-contained classes utilizing a curriculum aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, and incorporate hands on projects, life skills, and functional academics;
- Assessments, research based methods, and ongoing data collection;
- Individualized instruction designed to support student strengths and address vulnerabilities;
- Behavioral support, monitoring, and intervention using Applied Behavior Analysis; and
- Extensive home-school communication, and establishment of partnerships between parents and program staff.

The **Intensive Reading and Written Language, IRWL** program, at Manchester Memorial Elementary School provides specialized instruction for 4th and 5th grade students from Manchester and Essex who have been diagnosed with reading and language based learning disabilities. The Intensive Reading and Written Language Program incorporates speech and language support as well as daily reading tutorials tailored to student decoding, fluency, and/or reading comprehension goals. Students receive self-contained, language-based instruction in English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics. Assistive technology designed to support reading and written language development is integrated throughout the program.

Program Core Values and Strategies: The Intensive Reading and Written Language program offers developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction designed to support student strengths and address vulnerabilities through the following strategies:

- Emphasize skills acquisition in reading and writing;
- Incorporate a clear, sequential, and multi-sensory approach to learning, including ongoing use of visual reinforcements and opportunities for kinesthetic learning;
- Preview and review vocabulary relating to each lesson;
- Employ multi-modal assessment to maximize students' ability to demonstrate learning;
- Utilize micro-uniting (also known as "chunking") and structuring of tasks
- Automatize concepts and strategies through frequent opportunities for practice and review;
- Provide rigorous grade level content aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks;

- Conduct frequent progress monitoring and use results to inform instruction;
- Prepare students to transition into an inclusion classroom once skills are strengthened and compensatory strategies developed;
- Integrate assistive technologies that support students' independent access to the curriculum;
- Offer opportunities for increased independence and inclusion, preparing students to transition to mainstream programming.

The Intensive Reading and Written Language Program utilizes specialized decoding and reading comprehension programs and incorporates language based instruction across the curriculum using the following specialized curricula and methodologies:

- Highly structured, systematic, research-based reading programs matched to student needs (Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing, Wilson, Orton Gillingham, Great Leaps and Visualizing and Verbalizing)
- Landmark Writing Program
- Keys to Literacy
- Read Naturally

STUDENT OUTCOMES

For 2016, the DESE designated Manchester-Essex as a Level 2 district. Massachusetts's Framework for District Accountability and Assistance classifies schools and districts on a five-level scale, with the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5.

Districts are classified into the level of their lowest performing school. Points are awarded annually for narrowing proficiency gaps, growth, and two high school indicators: annual dropout rate and cohort graduation rate. Ratings are based on a measure of the improvement that a group makes toward its own targets over a two-year period on up to seven different indicators. Groups are eligible for ranking if a sufficient number of students were assessed (20 for schools, 30 for subgroups) in English Language Arts and mathematics in the most recent year and one of the two prior years. A group is awarded points and rankings based on the amount of improvement it makes from one year to the next:

100 - Above Target

75 - On Target

50 - Improved Below Target

25 - No Change

0 - Declined

Massachusetts uses the 100-point Composite Performance Index (CPI) to measure progress towards this goal of narrowing proficiency gaps. The CPI assigns 100, 75, 50, 25, or 0 points to each student participating in MCAS, MCAS-Alternate Assessment, and PARCC tests based how close they came to scoring Proficient or Advanced. The CPI is calculated by dividing the total number of points by the number of students in the

group. The result is a number between 0 and 100. A CPI of 100 means that all students in a group have scored in the proficient range or higher.

It is important to note that it is more difficult for high performing districts to meet “gap-narrowing” goals because their progress is being measured against already high CPIs.

Summary of Improvement at Manchester-Essex Regional School District:

Essex Elementary – Level 2 out of 5 - Not meeting gap-narrowing goals

78% of students scored proficient or higher on ELA MCAS for 2015

68% of students scored proficient or higher on Math MCAS for 2015

75% of students scored proficient or higher on Science MCAS for 2015

Manchester Memorial – Level 2 – Not meeting gap-narrowing goals

84% of students scored proficient or higher on ELA MCAS for 2015

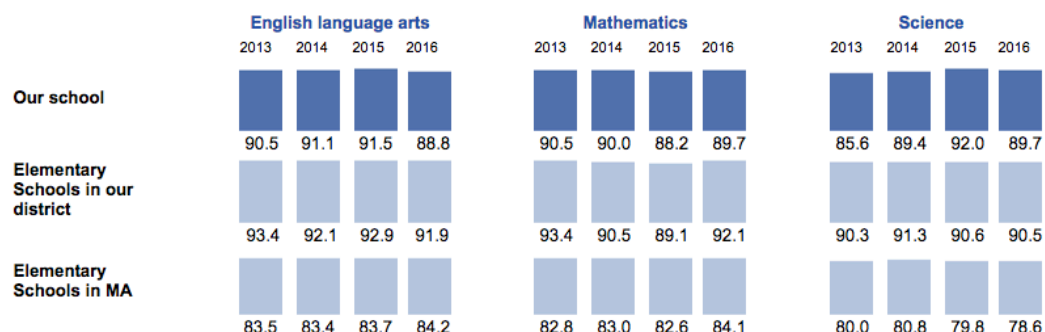
76% of students scored proficient or higher on Math MCAS for 2015

78% of students scored proficient or higher on Science MCAS for 2015

Essex Elementary School’s Performance Compared to State:

How does our school's achievement over time compare to the district and the state?

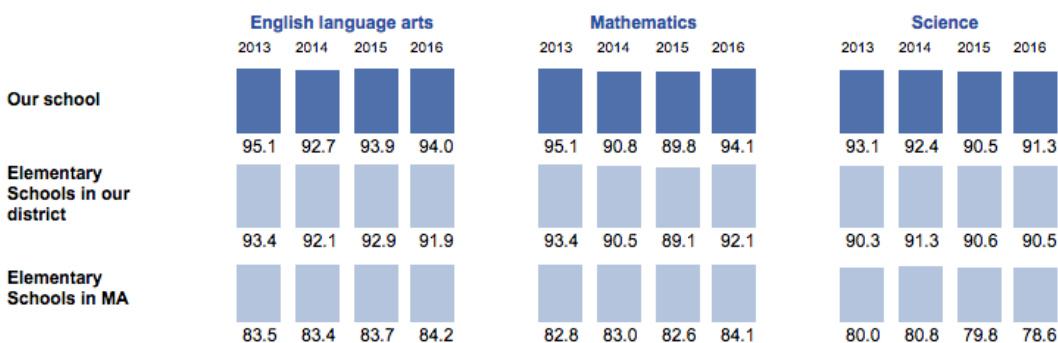
The transitional Composite Performance Index (CPI) is a number from 1-100 that represents the extent to which all students are progressing toward proficiency in a given subject. When all students demonstrate proficiency on MCAS and/or PARCC tests, the CPI will be 100. Our school's transitional CPIs for 2013-2016 are below.



Manchester Memorial Elementary School’s Performance Compared to State:

How does our school's achievement over time compare to the district and the state?

The transitional Composite Performance Index (CPI) is a number from 1-100 that represents the extent to which all students are progressing toward proficiency in a given subject. When all students demonstrate proficiency on MCAS and/or PARCC tests, the CPI will be 100. Our school's transitional CPIs for 2013-2016 are below.



PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ESSEX ELEMENTARY AND MANCHESTER MEMORIAL

IMPRESSIONS – PARENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were held for parents at each of the elementary schools. A total of 10 parents attended, representing 9 students or 9% of students with disabilities. Considerable disparity was noted in the nature of comments. After the group adjourned, two parents separately sought out the interviewer to express their appreciation of teachers and programs in the school. One reported not feeling comfortable speaking in the group setting.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

Focus group parents reported in general, special education Teams are responsive to parents' concerns and suggestions. Several highlighted the responsiveness of the Director of Student Services and feel she provides learning opportunities for parents. One noted the Director is very responsive to parents' concerns and proactive about scheduling Team meetings to address concerns.

Several parents agreed that administrators do a good job matching students with disabilities to general education teachers. One noted there is ample time at Team meetings for discussion and questioning.

Parents feel their children are included, for the most part, in classroom and extracurricular activities. One parent commented, "Teachers know the students inside and out." Another noted students do not feel isolated when they leave class for special education services. One reported teachers are tuned into (student's) needs, and reworked the schedule to get optimal time in the inclusive setting.

Regarding communication, one parent expressed gratitude for the special educator's participation in parent conferences. A SWING program parent reported, "Academically, (student) has thrived, and (student's) needs are met but it is difficult for student to reintegrate socially." An IRWL parent feels the program is working and her child, "has blossomed." The parent of a student whose first language is not English reported her child "has had a great experience." A SAIL Program parent feels program staff are flexible and willing to try a variety of techniques to meet (student's) needs. Appreciation was expressed for the sharing of data by SAIL staff.

AREAS TO CHANGE/IMPROVE

A majority of parents attending the focus groups believe evaluations for special education eligibility are not performed in a timely fashion. The process is often delayed and RTI services are prolonged. Some felt there is a need to pay for an outside evaluation in order to gain a finding of eligibility. "By not catching things early

(student's) confidence is shot." One opined, school testing is insufficient, the family had to go outside to get an evaluation that led to eligibility.

Several parents expressed concern that the district did not diagnose students using the "dyslexia" label. Several noted the beginning of the eligibility determination process is "cold and scary." They would like more information communicated verbally. They would also appreciate more and better education for parents on Team Process. Two parents felt the need to have an advocate working for them at Team meetings. "People with advocates get more."

Several parents feel teachers need training on how to work with students with disabilities and TAs have not received enough or proper training to understand the disabilities of students they work with. Several parents feel there is overreliance on Teaching Assistants in the general education setting and assistants are expected to provide direct instruction.

