EDCO
COLLABORATIVE

A REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES
FOR
MANCHESTER-ESSEX REGIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

APRIL 23, 2018

Presented by Colleen Dolan

INTRODUCTION

EDCO Collaborative was contracted by Manchester Essex Regional School District to conduct a program review of special education services at the Manchester Essex Regional Middle School. Through a process that included focus groups, observations, and 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:

- How is inclusion balanced with substantially separate programs?
- Are there other models that should be considered?
- What work needs to be done to improve the model?
- Is there an understanding of the role of RTI in processes and programming?

METHODOLODY

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 parent and staff satisfaction surveys.

Eighteen focus groups were held and included parents, central office administration, director of student services, principal, dean of students, general education teachers, special educators working with students with mild to moderate disabilities and special educators in specialized programs, related therapy providers (speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, school psychologist, school adjustment counselor, guidance counselor, interventionists, behaviorist), reading teacher and tutors, and teaching assistants. Union leaders were twice asked to participate in a focus group, but declined.

Twelve observations were conducted as part of this evaluation including specialized programs and special education in the inclusive setting.

Twenty-four parents completed the Parent Satisfaction Survey. Of the twenty-four, thirty-five percent of respondents are parents of 6th grade students, forty-four percent are parents of 7th grade students, seventeen percent are parents of 8th grade students and four percent are parents of students placed out of district.

Twenty-three staff members completed the Staff Satisfaction Survey. The twenty-three included ten percent administrators, nineteen percent general educators, thirty-three percent special educators, fourteen percent teaching assistants, fourteen percent related service providers, and ten percent "other".

SPECIAL EDUCATION AT MANCHESTER ESSEX REGIONAL MIDDLE 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 grade span, total

enrollment, and special populations. Data related to students eligible for special education from nine districts similar to Manchester-Essex Regional (DART data 2017) is shown below:

Percentage of Students Eligible For Special Education

District/School	Enrollment	SWD %age
Berkley: Berkley Middle School	392	18.1%
Dighton: Rehoboth-Dighton Middle School	396	11.6%
Franklin: Horace Mann Middle School	466	12.9%
Grafton: Grafton Middle School	485	13.2%
Hamilton: Hamilton-Wenham	407	16.2%
Ipswich: Ipswich Middle School	458	14.2%
MERSD: Manchester-Essex Regional Middle School	386	12.4%
Millis: Millis Middle School	429	13.3%
Newburyport: Rupert A. Nock Middle School	542	14.4%
Sutton: Sutton Middle School	375	18.7%
Wachusett: Chocksett Middle School	377	11.1%

Disability Categories in Manchester-Essex Middle School 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	75.6%	71.9%
Partial Inclusion	10.5%	16.2%
Substantially separate	8.7%	7.5%
Separate Schools, Residential / Homebound/Hospital Placements	5.2%	4.4%

Indicator 1: Graduation Rate for Students with IEPS enrolled in MERSD

The state target and district and state rates for Indicator 1 are the most current data available. Data reported in the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report reflect a one year data lag in reporting.

Reported	Cohort 2016 Graduates	# of Students In 2016 Cohort	District Rate	State Rate	State Target
Students with IEPs	12	12	100.0%	71.8%	84.0%
General Ed	100	103	97.1%	91.3%	NA
All Students	**112**	**115**	**97.4%**	**87.5%**	**NA**

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 supports the two elementary schools and one works at the middle and high schools.

Manchester Essex Regional Middle School
Total school population grades 6 through 8: 386 students
Percentage of students with disabilities: 12.4%
Special Education Teachers:
          Moderate Special Needs Teachers: 3 (one at each grade level)
          SWING Program: 1
          SAIL Program: 2 FTEs
          IRWL / Reading Program: 3 FTE
Teaching Assistants:
          SWING Program: 1 working 1:1 with student
          SAIL Program: 2.0 (1 working 1:1 with student)
          IRWL Program: .6 FTE, a Fellow from Endicott College also supports the IRWL
          program

Related Service Providers, special education: One School Psychologist dedicated to the middle school, a Team Chairperson, Speech and Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist and Physical Therapist, all shared with Manchester-Essex Regional High School
Related Service Providers, general education: School Adjustment Counselor, Guidance Counselor, Reading Teacher, Reading Tutor, and Interventionists

GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT SUPPORTS/CONTINUUM OF SERVICES
The pre-referral process at Manchester Essex Middle School is called "Teachers Assisting Teachers" or TAT. The process requires teachers who are concerned about a particular student to fill out a form that includes the concern, student's grades, and strategies they've used in the classroom. The form is then turned in to Guidance. A TAT meeting is scheduled and may include the principal, dean of students, guidance counselor, school psychologist, school adjustment counselor, reading teacher, a general education teacher and a special education

teacher. The teacher who made the referral may or may not be present. The TAT team makes recommendations regarding strategies that should be utilized in the classroom. Several weeks later, the team meets to consider whether or not the strategies were effective.

Manchester-Essex Middle School also has a general education program using staff called "Interventionists." Interventionists work with general education students who may not qualify for special education services. Students come to the program with specific goals. For example, one of the supports provided by Interventionists is Executive Functioning Bootcamp, an eight-week program for students struggling with organization skills. Once students have completed the bootcamp, service is terminated.

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

There are three specialized programs at the middle school level:

The **SAIL Program**, Social and Academic Integrated Learning, currently serves 7 middle school students. 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, and school psychologist. Students accessing the SAIL Program participate in a combination of self-contained and mainstream classes, social skills groups, academic support, leadership development, and specialized case management. In addition, students may receive additional support during unstructured activities when social challenges are greatest, including lunch, recess, and transition times.

Specialized Program Components include:
- Tracking of personal and social goals developed in collaboration with teachers and counselors
- Individual and group coaching, counseling, and instruction dedicated to building students' social pragmatic skills, pro-social behaviors, and self-advocacy
- Intensive case management by the SAIL Program liaison
- Daily check-in and check-out organizational system
- Anxiety management and wellness activities
- Home-school communication, including the establishment of partnerships between parents and program staff

Specialized instruction and methodologies in the SAIL Program include
- Positive Behavior Intervention Supports
- Social Thinking Groups
- Brain Frames
- Structured Study Skills Development
- Assistive Technology

The **SWING Program** (Students with Integrated Goals) staff are shared between middle and high school. Currently there are 3 SWING students, 1 at the middle school and 2 at the high school. SWING program staffing consists of an interdisciplinary team that includes a certified special education teacher, psychologist, 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 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 incorporating 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.

Specialized instruction and methodologies in the SWING Program include:
- Positive Behavior Intervention Supports
- Social Thinking Groups
- Specialized Reading and Math Methodologies
- Assistive Technology
- Transition Portfolio Development

The **IRWL Program** (Intensive Reading and Written Language) provides specialized instruction designed to remediate areas of weakness and maximize independent access to grade level curriculum. The program is designed for students who have diagnosed reading disabilities. Instruction parallels academic content in mainstream grade level classrooms, and prioritizes development of reading, writing, language comprehension, and oral communication skills. Class size is limited to eight students. Assistive technology designed to support reading and written language development is integrated throughout the program. The continuum of services in IRWL ranges from fully self-contained and intensive language-based classes to a combination of self-contained and supported inclusion classes.