Several parents also believe work should be done educating typical students about disabilities. In the general education setting, a few parents believe their students are "lost" in class and often work by themselves. Several parents noted their students struggle with writing. The parent of an elementary SWING Program student is concerned regarding the lack of social opportunities provided to the child.

Many parents agreed they feel angst regarding the transition process. They are concerned about how the transition to middle school will look and would like the conversation to begin earlier. "The Team is not looking forward."

Discrepancies were noted in comments regarding receipt of evaluation reports prior to meetings. Some parents received information and were able to read and understand it prior to the meeting; others had to ask for evaluations. Some parents expressed the desire for a menu of services to choose from.

Discrepancies were noted in comments regarding communication. Some felt they received sufficient information, other feel they are kept in the dark. Some parents would like to be allowed to communicate directly with teaching assistants.

One parent suggested, "things are changing at earlier ages, but our children did not receive that benefit." Although she acknowledges continuous improvement in special education in MERSD, particularly with regard to screening of primary age students, she regrets that her upper elementary child will not benefit.

IMPRESSIONS: PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY (45 RESPONDENTS - SEE APPENDIX FOR FURTHER BREAKDOWN)

Forty-five parents responded to the parent survey provided online, slightly less than 50% of parents of students with disabilities in Manchester Memorial or Essex Elementary Schools. Of the 45, 18% are parents of a student in the SWING Program, 16% are parents of a SAIL Program student, and 22% have a student in the IRWL Program. Forty-nine percent of respondents are from the Essex Elementary School district, 51% are from the Manchester Memorial Elementary School district. Please note 56% of parents responding have children in specialized programming. Also noteworthy is the number of parents who neither agreed nor disagreed and checked “neutral” or “not applicable” on a number of statements.

EVALUATIONS

- ✓ 69% of parents (31 respondents) strongly agree or agree that evaluations are thorough and comprehensive. 8% (4 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 66% of parents (30 respondents) strongly agree or agree that evaluations accurately reflect their child’s needs. 15% (7 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 66% of parents (30 respondents) strongly agree or agree that evaluations include specific recommendations. 6% (3 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 69% of parents (31 respondents) strongly agree or agree that evaluations are communicated in a clear manner. 14% (6 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.

IEPS/PROGRESS REPORTS

- ✓ 98% of parents report being invited to a Team at least once per year.
- ✓ 86% of parents (39 respondents) strongly agree or agree their concerns were documented in the IEP or cover letter. 6% (3 strongly disagree or disagree.)
- ✓ 78% of parents (35 respondents) strongly agree or agree that the IEP accurately reflect the Team’s discussion. 9% (4 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 80% of parents (36 respondents) strongly agree or agree that the IEP states how progress toward goals and objectives will be measured. 4% (2 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 78% of parents (35 respondents) strongly agree or agree that services and supports are provided as documented in the IEP. 11% (5 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 69% of parents (31 respondents) strongly agree or agree that their child is making progress on IEP goals. 13% (6 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 66% of parents (30 respondents) strongly agree or agree they receive updates with sufficient frequency to keep them informed. 13% (6 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- ✓ 71% of parents (32 respondents) strongly agree or agree that they are equal partners in planning their child's individual education program. 18% (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 80% of parents (36 respondents) strongly agree or agree that teachers and administrators interact with them in a professional manner. 15% (7 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 64% of parents (29 respondents) strongly agree or agree that teachers and administrators encourage them to participate in decision-making. 18% (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 84% of parents (38 respondents) strongly agree or agree that district staff are available and accessible. 13% (6 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 76% of parents (34 respondents) strongly agree or agree that communication from district staff is appropriate and frequent enough to keep them informed. 16% (7 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 60% of parents (27 respondents) strongly agree or agree that the district offers education about disabilities for students and families. 15% (7 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- ✓ 84% of parents (38 respondents) strongly agree or agree that special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP. 4% (2 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 71% of parents (32 respondents) strongly agree or agree that general education teachers are aware of the child's learning style and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP. 20% (9 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 64% of parents (29 respondents) strongly agree or agree that general education and special education teachers collaborate to ensure the IEP is implemented. 18% (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 67% of parents (30 respondents) strongly agree or agree that general education teachers demonstrate their understanding of their child's IEP. 27% (12 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 65% of parents (29 respondents) strongly agree or agree that general education teachers demonstrate their understanding of their role in implementing the IEP. 21% (9 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 71% of parents (32 respondents) strongly agree or agree that general education teachers are aware of the child's learning style and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP. 20% (9 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 80% of parents (36 respondents) strongly agree or agree that related service providers demonstrate that they understand the child's learning style. 11% (5 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.

- ✓ 62% of parents (28 respondents) strongly agree or agree that they are satisfied with specialized programming options in MERSD. 17% (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 66% of parents (30 respondents) strongly agree or agree that they are satisfied with the amount of services their child receives for the related service providers. 17% (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 69% of parents (31 respondents) strongly agree or agree that they are satisfied with the social-emotional support their child receives. 17% (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 68% of parents (31 respondents) strongly agree or agree that after school and extra-curricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities. 17% (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 67% of parents (30 respondents) strongly agree or agree that overall, they are happy with the special education services their child receives. 14% (6 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 71% of parents (32 respondents) strongly agree or agree that their child is happy at school. 11% (5 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 69% of parents (31 respondents) strongly agree or agree that they are satisfied with the specialized instruction their child receives. 15% (7 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree

PARENT SURVEY SUMMARY:

A majority of parents feel evaluations are comprehensive, accurately reflect their child's needs, and are communicated clearly. Overall, parents are satisfied with the manner in which their concerns are documented in IEPs. Most parents feel they are informed of their rights and their child is making progress on IEP goals. A high percentage agree they are treated in a professional manner and district staff are available and accessible. In addition they agree communication is frequent enough to keep them informed. Over seventy percent feel they are equal partners in planning their child's IEP, however, eighteen percent disagree.

Significant differences of opinion among parents occur with regard to statements regarding general educators' role in the IEP process. Seventy-one percent agree that general education teachers are aware of the child's learning style and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP, twenty percent disagree. Sixty-seven percent of parents agree that general education teachers demonstrate their understanding of their child's IEP, twenty-seven percent disagree. Sixty-five percent of parents agree that general education teachers demonstrate their understanding of their role in implementing the IEP, twenty-one percent disagree.

There is also disagreement regarding collaboration time for general and special educators. Sixty-four percent of parents agree that general education and special education teachers collaborate to ensure the IEP is implemented, eighteen percent disagree.

IMPRESSIONS – STAFF FOCUS GROUPS:

Special Education Administrators, Principals, General and Special Educators, Related Therapists, and Teaching Assistants

Essex Elementary School Focus Groups

At Essex Elementary School, the special education staff is comprised of 2.6 Learning Center teachers, 2 SWING Program teachers, 2 Learning Center teaching assistants (TAs), 8 SWING Program TAs, a Team Chairperson (shared w/ Manchester Memorial Elementary), School Psychologist, Speech and Language Pathologist, part time Occupational Therapist, and part time Physical Therapist. Weekly special education department meetings are held and attended by the principal. Common planning time for grade level teams is built into the staff schedule. Several general education teachers shared they see special education teachers as a “great resource” when they experience challenges or have questions regarding students in their classes with disabilities and feel there is a high level of collaboration between special education and general education teachers. Learning Center teachers provide pullout support for students; TAs provide most in-class support.

SWING Program teachers have dedicated time built into their schedules to collaborate with TAs and classroom teachers. SWING students travel with clipboards that include the student’s schedule, the behavior program outlining focus behaviors and skills targeted for transfer of skills, individualized graphic organizers, data sheets, circle maps and checklists.

SWING Program TAs are required to pass an online course to become certified as *Registered Behavior Technicians*. Most have been trained in *Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) Nonviolent Crisis Intervention* and have scheduled opportunities for regular consultation with SWING special education teachers. SWING TAs are rotated in morning and afternoon to avoid overdependence. Staff report SWING students access both school and community activities.

The *RTI (Response to Intervention)* Program at Essex Elementary is called *WIN*, which stands for “what I need.” All students are tested three times per year in reading and math. Data meetings are held following each testing period to discuss test results and determine who will be eligible for RTI support. Benchmarks determine eligibility and level of intervention. A variety of staff provide services as part of WIN including reading teachers, teaching assistants, the Title I math teacher, related therapists, and special educators. Progress monitoring occurs and data is regularly reviewed to assess student progress. It is possible for students to receive special education services and RTI simultaneously. Although criteria exist to exit students from RTI or to move them to another goal area, clear guidelines on how long RTI should continue prior to making a referral for special education eligibility are not available at Essex Elementary.

A variety of scientifically based, data-driven materials are available for intervention including Lively Letters, Fountas and Pinnell, Project Read, Orton- Gillingham, Wilson Reading, and Great Leaps. Several staff noted they struggle with how long to continue RTI prior to making a referral for special education eligibility determination.

There are ten teaching assistants (TAs) at Essex Elementary School. They have been provided with a dedicated room for planning and organization and receive regular training from both Essex Elementary special educators and outside sources. TAs report being asked for input on their training needs. Most focus groups agreed TAs are utilized in an efficient and effective manner. Supervision is the responsibility of special education teachers with input from classroom teachers. Learning Center teachers communicate with TAs before or after school.

A school-wide *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support* (PBIS) program was launched this school year at Essex Elementary School. The school psychologist heads the program. She shared that school-wide expectations are posted throughout the school and communicated to students. Common language is used, and teachers receive instruction on zones of regulation, a systematic, cognitive behavior approach used to teach self-regulation by categorizing the different ways we feel and states of alertness we experience. The Zones curriculum provides strategies to teach students to become more aware of and independent in controlling their emotions and impulses, managing their sensory needs, and improving their ability to problem solve conflicts. Data indicates the program has been successful in reducing inappropriate behaviors. Teachers gave accolades to the program and reported the principal is very supportive of this work.

The school psychologist also reports most referrals for special education eligibility come from the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT). She, too, expressed concern for lack of clear exit criteria from RTI. Students receiving RTI support appear to be making progress but may receive several continuous cycles of RTI.

Many teachers report the written language curriculum at MERSD, Write Steps, is challenging as sentence structure is not taught. This is a major concern since there are general education supports in place for students who struggle in reading or math but not for writing. Teachers also express concern for the fast pace of general education curriculum. They opine some typical students, as well as students with disabilities, have difficulty keeping up.

All staff report there is a tremendous level of support from administrators. Supervision of special education teachers is shared between the director of student services and principal. The director of student services is available for consultation and brainstorming and makes professional learning for teachers and TAs a priority. Funds are made available for purchases and special education staff feel they have adequate and appropriate materials for specialized instruction.

The principal was commended by many for her support of special education and school wide initiatives. "Support from the principal is great, she gets it." The Team Chairperson is also viewed as a great support to staff engaged in report writing and IEP development and also takes care of ordering materials.

Teachers feel there is sufficient communication with parents. The protocol is for communication to take place with SWING teachers rather than TAs. Although general education teachers feel they are afforded many opportunities for professional learning, they would appreciate more professional development on specific disabilities they are likely to see in their classrooms.

Manchester Memorial Elementary

Due to limited participation in the general education teacher focus group, this input is not discussed in this report.

At Manchester Memorial Elementary School, the special education staff is comprised of 3 Learning Center teachers, 2 SAIL Program teachers, 2 IRWL Program teachers (one holds both Reading and SLP certification), 3 Learning Center Teaching Assistants (TAs) 7 SAIL Program TAs, a Team Chairperson (shared w/ Essex Elementary School), School Psychologist, .8 Speech and Language Pathologist, a full time Occupational Therapist, part time Physical Therapist, part time Physical Therapy Assistant, and 2 part-time Orton-Gillingham Tutors dedicated to the IRWL Program.

The IRWL Program at Manchester Memorial Elementary provides support for students diagnosed with language-based learning disabilities in grades 4 and 5. IRWL teachers are trained in Orton-Gillingham and have had opportunities for professional learning in *Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing*, *Visualizing and Verbalizing*, and *Project Read Framing Your Thoughts*. A variety of specialized methodologies are utilized including *Framing Your Thoughts* for written language instruction, *Wilson Reading* materials and *Lindamood phoneme Sequencing* for reading and *Singapore Math*. Clear entry and exit criteria exist for the program and administration reports the program will likely be extended to grades 2 and 3 for school year 17-18. Communication with home occurs regularly. Work is sent home weekly in Friday Folders. In addition, the *Seesaw* app is used. *Seesaw* is a digital portfolio app that enables students to document their learning through photos and then share them with parents or peers. Several general educators opined the IRWL Program is excellent, and "can go to the mat with any private placement."

Two teachers and 7 TAs staff the SAIL Program. The two teachers come with a variety of certifications and experience among them including a BA in psychology, a licensed social worker, Master's Degree in special education and extensive ABA training. Clear entry and exit criteria exist for the SAIL program. SAIL special educators report they are able to use learning center teachers as a resource when it comes to questions on content.

TAs in the SAIL program have been afforded the opportunity to take training in de-escalation strategies. They are also trained in *Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*. SAIL TAs are required to take online training and certify as Registered Behavior Technicians prior to the 17-18 school year. TAs are primarily responsible for inclusion support.

The RTI Program at Manchester Memorial Elementary includes universal screening three times per year. Services are provided to those students scoring in the bottom 20%. Data meetings are held regularly to discuss data from weekly progress monitoring. The RTI team reports some students have received intervention services over the course of more than one school year. This has resulted in concerns regarding lack of progress and both parents and staff questioning, when it is time to go in another direction such as a special education eligibility determination? Often, this leads to parent referrals for special education eligibility.

At the time of the focus groups, although criteria existed to exit students from RTI or to move them to another goal area, clear guidelines on how long RTI should continue prior to making a referral for special education eligibility were not available. Since the focus groups, the Director of Student Services, Principal, and School Psychologist at Manchester Memorial Elementary collaborated to set such guidelines. Once a student moves to Tier III services, if they have not made significant gains after one cycle of service, they will be screened for a language-based learning disability.

Special education teachers report classroom teachers are cooperative and employ excellent strategies for students with disabilities. They believe, however, that general education teachers feel pressure due to the rigors of the MERSD curriculum. They feel referrals are often made for students who are both cognitively and academically average but are unable to keep up. The writing program is particularly challenging as it does not break down the steps necessary to write sentences and paragraphs. Everyday Math is also challenging for students with disabilities. Singapore Math has been used as an alternative math curriculum delivered in a substantially separate setting.

Overall, staff report the Director of Student Services is very supportive. Many opportunities for professional learning are provided. Recently, Alan Blume worked with staff to facilitate sharing of data between TAs and special education teachers. The Director of special services shares evaluation responsibilities for special educators with the school principal.

Special education staff at Manchester Memorial report they would appreciate it if opportunities for collaboration with special education colleagues, general education teachers, and the school principal could be built into their schedules. Although opportunities for special education teachers and therapists to collaborate with each other have been provided in past years, this year's schedule was prohibitive of such

opportunities. Teachers feel time for collaboration including the building principal should be prioritized when the school schedule is set.

Elementary District-wide Focus Group input / Survey Results

Administrators expressed concerns regarding students with language-based learning disabilities possibly being missed by RTI screening. Due to parent concerns regarding early diagnosis of dyslexia, the number of parents seeking diagnoses outside the school district, and because of the concern around RTI continuing for extended periods, MERSD plans to implement more intensive early screening of students.

Special education teachers report efforts are being made to provide more disability-specific training for general education staff. The *Reaching All Learners* program was launched this year by the Director of Student Services and Curriculum Director. Once per month, the school psychologist and general and special educators collaborate to provide workshops geared toward disability awareness. Most recently they presented on ADD/ADHD: what it looks like and strategies for the classroom.

In both Essex Elementary and Manchester Memorial Elementary, transition meetings are held for all fifth graders in June of each year. These provide opportunities for middle school Team members to get to know the students' learning styles.

IMPRESSIONS: STAFF SATISFACTION SURVEY

Fifty-nine staff members responded to the staff survey provided online. Of the 59, 2% are administrators, 49% are general educators, 21% are special educators, 10% are related services providers, 15% are teaching assistants, and 3% "other."

COMMUNICATION:

- ✓ 56% of staff (33 respondents) strongly agree or agree there is sufficient communication between general education and special education staff about the needs and progress of students with disabilities. 35% of staff (21 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 42% of staff (25 respondents) strongly agree or agree there is sufficient communication between general education and related services staff (SLP, OT, PT, Behaviorists, School Adjustment, etc.) about the needs and progress of students with disabilities. 27% of staff (16 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 12% of staff (7 respondents) strongly agree or agree adequate time is available for general and special education teachers to collaborate in planning and delivering instruction students with disabilities. 68% of staff (40 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 51% of staff (30 respondents) strongly agree or agree general education teachers are provided with sufficient information and support for helping students with disabilities in their classrooms. 26% of staff (15 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.

- ✓ 75% of staff (44 respondents) strongly agree or agree they receive the support they need from the Student Services Director when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities. 3% of staff (2 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 56% of staff (33 respondents) strongly agree or agree they receive the support they need from the Principal when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities. 13% of staff (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 70% of staff (41 respondents) strongly agree or agree teaching assistants are effectively assigned in order to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities. 13% of staff (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 73% of staff (43 respondents) strongly agree or agree teaching assistants are effectively utilized to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities. 12% of staff (7 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 62% of staff (37 respondents) strongly agree or agree the teaching assistants they work with are sufficiently trained to provide instructional support to students with special needs. 13% of staff (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 82% of staff (48 respondents) strongly agree or agree the district provides useful professional development related to meeting the needs of special education students. 9% of staff (5 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 69% of staff (41 respondents) strongly agree or agree the training sessions they have attended have been helpful to them in supporting the learning of students with disabilities. 9% of staff (5 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESSES

- ✓ 87% of staff (51 respondents) strongly agree or agree their school makes every attempt to meet the unique needs of students through a pre-referral process such as RTI before a district referral to special education is made. 5% of staff (3 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 71% of staff (42 respondents) strongly agree or agree their school has a well-defined and systematic process for implementing interventions prior to referral. 13% of staff (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 80% of staff (47 respondents) strongly agree or agree the evaluations conducted through the special education process are sufficiently comprehensive to identify students' specific strengths and needs. 8% of staff (5 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 68% of staff (40 respondents) strongly agree or agree the results of special education evaluations are shared with them in ways that provide meaningful insights into students' educational needs. 17% of staff (10 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 52% of staff (31 respondents) strongly agree or agree the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process in the school involves general and special education teachers as equal partners in making recommendations. 13% of staff (8 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.

- ✓ 87% of staff (51 respondents) strongly agree or agree the Team considers the least restrictive environment in making recommendations for special education services. 5% of staff (3 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 63% of staff (37 respondents) strongly agree or agree their students' IEP goals and objectives are specifically aligned with the general education curriculum. 10% of staff (5 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 78% of staff (46 respondents) strongly agree or agree the special education services, accommodations, and/or modifications identified in their students' IEPs are provided as written. 2% of staff (1 respondent) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 69% of staff (41 respondents) strongly agree or agree there is a consistent approach for progress monitoring in their school. 11% of staff (6 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 47% of staff (28 respondents) strongly agree or agree the school's report card (or other progress report) effectively communicates the progress of students with disabilities. 10% of staff (6 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 93% of staff (55 respondents) strongly agree or agree students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in school-sponsored activities such as field trips, extracurricular activities, and sporting events. 0% of staff strongly disagree or disagree.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

- ✓ 85% of staff (50 respondents) strongly agree or agree parents are given the opportunity to participate as partners in evaluating their child's needs. 2% (1 respondent) of staff strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 85% of staff (50 respondents) strongly agree or agree parents are encouraged to participate in making decisions about their children's educational programs and services. 2% of staff (1 respondent) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 83% of staff (49 respondents) strongly agree or agree the school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents of children with disabilities. 2% of staff (1 respondent) strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ 83% of staff (49 respondents) strongly agree or agree their professional recommendations are valued by parents and family members. 5% of staff (3 respondents) strongly disagree or disagree.