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
- Utilize micro-uniting (also known as "chunking") and structuring of tasks
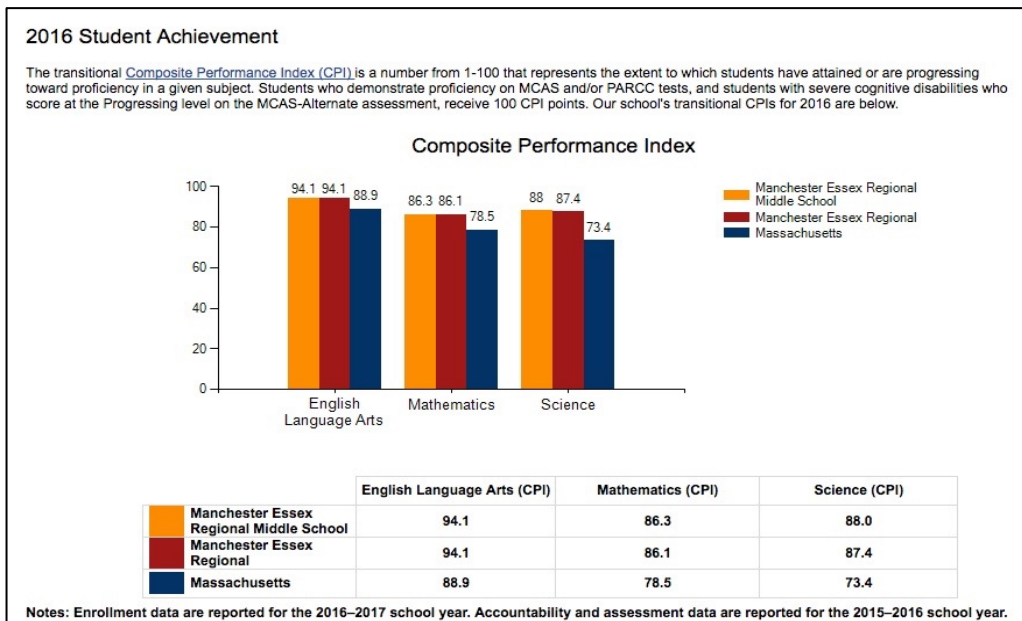
- Automatize concepts and strategies through frequent opportunities for practice and review
- Provide rigorous grade level content aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks
- Conduct frequent progress monitoring and use results to inform instruction
- Integrate assistive technologies that support students' independent access to the curriculum
- Offer opportunities for increased independence and inclusion, preparing students to transition to mainstream programming

Specialized Instruction and Methodologies in the IRWL Program
- Highly structured, systematic, individualized Orton Gillingham based reading programs
- Brain Frames
- Landmark Writing Program
- Visualizing and Verbalizing
- Read Naturally Reading Fluency Program
- Assistive Technology

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Manchester-Essex Regional School District participated in 2017 Next Generation MCAS. Since 2017 was the first year of this testing the state has no comparative data, therefore, districts participating in Next Generation MCAS are not ranked. Student achievement data from 2016 is provided below. The district report card data from 2017 is included in the Appendix.

2016 Student Achievement

The transitional Composite Performance Index (CPI) is a number from 1-100 that represents the extent to which students have attained or are progressing toward proficiency in a given subject. Students who demonstrate proficiency on MCAS and/or PARCC tests, and students with severe cognitive disabilities who score at the Progressing level on the MCAS-Alternate assessment, receive 100 CPI points. Our school's transitional CPIs for 2016 are below.

Composite Performance Index

	English Language Arts (CPI)	Mathematics (CPI)	Science (CPI)
Manchester Essex Regional Middle School	94.1	86.3	88.0
Manchester Essex Regional	94.1	86.1	87.4
Massachusetts	88.9	78.5	73.4

Notes: Enrollment data are reported for the 2016–2017 school year. Accountability and assessment data are reported for the 2015–2016 school year.

PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AT MANCHESTER ESSEX REGIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

IMPRESSIONS – PARENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL FOCUS GROUPS

Two focus groups were offered for parents of middle school students with disabilities, one in the evening and one during school hours. A total of four parents attended, representing four students or eight percent of students with disabilities.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

Parents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be heard. They commended the Manchester Essex Middle School staff for their support and commitment. They noted the rigor of the curriculum and the district's strong reputation as positive but also expressed concern that this could be a challenge for students with disabilities.

All parents rated communication from special education staff as good to excellent. They receive emails or phone calls on a regular basis and appreciate "being in the loop" and having their voices heard.

Parents attending the focus group also noted Manchester Essex provides lots of resources for kids in terms of programming, support, and after school activities.

AREAS TO CHANGE/IMPROVE

Two parents believe there is not enough support for general educators to enable them to know what they need to know about students with disabilities. One stated, "general educators do not always recognize the students who need help and often feel supporting students with disabilities is the job of the teaching assistant or special education liaison."

One parent feels it takes too long to get a child who is struggling into special education and suggested it would be better to get support earlier, before the student is really struggling.

Another parent expressed concern regarding support provided by teaching assistants. She wonders if her child receives too much support and feels (s)he is becoming enabled. She would like her child to demonstrate independent work skills but feels the current level of support will not result in independence.

Also noted was the number of accommodations students receive through the IEP; one parent feels accommodations are over done. The transiency of teaching assistants in the district was also noted as a concern.

One parent expressed, "strengths are our weaknesses," and explained trying to live up to the expectations in a high performing district can be anxiety producing for many students.