The next several survey questions asked respondents to rank statements as:

- CHALLENGE - if statement is a challenge that sometimes affects the educational programs of students with disabilities and their progress;
 - BARRIER - if statement is a major barrier that has a serious impact on the educational programs of students with disabilities and their progress—it is a critical implementation issue;
 - Or NOT A PROBLEM
- ✓ Teachers in this school do not have high enough expectations for students with disabilities.

- 0% Barrier
 - 17% Challenge (10 respondents)
 - 83% Not a problem (49 respondents)
- ✓ Teachers in this school have expectations that are too high for students with disabilities.
 - 7% Barrier (4 respondents)
 - 20% Challenge (11 respondents)
 - 71% Not a problem (42 respondents)
 - 3% No response (2 respondents)
- ✓ Regular and special education teachers don't have sufficient time to collaborate with each other.
 - 25% Barrier (15 respondents)
 - 68% Challenge (40 respondents)
 - 7% Not a problem (4 respondents)
- ✓ Progress monitoring for special education students is not being implemented consistently.
 - 14% Barrier (8 respondents)
 - 27% Challenge (16 respondents)
 - 58% Not a problem (34 respondents)
 - 2% No response (1 respondents)
- ✓ General and special education teachers need a toolkit of progress monitoring tools and training in how to use them
 - 10% Barrier (6 respondents)
 - 36% Challenge (21 respondents)
 - 53% Not a problem (31 respondents)
 - 2% No response (1 respondents)
- ✓ Our school needs more guidance in the selection and use of intensive reading interventions for students reading below grade level.
 - 8% Barrier (5 respondents)
 - 22% Challenge (13 respondents)
 - 69% Not a problem (41 respondents)
- ✓ General education teachers need more focused professional development on special education and teaching students with disabilities.
 - 14% Barrier (8 respondents)
 - 51% Challenge (30 respondents)
 - 36% Not a problem (21 respondents)
- ✓ General education teachers need more focused professional development on differentiating instruction.
 - 10% Barrier (6 respondents)
 - 39% Challenge (23 respondents)
 - 51% Not a problem (30 respondents)
- ✓ Teaching assistants need more focused professional development on providing instructional interventions to students.
 - 17% Barrier (10 respondents)

- 53% Challenge (31 respondents)
- 31% Not a problem (18 respondents)
- ✓ Our school needs guidance and support on implementing a more systematic pre-referral intervention process (RTI or similar).
 - 12% Barrier (7 respondents)
 - 12% Challenge (7 respondents)
 - 73% Not a problem (43 respondents)
 - 3% No response (2 respondents)
- ✓ There is insufficient communication and collaboration among general and special education teachers and parents to help special education students make an effective transition into our school.
 - 10% Barrier (6 respondents)
 - 27% Challenge (16 respondents)
 - 59% Not a problem (35 respondents)
 - 4% No response (2 respondents)

STAFF SURVEY SUMMARY

More than half of staff who responded to the survey feel there is insufficient communication between general education and special education staff about the needs and progress of students with disabilities. Sixty-eight percent of respondents do not feel there is adequate time for communication. Regular and special education teachers being afforded sufficient time to collaborate is seen as a barrier or challenge by 93% of respondents. Teaching assistants needing more focused professional development on providing instructional interventions to students is seen as a challenge or barrier by 70% of staff.

Seventy-five percent of respondents feel the Director of Student Services is supportive when they face challenges. Only 3% of respondents disagree. Fifty-six percent feel their principal is supportive of their work related to teaching students with disabilities, 13% disagree.

Over 70% of staff feel TAs are effectively assigned and utilized. The majority of staff also believe the professional learning opportunities provided to professional staff and TAs are useful.

Over 70% of staff find RTI is utilized appropriately and systematically. Eighty percent feel evaluations are comprehensive and 68% feel they are shared in a meaningful way. Over 90% of staff feel the least restrictive environment is considered for students with disabilities and 78% feel services are provided as documented in the IEP.

Staff overwhelmingly believe that students with disabilities are afforded opportunities to participate in school-sponsored activities such as summer programs, field trips, and extra-curricular activities.

In summary, over 80% of staff feel that their school delivers high quality programs and services for students with disabilities and MERSD is meeting the needs of all students in the district.

- ✓ Overall, 84% of staff that responded strongly agree or agree that their school delivers high quality programs and services for students with disabilities. 4% strongly disagree or disagree.
- ✓ Overall, 83% of staff that responded strongly agree or agree that MERSD is meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the district. 7% strongly disagree or disagree.

OBSERVATIONS

The three specialized programs, SWING, SAIL, and IRWL were observed. In addition, observations were completed in general education classrooms and learning centers at each school. Across the board, students demonstrate awareness of routine and take advantage of available sensory accommodations. A variety of sensory “seating” options are available in all classes: students may use Balance Balls, they may work standing up, sit on mats on the floor or sit on pillows on crates. Teachers also offered sensory breaks such as use of the OT room or gym. Study carrels are available when students need quiet space.

Other examples of accommodations/best practice offered to both typical students and students with disabilities observed were:

- Visual schedules, goals, directions, checklists, posters
- Exemplars
- Connections made between content and student experiences
- Use of interactive SMART Board
- Time limits, warnings
- Wait time
- Assistive Technology

A variety of specialized methodologies were observed: Wilson Reading, Orton-Gillingham, Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing, Lively Letters, Singapore Math, Project Read Framing Your Thoughts.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

My thanks to all staff members and parents who participated in the focus groups, surveys, and interviews. The warm welcome from principals, special education administrators and staff at both elementary schools was much appreciated. Focus group participants demonstrated a thoughtful, open, and honest approach to questions.

COMMENDATIONS

It is quite evident that the Manchester Essex special education department is reflective and thoughtful regarding programs and services. Several examples of continuous improvement were noted: launching of the Reaching All Learners Program for school

year 16-17, the requirement for SAIL TAs to be certified as Registered Behavior Technicians by fall 2017, and newly developed criteria for students receiving Tier III RTI services to be screened for specific learning disability following one cycle of services with less than significant gains.

Parents, principals, and staff praise the Director of Student Services for her support and guidance. She is described as responsive, accessible, and knowledgeable and is viewed as a resource. Seventy-five percent of staff respondents feel the Director of Student Services is supportive when they face challenges. Several parents who attended the focus group reported, “the director is very responsive to parents’ concerns and proactive about scheduling TEAM meetings to address concerns.”

Special education staff also expressed appreciation for the support of the Team Chairperson. The Team Chair role at MERSD includes facilitation of all annual reviews as well as reevaluations. The Team Chair also supports staff by editing reports, assisting with IEP development, and providing resources.

DESE data on *Educational environments for students age 6 -21 in Manchester Essex Regional School District compared to Massachusetts: (DESE 2015)*, indicates MERSD has a higher rate of inclusion, both full and partial, than the state average and a lower rate of substantially separate environments:

Full inclusion:	MERSD: 72.3%	STATE: 61.9%
Partial Inclusion:	MERSD: 10.5%	STATE: 16.7%
Substantially separate:	MERSD: 9.9%	STATE: 14.4%

Sixty-seven percent of parents agree general education teachers demonstrate understanding of their child's learning style. Twenty-seven percent disagree.

Manchester Essex special educators have benefitted from training in a wide variety of reading programs. This training is advantageous when the Team decides which is the most appropriate methodology for specialized instruction and students presenting with reading issues receive instruction via methodologies suited to their unique needs. In addition, 93% of staff surveyed agree students with disabilities have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Forty-eight percent of parents surveyed agree students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in school-sponsored activities. Eighteen percent disagree.

Currently, programs exist at the elementary level for students with autism spectrum disorders and related challenges, social-emotional disabilities, and language-based learning disabilities. A study of RTI data along with parent feedback have led to consideration of beginning the IRWL program at an earlier grade. There is also a plan to implement intensive early screening with the goal of early diagnosis of specific learning disabilities. Sixty-two percent of parent respondents are satisfied with specialized programming options in MERSD, 13% are neutral and 17% disagree. Eighty-four percent of staff respondents feel their school delivers high quality programs and services for

students with disabilities. Staff report clear entry and exit criteria exist for each specialized program and are adhered to consistently to ensure the integrity of the programs is maintained.

It should be noted that despite the preponderance of diagnoses of dyslexia from outside evaluators, guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) refers specifically to ten disability categories (see form F in APPENDIX) including *Specific Learning Disability*. DESE provides the following definition of Specific Learning Disability (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/definitions.html>):

The term shall have the meaning given in federal law at 34 C.F.R. §§300.7 and 300.541.

Federal Definition:

Specific learning disability is defined as follows:

- (i) General. The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
 - (ii) Disorders not included. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage
- Further, Federal regulation requires additional steps in the evaluation process if the Team suspects a student of having a specific learning disability.

Manchester Essex boasts high quality professional and support staff. Staff working in specialized programs possess optimal experience as well as appropriate licensure for their unique roles. Training specific to the needs of their respective students has been provided. Examples are *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)*, *Social Thinking*, *Orton Gillingham*, and *Wilson Reading*, and staff report having appropriate materials to utilize these programs.

Currently TAs in the SWING Program are required to become Registered Behavior Technicians. SAIL Program are also required to have this certification by fall 2017.