IMPRESSIONS: PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY (24 RESPONDENTS - SEE APPENDIX FOR FURTHER BREAKDOWN)

Twenty-four parents completed the parent satisfaction survey. Eight reported as parents of sixth graders, ten as parents of seventh graders, four as parents of eighth graders and one as a parent of a student in an out of district placement. Fourteen parents reported having a student in a specialized program, SAIL, IRWL, or SWING.

Over fifty percent of parents reported their child presents with a specific learning disability, twelve percent have children on the autism spectrum, twelve percent report their child has a social-emotional disability and the remainder report their children present with developmentally delays, neurological impairment, health or communication disabilities.

Fourteen percent of students whose parents responded were found eligible for special education services while in middle school. Fourteen percent were found eligible while in preschool, thirty-two percent in grades K, 1 or 2, and forty percent in grades 3 – 5.

EVALUATIONS

Over eighty percent of parents who responded feel Manchester-Essex Regional Middle School provides evaluations that are thorough and comprehensive, accurately reflect their child's needs, and include specific recommendations. Seventy-five percent feel the results are communicated in a manner that helps them understand their child's disability and learning needs.

Over sixty percent agree or strongly agree that general education teachers are made aware of results with twenty-one percent in disagreement.

IEPS/PROGRESS REPORTS

The majority of parents who responded to the survey, eighty-eight percent, agree or strongly agree their concerns and request are documented in the IEP or cover letter. Seventy-nine percent feel the IEP accurately reflects the Team's discussion with seventeen percent in disagreement.

Eighty-seven percent agree or strongly agree the IEP states how progress toward goals and objectives will be measured.

Although most parents agree there are a variety of methodologies considered by the Team, thirty-eight percent are neutral or disagree. Seventy-nine percent agree or strongly agree that services and supports are provided as stated in the IEP, however, thirteen percent strongly disagree.

Eighty-three percent agree or strongly agree their children are making progress on IEP goals, thirteen percent disagree or strongly disagree.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT
Seventy-five percent of parents who responded to the survey feel they are equal partners in planning their child's individual education program. Twelve percent strongly disagree. Over ninety percent feel they are treated in a professional manner and over eighty percent feel district staff are available and accessible and they are encouraged to participate in decision making.

Seventy-nine percent of parents agree or strongly agree communication from district staff is sufficient to keep them informed, twenty-one percent disagree or strongly disagree.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES
Of parents who responded to the survey, seventy-five percent agree special educators make accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP, seventeen percent disagree or strongly disagree. Fewer, sixty-seven percent, agree general education teachers are aware of their child's disability and related needs and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP. Thirty-eight percent are neutral or disagree. Regarding collaboration between special and general educators, fifty-eight percent of parents agree it is sufficient, twenty-nine percent are neutral and sixteen percent disagree.

Parents are split regarding whether or not general education teachers demonstrate an understanding of their child's disability and related needs. Fifty-four percent agree they do, twenty-nine percent are neutral, and twenty percent disagree. Significantly more parents, seventy percent, agree related therapists (speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy) demonstrate an understanding of their child's disability and related needs, seven percent disagree. With regard to the amount of services provided by related therapists, seventy percent of parents are satisfied, twenty-four percent are not satisfied. Seventy-five percent of parents are satisfied with the social emotional support their child receives, seventeen percent are not.

Half of the parents who responded to the survey feel the middle school ensures that after-school and extra-curricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities, thirteen percent are neutral and twenty-five percent disagree.

Parents of students who are supported by a teaching assistant were asked to respond to three targeted questions. Fifty-six percent of these parents feel teaching assistants demonstrate knowledge of their students' disabilities and related needs, twenty-two percent disagree. Sixty percent feel teaching assistants demonstrate an understanding of their role, twenty-two percent disagree. Seventy-three percent of parents feel the teaching assistants provide opportunities for their children to become independent.

Parents of students in specialized programs were asked to respond to three supplementary questions regarding programming. Sixty-eight percent of these parents are satisfied with the specialized programming options at the middle school and are satisfied with the types of and amount of services their child receives in specialized instruction. Thirty percent are not satisfied

with specialized programming options at the middle school, twenty-one percent are not satisfied with the types of and amount of services their child receives in specialized instruction. Seventy-nine percent feel teachers and assistants in the program work toward promoting independence and placing their child in a lesser restrictive setting, sixteen percent disagree.

Overall, seventy-nine percent of respondents are happy with the special education services their child receives and seventy-one percent feel their child is happy at school.

Parents who completed the satisfaction survey made nine additional comments. Of these, four praised staff, programs and communication. Two parents expressed concern over a lack of communication from special education staff, one reporting they initiate most of the communication. One parent expressed concerns over a lack of inclusion opportunities for their child and noted that even in the inclusive setting, their child is placed with other students with disabilities.

PARENT SURVEY SUMMARY:
Just about half of the parents of students with disabilities at Manchester Essex Regional Middle School responded to the parent satisfaction survey. Of these, most parents report a high level of satisfaction with evaluations, IEPs, and parent involvement. With regard to programs and services, although most feel special educators make accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP, fewer feel general educators are aware of their child's disability and provide accommodations and modifications accordingly. Similarly, just over half of parents of students who are supported by a teaching assistant feel the assistant demonstrates knowledge of their child's disability and needs.

Parents report a high level of satisfaction with related services including social-emotional support. A majority of parents whose children are in specialized programs are satisfied with programming. These parents also feel program staff are promoting independence in their children.

IMPRESSIONS – STAFF FOCUS GROUPS:
Special Education Administrators, Principals, General and Special Educators, Related Therapists, and Teaching Assistants

Manchester-Essex Middle School Focus Groups
At Manchester-Essex Middle School, special educators support students with mild to moderate disabilities as well as students in specialized programs: SAIL, SWING, and IRWL. In addition, students with disabilities in specialized programs are supported by Teaching Assistants. Related service providers include a Team Chairperson (shared w/ Manchester Essex High School), School Psychologist, Guidance Counselor and School Adjustment Counselor. Reading tutors and Interventionists support general education students at the middle school. 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.
SAIL Program staff report they communicate well with each other and with parents; however, there is not enough time in the day to consult with grade level teachers whose classes they support. They would like to have time to share and model best practices with general educators.

SWING Program staff feel the program is working for their students. There are currently three students overseen by SWING staff, two at Manchester-Essex High School and one at the middle school. Students fit the profile for the program and are included in general education during some portions of the day. SWING staff would like the opportunity to work more with teachers to make inclusion experiences more meaningful.

There are a variety of methodologies available to meet the needs of students. SWING staff report continually researching best practice and currently, one teacher is training in Lindamood Visualizing and Verbalizing. The SWING Program Teaching Assistant has completed Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) training.

The IRWL program at Manchester Essex Middle School offers a variety of services tailored to the needs of its students. Services range from self-contained to inclusive classes. The program offers separate, small group classes for grades 6, 7 and 8. A separate reading tutorial is offered, when needed, using the Orton-Gillingham approach. For students requiring math support, small group instruction is provided.   Singapore math is utilized in grade 6. At grades 7 and 8, students engage in grade level curriculum. Currently there are twelve students in the program across the three grade levels. IRWL teachers praised general education teachers who took part in training on Language-based Learning Disabilities at Landmark School.

There are three special education teachers working with students with mild to moderate disabilities at Manchester-Essex Middle School, one at each grade level. Two report caseloads of 11, one reports having 16 students as part of a "bubble year." Special education support includes a "Strategies" class for students. In Strategies classes, students focus on IEP objectives. Special educators expressed concern over working with more than one grade level in some Strategies classes.

All special educators expressed gratitude toward both regular and special education administration for their support and advocacy. They feel supported and have been provided with a variety of resources to meet the needs of their students and deal with challenges that arise.

Special educators report time is the biggest challenge. Consultation time with general educators and teaching assistants is minimal. Although a common block is scheduled at the beginning of the year, that time may be used for Team meetings.

Teaching Assistants commend the district for its specialized programming options during their focus group. IRWL Teaching Assistants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to communicate

with other IRWL staff at least once per cycle. Similarly, the SWING Teaching Assistant feels supported and receives regular updates from the SWING liaison. SAIL Teaching Assistants feel they do not have adequate time for consultation. Although they are provided access to student IEPs at the beginning of the year, they would like access throughout the year to be able to review accommodations and goals. SAIL Teaching Assistants also report they may be assigned primarily to one student but may be placed in classes where there is more than one student on an IEP. In these situations, they report having difficulty prioritizing responsibilities.