Special education is respected and supported at Manchester Essex. Both parents and general education staff expressed gratitude for the work of special educators and teaching assistants. Eighty-four percent of staff that responded to the survey feel their school delivers high quality programs and services for students with disabilities, and 67% of parents responding to the survey agree that overall, they are happy with the special education services their child receives.

Staff report being afforded opportunities for professional learning. Some take place outside the district; however, efforts are made to bring trainers to the district to work with staff or to provide training using in-house resources. Recently, *Data-based Decision Making* with Alan Blume was provided for district special education staff. Staff report the sharing of data occurring as a result of this training has supported better

communication among staff. At Essex Elementary School a school wide *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support* initiative was launched this year and at both Manchester Memorial Elementary and Essex Elementary, the *Reaching All Learners* program was introduced for this year.

With the support of the principal, special education staff at Essex Elementary School have built weekly meeting time into their schedules. The principal and Team Chairperson attend the meetings and collaborate on challenges. Special educators view these meetings as an excellent resource, vital to the success of their programs and services.

There is a shared model of supervision in Manchester Essex. Both the principal and Director of Student Services are involved in evaluating special education staff. This model ensures staff receive feedback from both a special education and general education perspective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research shows giving teachers time to collaborate positively impacts students and teachers alike. (*Give Teachers Time to Collaborate*, J. Davis, *Education Week* 9.1.2015 <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/09/16/give-teachers-time-to-collaborate.html>) Essex Elementary is commended for the provision of weekly meeting time for special educators. Staff at Manchester Memorial Elementary report they struggle to find time for collaboration. It is recommended special education administrators work with the school principal at Manchester Memorial to brainstorm ways to provide collaboration time on a regular basis. The Essex Elementary model could be used as a resource to make this happen.

Related therapists at both schools shared similar challenges regarding the lack of time for collaboration among themselves as well as with special and general educators. A co-treatment model, where more than one discipline works with a child at the same time, should be considered. Often therapists can complement each other by providing strategies that increase the likelihood of skill mastery. The co-treat model also maximizes the therapists' time while potentially ensuring more inclusion time for students.

Clear criteria exist for entry into specialized programs in Manchester Essex. The eligibility flowchart is adhered to in determining eligibility for special education programs. A missing link in strong decision-making practices exists with regard to exit criteria for the Response to Intervention Program. Benchmarks exist for returning students to general education but guidance exists only at Manchester memorial on how long a student should remain in RTI prior to a referral to special education. There is a perception among many teachers and parents that services may be prolonged thus postponing a referral for special education eligibility. Exit criteria should be developed focusing on a timeframe and/or documented lack of growth.

MERSD is to be commended for their high rate of inclusion and lower rate of students placed in substantially separate environments. It is concerning, however, that the majority of inclusion support is provided by teaching assistants. It is recommended that learning center schedules be adjusted so that special education teachers have the opportunity to provide inclusion support at least on a weekly basis. Also consider a review of current staffing models and exploration of alternative ways to provide necessary support, i.e. reading tutors. Finally, consider additional training for teaching assistants in specialized methodologies so that they can cover a portion of learning center services thus enabling special educators to spend time in the inclusive setting.

At Essex Elementary School, special educators provide Tier III interventions as part of the Response to Intervention process. This practice has the potential to dilute the special education process. Special educators providing support as part of RTI would likely provide similar specialized instruction through the IEP process. It is recommended alternative staffing models be considered to take special educators out of the RTI process.

At Manchester Memorial Elementary, following the administration of benchmark assessments for RTI, data is reviewed and students who score in the bottom 20% receive services. It is possible that a student scoring in the bottom 20% may be within the average range. The use of benchmarks to determine the cut-off is preferable as it prevents over-identification.

Currently, teaching assistants are assigned to each student in the SWING Program. The Director of Student Services reports 1:1 assignments are made based on student need. It is important that Teams continue to make decisions regarding 1:1 assistance based on DESE guidelines. The process must include a decision making process that assists the Team in identifying first, if paraprofessional support is necessary and, if so, where, when and how the paraprofessional will provide support and encourage independence. In addition, a plan for fading support should be part of the process. Such a decision-making process may have positive impact on the district budget and/or staffing. If the process results in lesser need for paraprofessional support, it may be possible to utilize funds to add professional staff.

Both general educators and special educators cite certain curriculums at MERSD as a challenge. One example is the written language curriculum, *WriteSteps*. The program does not teach sentence structure or break down the writing process. General education teachers report both typical students and students with disabilities struggle with the curriculum. Although special educators utilize *Project Read Written Expression: Framing Your Thoughts* as an alternative for some students, this practice may require removing students from the inclusion setting for alternative instruction. It is recommended MERSD evaluate the written language curriculum and alternatives to assess whether a change would be in the best interest of students.

Everyday Math is also identified as a challenge for students with disabilities. The program is based on a spiral approach; rather than teaching to mastery, it moves from one concept to another, then spirals back to promote skill acquisition. Singapore Math has been used as an alternative math curriculum delivered in a substantially separate setting. It is recommended MERSD consider providing special educators the opportunity to modify *Everyday Math* curriculum. One example is to modify “math boxes,” worksheets that include up to six concepts on one page, to include multiple problems on only one concept.

Many teachers opined the rigor of the curriculum at MERSD impacts referrals to special education. Several suggested students found eligible by MERSD may not be eligible in other districts. Special education eligibility data does not support this theory. In MERSD, 12.2% of students are eligible for special education services. According to DART data, similar districts have an average of 13.2 % of students eligible. The state average is 17.2%. Although fewer students are found eligible for special education in MERSD, the incidence of referrals is high and this could be attributed to rigorous curriculum. From FY2014 to FY2016, the number of referrals at Manchester Memorial increased from 10 to 19. So far in FY17, there have been 9 referrals. At Essex Elementary, the number of referrals jumped from 8 to 11. Nine referrals have been made to date in FY17. If referrals continue on this track for the remainder of FY17 Manchester Memorial will realize an 80% increase over four years and during the same time frame, Essex Elementary will see an increase of 125%.

The perception of a rigorous curriculum should be studied. In a culture of high expectations, it is imperative that staff receive regular training around their responsibilities to provide accommodations and modifications as outlined in the IEP or 504 to “level the playing field” for students with disabilities.

The majority of referrals at the elementary level in MERSD focus on concerns around reading skills. Currently, 74 students at Manchester Memorial and 69 at Essex Elementary receive reading services through RTI. Twelve Manchester Memorial students and 7 Essex Elementary students receive reading services in the learning center through their IEPs. In addition, 7 students receive support through the IRWL program at Manchester Memorial. This data shows 93 out of 361 or 26% of students at Manchester Memorial receive some type of reading intervention service, and 76 out of 225 or 34% of students receive reading support at Essex Elementary. Collectively, twenty-nine percent of students at the elementary level at MERSD receive reading support. A review of the primary reading curriculum should be considered to determine if a change might benefit students and reduce the need for reading support.

Although MERSD is to be commended for the range of professional learning opportunities afforded to staff, many focus group attendees as well as parent and staff surveys indicated education on specific disability categories teachers are likely to see in their classrooms is desired. Teachers and teaching assistants verbalized the need for

such training and special educators agree it would be beneficial for staff to be equipped with knowledge and strategies on various disability categories. The *Reaching All Learners* program is a positive step in providing training. However, this education should continue with a focus on the disabilities represented in specialized programming housed at the elementary schools. Almost half of the teachers responding to the survey indicate general education teachers need more focused professional development on special education.

The opportunity to meet with several Special Education Parent Advisory Council members was much appreciated. Five SEPAC parents attended and most shared dissatisfaction around MERSD's programs and services. It appears that one special education element may be disproportionately represented among the group. As the PAC is an advisory group, it would be advantageous for the group to include greater diversity so that the SEPAC would offer a broader parent perspective.

Also of concern is that one or more SEPAC members have established a facebook page under the name MEPAC, Manchester Essex Parents Advocacy Connection. Despite what the name may infer, this page is clearly not allied with MERSD's special education department or sanctioned by the MERSD SEPAC. In addition to providing helpful information for parents, it contains several disparaging comments about district programs and services as well as advertisements for private special education schools.

DESE has provided the following guidance on establishing Parent Advisory Councils (see *Administrative Advisory SPED 2015-2R: Special Education Parent Advisory Councils, Acceptable Alternatives, and Use of Social Media in APPENDIX*): "the PAC must offer membership to all parents of students found eligible for special education in the district, as well as other interested parties. The PAC is authorized to provide advice to the district regarding special education programs and policies. Additionally, the PAC is authorized to meet with designated school officials and to engage in activities which enable the PAC to participate in the planning, development and evaluation of the district's special education programs."

The divisiveness caused by facebook page is contrary to the goal of establishing a PAC to encourage positive school/family relationships. It is recommended the Director of Student Services engage in outreach to parents as a means to encourage communication between administration and PAC and also to recruit new and diverse members to the Special Education Parent Advisory Council. Varied representation may be beneficial to ensure the advisory role is satisfied by a diverse group.

SUMMARY

In summary, special education at MERSD is working. Overall, parents and teachers are satisfied with programs and services. Most importantly, staff are reflective regarding their needs and administration is responsive to those needs and staff recommendations. MERSD has developed many excellent specialized programs and continues to look at

these programs and all services with an eye toward improvement. Several changes are considered for specialized programming for school year 17-18.

The MERSD superintendent and Director of Student Services are to be commended for engaging in this review of special education programs and services. It is important to note that many of the recommendations made in this report are in areas stated as concerns in the initial interview. Clearly, administration is aware of practices, concerns and weaknesses and strives to continue improvement efforts.

EDCO is grateful for the opportunity to review special education programming at Essex Elementary and Manchester Memorial Elementary Schools. Thanks to all of the participants, parents, staff, and administration for the open and honest dialogue, and assistance in this work. It has been a pleasure to speak with and observe the many fine and committed professionals and support staff in the district.

APPENDIX

Manchester Essex Regional School District Data: (www.profiles.doe.mass.edu)

Selected Populations in MERSD (2015-2016)

Title	% of District	% of State
First Language not English	1.4	19.0
English Language Learner	1.0	9.0
Students With Disabilities	12.2	17.2
High Needs	19.4	43.5
Economically Disadvantaged	7.8	27.4



2016 Massachusetts District Report Card Overview

MANCHESTER ESSEX REGIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT (06980000)

Pamela A Beaudoin, Superintendent
PO BOX 1407, Manchester, MA 01944

Phone: 978.526.4919
Website: <http://www.mersd.org>

Report cards help parents/guardians and the general public see where schools and districts are succeeding and where there is still work to do. This report card overview answers important questions about our district's performance. For the full report card containing additional data contact the district or visit the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu>. For more information about report card data, visit <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/help/data.aspx>.

How is our district doing overall?

<p>Accountability & assistance levels</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> Level 2 </div> <p>One or more schools in the district classified into Level 2</p> <p>Most schools are assigned a level from 1-5, with those meeting their proficiency gap-narrowing goals in Level 1 and the lowest performing in Levels 4 and 5. A district is typically assigned a level based on the level of its lowest performing school. Placing schools and districts into levels helps districts know which schools need more support, and helps the state know which districts need the most assistance. More information is available here: http://www.mass.gov/ese/accountability.</p>	<p>Overall progress in narrowing gaps</p> <p>Massachusetts aims to reduce proficiency gaps by half between 2011 and 2017.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>All students</td><td>Met Target</td></tr> <tr> <td>High needs students</td><td>Did Not Meet Target</td></tr> <tr> <td>Economically disadvantaged</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr> <td>Students with disabilities</td><td>Did Not Meet Target</td></tr> <tr> <td>English language learners & former ELLs</td><td>-</td></tr> </table>	All students	Met Target	High needs students	Did Not Meet Target	Economically disadvantaged	-	Students with disabilities	Did Not Meet Target	English language learners & former ELLs	-
All students	Met Target										
High needs students	Did Not Meet Target										
Economically disadvantaged	-										
Students with disabilities	Did Not Meet Target										
English language learners & former ELLs	-										
<p>District determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0; text-align: center;"> Meets Requirements-At Risk (MRAR) </div> <p>Districts, including single school districts, are assigned a determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention. These determinations, which are typically based on the district's accountability and assistance level, range from <i>Meets Requirements - Provisional</i> (districts with insufficient data) to <i>Needs Substantial Intervention</i> (Level 5 districts). The determination, which also incorporates compliance measures, helps to identify whether the Department will require districts to take additional actions to support improved outcomes for all children, especially students with disabilities.</p>											

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group: _____ **Date:** _____

Attendees/Roles/Responsibilities: _____

Primary questions:

- What do you believe your school does exceptionally well in delivering special education services to students with disabilities?
- What do you believe should change or be improved in the delivery of special education services?

Specific Areas to discuss:

- Communication - gen. ed., sped, related svc. providers, parents
 - Time for communication?
 - Support for gen educators in disability awareness, other special ed. topics?
 - Co-teaching model
- Learning Assistants
 - Trained?
 - Effectively assigned/utilized?
- IST Process
 - RTI utilized?
 - Documentation
- IEP
 - Goals and objectives aligned with need and curriculum?
 - Services provided as written?
 - How are general education teachers / learning assistants made aware of IEP?
 - Are accommodations provided throughout settings?
- How is progress monitored?
- Is progress reported using data?
- Substantially separate programming:
 - Adequate methodologies to meet unique needs?
 - Adequate programming?
 - Vertical alignment of curriculum?
 - Methodologies?
- Parent involvement
 - Parents encouraged to participate?
 - District responsive to parents?
 - District recommendations valued?
 - Education offered for parents?
- Professional learning opportunities:
 - Who has access?
 - Topics?

Parent Survey Results

45 Responses:

- 2 Pre-K
- 17 Primary (K-3)
- 26 Elementary (3-5)

Primary Disability:

- 7 Autism
- 1 Autism, Developmental Delay
- 1 Autism, Neurological
- 5 Communication
- 1 Communication, Emotional, Physical
- 2 Developmental Delay
- 1 Developmental Delay, Physical, not sure
- 3 Health
- 1 Health, Specific Learning
- 1 Neurological
- 4 Not sure
- 18 Specific Learning

Gender:

- 31 Male
- 11 Female

1. If your child was found eligible by MERSD, in what grade level?

- 22% Pre-K
- 49% K-2
- 18% 3-5
- 5% n/a

2. Was your child found eligible for an IEP prior to enrolling in MERSD?

- 49% Yes
- 36% No
- 16% n/a

3. Evaluations are thorough and comprehensive.

- 27% Strongly Agree
- 42% Agree
- 16% Neutral
- 4% Disagree
- 4% Strongly Disagree
- 4% n/a

4. Evaluations accurately reflect my child's needs.

24%	Strongly Agree
42%	Agree
13%	Neutral
11%	Disagree
4%	Strongly Disagree
4%	n/a

5. Evaluations include specific recommendations.

27%	Strongly Agree
51%	Agree
9%	Neutral
4%	Disagree
2%	Strongly Disagree
4%	n/a

6. Evaluation results are communicated in a clear manner that helps me understand my child's disability and learning needs.

24%	Strongly Agree
42%	Agree
16%	Neutral
7%	Disagree
7%	Strongly Disagree
4%	n/a

7. I am invited to a Team meeting at least once per year.

69%	Strongly Agree
29%	Agree
2%	Neutral
0%	Disagree
0%	Strongly Disagree
0%	n/a

8. My concerns and requests were documented on the IEP or in the IEP cover letter.

44%	Strongly Agree
42%	Agree
2%	Neutral
4%	Disagree
2%	Strongly Disagree
4%	n/a

9. The IEP accurately reflects the TEAM's discussion.

40%	Strongly Agree
38%	Agree
9%	Neutral
2%	Disagree
7%	Strongly Disagree

4% n/a

10. The IEP states how progress towards goals and objectives will be measured.

40% Strongly Agree
40% Agree
13% Neutral
4% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
2% n/a

11. A variety of methodologies are available for consideration during the IEP development process.

27% Strongly Agree
29% Agree
22% Neutral
13% Disagree
4% Strongly Disagree
7% n/a

12. Services and supports are provided as documented in the IEP.

40% Strongly Agree
38% Agree
7% Neutral
4% Disagree
7% Strongly Disagree
4% n/a

13. My child is making progress on the goals on the IEP.

29% Strongly Agree
40% Agree
16% Neutral
9% Disagree
4% Strongly Disagree
2% n/a

14. I receive progress update with enough frequency to keep me informed.

22% Strongly Agree
44% Agree
16% Neutral
4% Disagree
9% Strongly Disagree
2% n/a

15. I am informed of my rights if I disagree with the school's decision.

33% Strongly Agree
36% Agree
11% Neutral

4% Disagree
7% Strongly Disagree
9% n/a

16. I feel that I am an equal partner in planning my child's individual education program.

22% Strongly Agree
49% Agree
11% Neutral
9% Disagree
9% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

17. Teachers and administrators interact with me in a professional manner.

44% Strongly Agree
36% Agree
2% Neutral
11% Disagree
4% Strongly Disagree
2% n/a

18. I am encouraged by teachers and administrators to participate in decision-making.

24% Strongly Agree
40% Agree
13% Neutral
11% Disagree
7% Strongly Disagree
2% n/a

19. District staff are available and accessible.

31% Strongly Agree
53% Agree
2% Neutral
4% Disagree
9% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

20. Communication from district staff is appropriate and frequently enough to keep me informed.

20% Strongly Agree
56% Agree
9% Neutral
7% Disagree
9% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

21. The district offers education about disabilities for students and families.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 18% | Strongly Agree |
| 42% | Agree |
| 20% | Neutral |
| 11% | Disagree |
| 4% | Strongly Disagree |
| 0% | n/a |
22. The special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 33% | Strongly Agree |
| 51% | Agree |
| 9% | Neutral |
| 2% | Disagree |
| 2% | Strongly Disagree |
| 2% | n/a |
23. General education teachers are aware of my child's learning style and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 33% | Strongly Agree |
| 38% | Agree |
| 7% | Neutral |
| 13% | Disagree |
| 7% | Strongly Disagree |
| 2% | n/a |
24. General education and special education teachers collaborate to insure the IEP is implemented.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 31% | Strongly Agree |
| 42% | Agree |
| 4% | Neutral |
| 16% | Disagree |
| 2% | Strongly Disagree |
| 2% | n/a |
25. General education teachers demonstrate their understanding of my child's learning style.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 27% | Strongly Agree |
| 40% | Agree |
| 4% | Neutral |
| 11% | Disagree |
| 16% | Strongly Disagree |
| 0% | n/a |
26. General education teachers demonstrate their understanding of their role in implementing the IEP.
- | | |
|-----|----------------|
| 29% | Strongly Agree |
|-----|----------------|

36%	Agree
9%	Neutral
9%	Disagree
13%	Strongly Disagree
2%	n/a

27. Related service providers (speech/language, PT, OT, etc.) demonstrate that they understand my child's learning style.