There is some confusion among Teaching Assistants over schedules, roles, and responsibilities. They would appreciate having job descriptions detailing specific responsibilities related to their unique positions as well as clarification on what else may be asked of them, i.e. clerical tasks. Teaching assistants are required to work an additional ten hours over the course of the year, but they are sometimes uncertain about whether or not they should attend professional learning opportunities provided by the district. Finally, assistants would like their role to be clarified for general education teachers. They report they are not utilized consistently throughout the school.

The pre-referral process at Manchester Essex Regional Middle School is Teachers Assisting Teachers, or TAT. A team comprised of a variety of general and special education staff and administrators hear concerns of teachers and suggest strategies that may resolve challenges in the classroom. The teacher is then given a period of time to utilize recommendations and assess their appropriateness. Later the team meets and considers next steps.

A consistent theme from staff attending the focus groups is that TAT is not effective. Many are unsure what paperwork is required, who gets the referral, and/or what the meeting format is. For many, TAT is seen as a route to a schedule change, i.e. special education service or a supported class. Regarding the TAT process, they feel it is too slow and not responsive enough to the needs brought forth. One teacher suggested it can take months to get students who are referred to TAT tested for special education eligibility, however, students referred by parents are tested right away. For that reason, some reported discussing concerns with parents in the hope they would refer their children for special education eligibility.

The School Psychologist at the middle school does the psychological testing for special education referrals. Staff report the information gleaned from psychological evaluations is thorough and helpful. They also feel it is reported in a manner that is clear and easy to understand. Several teachers expressed, however, they would like to review test results prior to the Team meeting so that they are better able to speak to the accommodations that are necessary.

Students on IEPs who require counseling typically see the school psychologist while general education students typically work with the school adjustment counselor. There is also a guidance counselor at the middle school that refers to himself as a "jack of all trades" and sees the role as one of "driving kids to improve."

Four focus groups were offered, by grade level, for general educators. Many general education staff expressed gratitude for the opportunities presented through the *Reaching All Learners* program. They feel the program has been helpful but would also appreciate additional training on the types of students they will see in their classroom in a given year.

Teachers generally feel there are sufficient programming options for students with disabilities and special educators do an excellent job as liaisons. One group noted special educators are great at anticipating issues and heading them off before they become larger. They expressed concern that in one particular Strategies class there are students from two grade levels. General educators would appreciate more planning time with special education liaison and suggested one common planning time block per cycle be set aside for this.

General educators report special education teachers are not sufficiently trained in content areas and therefore, are not familiar with curriculum or vocabulary. An analogy to baseball was offered as an example: "If someone who plays one position is put in another position. How successful will they be?"

Concerns were raised among general educators about several students on IEPs being placed in the same classroom as this results in fewer higher achieving peer models. Teachers generally feel a teaching assistant should support all classes containing students on IEPs. They wonder if placements are made solely on the basis of social skills.

In addition, teachers feel some students in the inclusive setting present with high needs and are unable to handle grade level curriculum. Although teachers are able to modify curriculum for different ability levels, they do not feel prepared to deliver a different curriculum and some do not feel qualified to teach the high needs students.

Many felt it would be beneficial if the same Teaching assistant could work in their classrooms consistently rather than having different assistants support different classes.

IMPRESSIONS: STAFF SATISFACTION SURVEY
Twenty-three staff members responded to the staff satisfaction survey. By role, there were two administrators, four general educators, seven special educators, three related service providers, three teaching assistants and two "other."

COMMUNICATION:
A majority of teachers who completed the staff satisfaction survey, fifty-nine percent, do not agree there is sufficient communication between special education and general education staff about the needs and progress of students with disabilities. Forty percent feel communication is sufficient. Similarly, only twenty-seven percent agree there is sufficient time for communication between general educators and related service providers; fifty-five percent disagree. Overwhelmingly, staff do not agree there is sufficient time for collaboration.

Thirty-eight percent of staff completing the survey do not agree general educators are provided

with sufficient information and support for helping students with disabilities in their classrooms, thirty-three percent agree and twenty-nine percent are neutral.

Regarding support from administration, staff largely agree they receive what they need from the middle school team chairperson. Sixty-seven percent agree they are supported by the Student Services Director when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities and seventy-one percent agree they receive the support they need from the Principal.