36%	Strongly Agree
42%	Agree
7%	Neutral
7%	Disagree
2%	Strongly Disagree
4%	n/a

28. I am satisfied with the specialized programming options in MERSD.

24%	Strongly Agree
38%	Agree
13%	Neutral
4%	Disagree
13%	Strongly Disagree
2%	n/a

29. I am satisfied with the amount of services my child receives from related service providers.

24%	Strongly Agree
42%	Agree
13%	Neutral
9%	Disagree
7%	Strongly Disagree
2%	n/a

30. I am satisfied with the amount of counseling services my child receives.

0	Strongly Agree
0	Agree
0	Neutral
0	Disagree
0	Strongly Disagree
0	n/a

31. I am satisfied with the social-emotional support my child receives.

20%	Strongly Agree
49%	Agree
11%	Neutral
4%	Disagree
13%	Strongly Disagree
0%	n/a

32. The school ensures that after-school and extra-curricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities.

24%	Strongly Agree
24%	Agree
16%	Neutral
7%	Disagree
11%	Strongly Disagree
16%	n/a

33. Overall, I am happy with the special education services my child receives.

36%	Strongly Agree
31%	Agree
13%	Neutral
7%	Disagree
7%	Strongly Disagree
2%	n/a

34. Overall, my child is happy at school.

42%	Strongly Agree
29%	Agree
13%	Neutral
2%	Disagree
9%	Strongly Disagree
2%	n/a

35. I am satisfied with the types of and amount of services my child receives in specialized instruction.

27%	Strongly Agree
42%	Agree
11%	Neutral
4%	Disagree
11%	Strongly Disagree

36. School

49%	Essex Elementary
51%	Memorial Elementary

37. If your child is part of a specialized program, please indicate the program.

18%	SWING – Students with Integrated Goals Program
16%	SAIL – Social and Academic Integrated Learning Program
22%	IRWL – Intensive Reading and Written Language Program
44%	n/a

MERSD Staff Survey Results

59 Responses:

Grade Level:

3	District Wide
3	Pre-K
18	Primary (K-3)
21	Elementary (3-5)
12	K – 5
2	No response

Role:

1	Administrator
29	General Education Teacher
12	Special Education Teacher
6	Related Service Provider
9	Teaching Assistant
2	Other

1. There is sufficient communication between general education and special education staff about the needs and progress of students with disabilities.
12% Strongly Agree
44% Agree
7% Neutral
27% Disagree
8% Strongly Disagree
2% n/a
2. There is sufficient communication between general education and related services staff (SLP, OT, PT, Behaviorists, School Adjustment, etc.) about the needs and progress of students with disabilities.
10% Strongly Agree
32% Agree
25% Neutral
20% Disagree
7% Strongly Disagree
5% n/a
3. Adequate time is available for general and special education teachers to collaborate in planning and delivering instruction students with disabilities.
2% Strongly Agree
10% Agree
19% Neutral
49% Disagree
19% Strongly Disagree
2% n/a

4. General education teachers are provided with sufficient information and support for helping students with disabilities in their classrooms.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 7% | Strongly Agree |
| 44% | Agree |
| 19% | Neutral |
| 24% | Disagree |
| 2% | Strongly Disagree |
| 5% | n/a |
5. I receive the support I need from the Student Services Director when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 22% | Strongly Agree |
| 53% | Agree |
| 17% | Neutral |
| 3% | Disagree |
| 0% | Strongly Disagree |
| 5% | n/a |
6. I receive the support I need from the principal when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 27% | Strongly Agree |
| 29% | Agree |
| 24% | Neutral |
| 8% | Disagree |
| 5% | Strongly Disagree |
| 7% | n/a |
7. Teaching assistants are effectively assigned in order to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 29% | Strongly Agree |
| 41% | Agree |
| 15% | Neutral |
| 10% | Disagree |
| 3% | Strongly Disagree |
| 0% | n/a |
8. Teaching assistants are effectively utilized to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 24% | Strongly Agree |
| 49% | Agree |
| 15% | Neutral |
| 10% | Disagree |
| 2% | Strongly Disagree |

0% n/a

9. The teaching assistants I work with are sufficiently trained to provide instruction support to students with special needs

25% Strongly Agree
37% Agree
14% Neutral
8% Disagree
5% Strongly Disagree
10% n/a

10. The district provides useful professional development related to meeting the needs of special education students.

29% Strongly Agree
53% Agree
20% Neutral
7% Disagree
2% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

11. The training sessions I attended have been helpful to me in supporting the learning of students with disabilities.

20% Strongly Agree
49% Agree
20% Neutral
7% Disagree
2% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

12. Our school makes every attempt to meet the unique needs of students through a pre-referral process such as RTI before a district referral to special education is made.

41% Strongly Agree
46% Agree
3% Neutral
5% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
5% n/a

13. Our school has a well-defined and systematic process for implementing interventions prior to referral.

27% Strongly Agree
44% Agree
12% Neutral

10% Disagree
3% Strongly Disagree
3% n/a

14. The evaluations conducted through the special education process are sufficiently comprehensive to identify students' specific strengths and needs.

27% Strongly Agree
53% Agree
10% Neutral
5% Disagree
3% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

15. The results of special education evaluations are shared with me in ways that provide meaningful insights into students' educational needs.

17% Strongly Agree
51% Agree
10% Neutral
12% Disagree
5% Strongly Disagree
5% n/a

16. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) process in the school involves general and special education teachers as equal partners in making recommendations.

19% Strongly Agree
39% Agree
22% Neutral
8% Disagree
5% Strongly Disagree
7% n/a

17. The Team considers the least restrictive environment in making recommendations for special education services.

36% Strongly Agree
51% Agree
5% Neutral
3% Disagree
2% Strongly Disagree
3% n/a

18. My students' IEP goals and objectives are specifically aligned with the general education curriculum.

12% Strongly Agree
51% Agree

19% Neutral
 8% Disagree
 2% Strongly Disagree
 8% n/a

19. The special education services, accommodations, and/or modifications identified in my students' IEPs are provided as written.

20% Strongly Agree
 58% Agree
 12% Neutral
 2% Disagree
 0% Strongly Disagree
 8% n/a

20. There is a consistent approach to progress monitoring in my school – there is a schedule and methods/tools for monitoring the progress of students with disabilities.

27% Strongly Agree
 42% Agree
 15% Neutral
 8% Disagree
 3% Strongly Disagree
 3% n/a

21. The school's report card (or other progress report) effectively communicates the progress of students with disabilities.

10% Strongly Agree
 37% Agree
 32% Neutral
 3% Disagree
 7% Strongly Disagree
 10% n/a

22. Students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in school-sponsored activities such as field trips, extracurricular activities, and sporting events.

68% Strongly Agree
 25% Agree
 5% Neutral
 0% Disagree
 0% Strongly Disagree
 2% n/a

23. Parents are given the opportunity to participate as partners in evaluating their child's needs.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 31% | Strongly Agree |
| 54% | Agree |
| 3% | Neutral |
| 2% | Disagree |
| 0% | Strongly Disagree |
| 10% | n/a |
24. Parents are encouraged to participate in making decisions about their children's educational programs and services.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 36% | Strongly Agree |
| 49% | Agree |
| 5% | Neutral |
| 2% | Disagree |
| 0% | Strongly Disagree |
| 8% | n/a |
25. The school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents of children with disabilities.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 37% | Strongly Agree |
| 46% | Agree |
| 8% | Neutral |
| 2% | Disagree |
| 0% | Strongly Disagree |
| 7% | n/a |
26. My professional recommendations are valued by parents and family members.
- | | |
|-----|-------------------|
| 24% | Strongly Agree |
| 59% | Agree |
| 3% | Neutral |
| 2% | Disagree |
| 3% | Strongly Disagree |
| 8% | n/a |
27. Teachers in this school do not have high enough expectations for students with disabilities.
- | | |
|-----|---------------|
| 0% | Barrier |
| 17% | Challenge |
| 83% | Not a problem |
28. Teachers in this school have expectations that are too high for students with disabilities.
- | | |
|----|---------|
| 7% | Barrier |
|----|---------|

20% Challenge
71% Not a problem
3% No response

29. Regular and special education teachers don't have sufficient time to collaborate with each other.

25% Barrier
68% Challenge
7% Not a problem

30. Progress monitoring for special education students is not being implemented consistently.

14% Barrier
27% Challenge
58% Not a problem
2% No response

31. General and special education teachers need a toolkit of progress monitoring tools and training in how to use them

10% Barrier
36% Challenge
53% Not a problem
2% No response

32. Our school needs more guidance in the selection and use of intensive reading interventions for students reading below grade level.

8% Barrier
22% Challenge
69% Not a problem

33. General education teachers need more focused professional development on special education and teaching students with disabilities.

14% Barrier
51% Challenge
36% Not a problem

34. General education teachers need more focused professional development on differentiating instruction.

10% Barrier
39% Challenge
51% Not a problem

35. Teaching assistants need more focused professional development on providing instructional interventions to students.
- 17% Barrier
 - 53% Challenge
 - 31% Not a problem
36. Our school needs guidance and support on implementing a more systematic pre-referral intervention process (RTI or similar).
- 10% Barrier
 - 12% Challenge
 - 45% Not a problem
 - 2% No response
37. There is insufficient communication and collaboration among general and special education teachers and parents to help special education students make an effective transition into our school.
- 10% Barrier
 - 27% Challenge
 - 59% Not a problem
 - 3% No response
38. Overall, I believe that my school delivers high quality education programs and services for students with disabilities in my school.
- 42% Strongly Agree
 - 42% Agree
 - 12% Neutral
 - 2% Disagree
 - 2% Strongly Disagree
 - 0% n/a
39. Overall, I feel MERSD is meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the district.
- 32% Strongly Agree
 - 51% Agree
 - 10% Neutral
 - 7% Disagree
 - 0% Strongly Disagree
 - 0% n/a

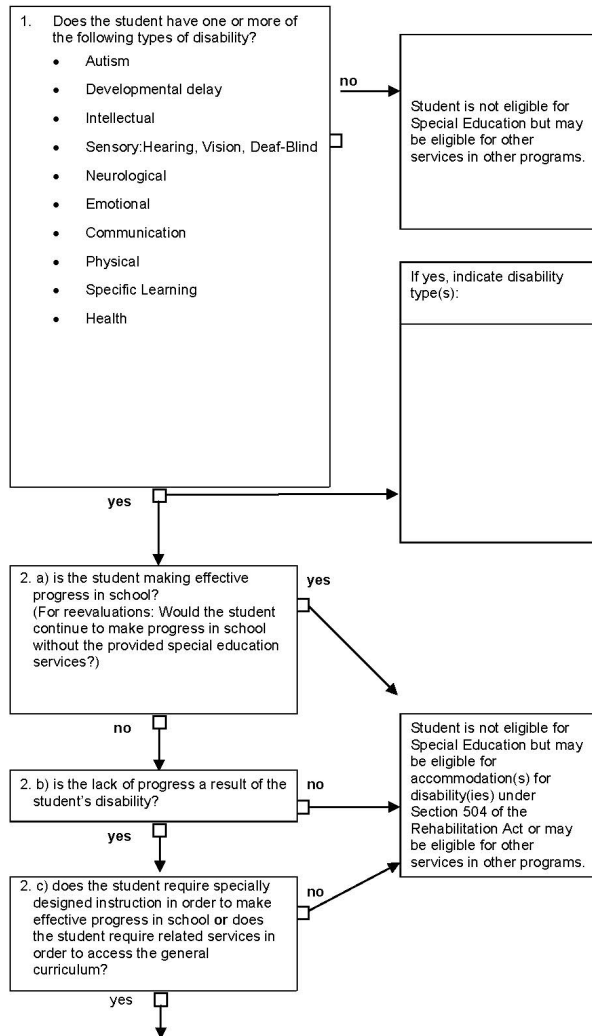
FORM ED1

School District Name:
 School District Address:
 School District Contact Person/Phone #:

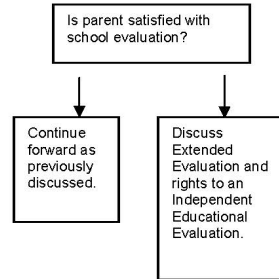
Special Education Eligibility/Initial and Reevaluation Determination

Student Name: _____ DOB: _____ ID#: _____ Date: _____

A. Proceed through the flowchart until an eligibility determination is reached..



B. Answer this question for all students.



KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS
AND/OR NEXT STEPS

**Administrative Advisory SPED 2015-2R:
Special Education Parent Advisory Councils, Acceptable Alternatives,
and Use of Social Media**

To: Superintendents, Administrators of Special Education, and Other Interested Parties
From: Marcia Mittnacht , State Director of Special Education
Date: March 18, 2015 (Section on Social Media revised 5/26/2015, 9/11/2015)

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) issues this advisory relative to Special Education Parent Advisory Councils (PACs or SEPACs) and alternatives. The advisory also comments on the use of social media.

Background: The Massachusetts special education law, Chapter 71B1 of the Massachusetts General Laws, requires a school district to establish a Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and assigns both an advisory and participatory function to the PAC. A school district is required to demonstrate that it has established a PAC upon request of the Department. When the Program Quality Assurance (PQA)² unit conducts a Coordinated Program Review (CPR)³ to monitor and review a school district's compliance with special education regulations, it checks to confirm that a PAC is operating. If no PAC is established, the Department will require the district to establish a PAC.

As outlined in the Guidance for Special Education Parent Advisory Councils⁴, the PAC must offer membership to all parents of students found eligible for special education in the district, as well as other interested parties. The PAC is authorized to provide advice to the district regarding special education programs and policies. Additionally, the PAC is authorized to meet with designated school officials and to engage in activities which enable the PAC to participate in the planning, development and evaluation of the district's special education programs.

Acceptable alternatives to a district level Special Education Parent Advisory Council: School districts have presented the Department with evidence of strong efforts to create a PAC but with parent response suggesting that there is not an interest or poor participation in the PAC. In such cases, the following alternatives will be accepted as compliance with the spirit of the requirement.

Regional PACs: Districts may work with other districts or through an Educational Collaborative to establish a regional PAC. Each regional PAC must have, at a minimum, a representative from each participating district. The participating districts must comply with the Massachusetts special education laws and regulations pertaining to PACs, their role and responsibilities. Collaboration with MassPAC and the Federation for Children with Special Needs: Districts may choose to work with the Massachusetts Association of Special Education Parent Advisory Councils (MassPAC)⁵ to develop and/or increase membership. The MassPAC at the Federation provides information, training, and networking opportunities to Massachusetts Special Education Parent Advisory Councils (SEPACs) and the professionals who collaborate with them. The Federation of Children with Special Needs provides leadership training for SEPACs and Administrators of Special Education through the Advancing Parent-Professional Leadership in Education (A.P.P.L.E.)⁶ project. This leadership program has been designed to assist participants to develop collaborative leadership skills and team action plans for increasing parent involvement in the district.

A Series of District Level Parent Training and Participation Events: The Conditions for School Effectiveness (CSE) articulates what schools need to have in place in order to educate their students well; including Family Engagement. The Conditions for School Effectiveness Self-Assessment⁷ has been designed as a tool that can be used as a benchmark in which districts can gauge their practice in key areas. In an effort to implement Conditions for School Effectiveness in the area of Family Engagement, districts may annually provide opportunities for parents of students with disabilities to participate in at least three district level activities and trainings specifically designed for parents of students with disabilities. Districts should document these opportunities and develop a process for monitoring the effectiveness of the activity. The monitoring process should include a method for collecting feedback from participating parents. This feedback should be used to develop meaningful activities for parents in an effort to increase interest and membership in a SEPAC.

Regardless of the alternative method identified, districts must seek approval from PQA through PQA's Alternative Compliance Waiver⁸ pursuant to 603 CMR 28.03(5). The Department has discussed the alternatives outlined in this advisory and district applications will only need to reference the type of acceptable alternative that will be used, how the parent community was consulted, and must identify specific annual steps that will show how they will maintain and monitor the effectiveness of their methodology. The district(s) must seek approval of their waiver request in advance of substituting any of these alternatives for a fully functioning district level PAC. The alternative compliance waiver will be in effect for three years and if renewed, must present evidence of successful alternative compliance.

The Use of Social Media: Section Revision (9/11/2015): Districts have asked if they may use social media as a replacement to a face-to-face meeting in order to increase membership and participation in the district PAC. The PAC is an advisory council to the school committee, and is subject to the state's Open Meeting Law⁹. This law includes (but is not limited to) the requirement that the meeting is open to its members and to the public.

Section revision (5/26/15): The Attorney General's Regulations, updated March 18, 2015, permit remote participation in certain circumstances. The Massachusetts Open Meeting Law Guide¹⁰ Open Meeting Law Guide¹⁰ indicates that the public body may allow remote participation by its members if the practice has been properly adopted. The PAC may therefore utilize remote participation if the school committee(s) for the district(s) involved has adopted the practice.

If remote participation is adopted, PAC members are encouraged to review the Open Meeting Law Guide to consider the particulars of use of remote participation. Use of remote participation is allowed for the following reasons: If it is not possible to physically attend the meeting due to personal illness, personal disability, emergency, military service or geographic distance. In such cases, the chair may choose to use an acceptable method of remote participation including telephone; internet or satellite-enabled audio or video conferencing, or other technology that allows all members to be clearly audible to one another. Text messaging, email or other technology without audio are not an acceptable means of remote participation. When members are participating remotely, there must be a quorum of the body physically present at the meeting, all members must be clearly audible to one another and all votes must be taken by a roll call vote. It is important to ensure that remote participation is not used in a way that would defeat the purpose of the Open Meeting Law.

The use of social media tools such as Facebook or Websites may be considered to share

information. PACs may use this type of social media to post upcoming activities and events sponsored by the advisory council. The PAC must work with their district to ensure that they are aware of and in compliance with district policies and procedures relating to the use of the Internet and Social Media. In closing, we hope this guidance is helpful. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact the Program Quality Assurance unit at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (781-338-3700).

1 Chapter 71B: Massachusetts special education law, also known as Chapter 766, and in regulation at 603 CMR 28.00

2 Program Quality Assurance Services (PQA): Program Quality Assurance Services (PQA) implements the Department's compliance monitoring and complaint management procedures for school districts, charter schools, educational collaboratives, and approved public and private day and residential special education schools and provides technical assistance to school personnel and the public regarding the implementation of laws and regulations.

3 Coordinated Program Review (CPR): The Department oversees local compliance with education requirements through the Coordinated Program Review (CPR). Each school district and charter school in Massachusetts is scheduled to receive a CPR every six years and a mid-cycle special education follow-up visit three years after the CPR.

4 Guidance for Parent Advisory Councils: This guidance document was designed to ensure that every special education parent advisory council operating in the state understands the capacity and potential that they have to collaborate with the school community to influence special education programs and policies in their district.

5 Massachusetts Association of Special Education Parent Advisory Councils (MassPAC): Statewide organization providing information, training, and networking opportunities to Massachusetts special education parent advisory councils (SEPACs) and the professionals who collaborate with them.

6 Advancing Parent-Professional Leadership in Education (A.P.P.L.E.): Leadership Training for SEPACs and Administrators of Special Education

7 Conditions For School Effectiveness Self Assessment tool: This tool can be used as benchmarks against which schools can gauge their practice in key areas.

8 Alternative Compliance Waiver: Proposal for approval by the Department for the satisfaction of any requirement in 603 CMR 28.00 in a manner different from that specified in 603 CMR 28.00. The Department may approve such proposal if it shows substantial promise of contributing to improvements in the methods for meeting the goals of 603 CMR 28.00 and if such proposal does not conflict with any provision of law. No such proposal shall be implemented until approved by the Department. (See 603 CMR 28.03(5).) Districts may use the following form:

http://www.doe.mass.edu/forms/waivers/form_c.pdf

9 Open Meeting Law: Massachusetts law which requires that meetings of all governmental bodies be announced 48 hours in advance, recorded by means of minutes, and open to the public.

10 The Open Meeting Law Guide at: <http://www.mass.gov/ago/docs/government/oml/oml-guide.pdf>
Massachusetts Guide for public bodies regarding the Open Meeting Law. Updated March 18, 2015.

Last Updated: September 14, 2015