Regarding teaching assistants, fifty-eight percent of staff agree assistants are effectively assigned in order to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities. Similarly, forty-eight percent of staff agree teaching assistants are utilized effectively to support students with disabilities, twenty percent do not agree. Staff are split regarding whether or not teaching assistants are sufficiently trained to provide instruction support to students with special needs. While forty-three percent of staff have no opinion or are neutral, forty-eight percent agree they are and fourteen percent do not agree. Thirty-four percent agree the teaching assistants they work with are trained to promote independence in their students, twenty-four percent disagree.

The majority of staff who completed the survey agree the district provides useful professional development related to meeting the needs of special education students. Fourteen percent disagree. Fifty-nine percent agree the training sessions they have attended have been helpful to them in supporting the learning of students with disabilities, twenty-three percent do not agree.

Nine respondents answered questions directed specifically toward staff engaged in co-teaching. While twenty-two percent agree (none strongly) adequate training has been provided to ensure co-teaching is effective, eleven percent strongly disagree, sixty-six percent are neutral or have no opinion. Thirty-three percent agree (again, none strongly) the co-teaching model they are engaged in is effective and beneficial for both general education students and students with disabilities, eleven percent strongly disagree.

When asked about obstacles to effective co-teaching, staff replied, "no direct training," and "lack of planning time." Four staff members provided comments regarding what is needed to improve co-teaching at Manchester Essex Middle School. Individual responses included, time to meet, more opportunities to work together (more than one period per day), and planning time. One suggested administrators consider personalities before requiring staff to work together.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESSES
Staff who responded to the survey offered split opinions on the TAT process. Twenty-nine percent agree (none strongly agree) the school makes every attempt to meet the unique needs of students through the TAT process before a district referral to special education is made. Twenty-four percent disagree and forty-eight percent are neutral or have no opinion. Only

fourteen percent feel the process is clearly defined with a designated contact person, process and follow-up procedures. Similarly, only four percent agree TAT provides helpful and appropriate interventions prior to referral. Forty-eight percent agree the TAT is viewed as a "route to an IEP."

A majority, eighty-one percent of staff, agree the evaluations conducted through the special education process are sufficiently comprehensive to identify students' specific strengths and needs and sixty-two percent agree the results of special education evaluations are shared in ways that provide meaningful insights into students' educational needs. Fourteen percent disagree.

Regarding the IEP (Individualized Education Program) process, only twenty-nine percent agree the process in the school involves general and special education teachers as equal partners in making recommendations, thirty-eight percent do not agree. A clear majority, however, agree they have the opportunity to weigh in on accommodations they will make in their classrooms.

Fifty-seven percent agree their student's IEP goals and objectives promote skills that align with the Massachusetts curriculum standards, only five percent do not agree. Overwhelmingly, staff agree the special education services identified in their students' IEPs are consistently provided by special education. While forty-eight percent agree the special education accommodations identified in students' IEPs are consistently delivered by general education teachers, thirty-three percent do not agree. A majority also do not agree special education accommodations are developed collaboratively between general and special education teachers.

Staff who responded to the survey are split regarding progress monitoring. While thirty-eight percent agree there is a consistent approach to progress monitoring, a schedule, and methods/tools for monitoring the progress of students with disabilities, forty-three percent do not agree.

There is clear agreement that the Team considers the least restrictive environment in making recommendations for special education services and students with disabilities placed in the inclusion setting receive a benefit from interacting with typical peers.

Staff also agree specialized programming options at MERMS are sufficient, and students in specialized programs are taught strategies to promote independence and facilitate movement to a lesser restrictive setting.

Contrary to the view expressed by parents who responded to the survey, staff who responded agree students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in school-sponsored activities such as field trips, extracurricular activities, and sporting events.

PARENT COMMUNICATION
Asked about parent communication and involvement, over seventy-five percent of staff responding to the satisfaction survey agree parents are given the opportunity to participate as

partners in evaluating their child's needs, none disagree. Similarly, staff agree parents are encouraged to participate in making decisions about their children's educational programs and services and the school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents of children with disabilities.

Fifty-eight percent of staff feel their professional recommendations are valued by parents and family members, nine percent do not agree, the remainder have no opinion or are neutral.

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

More than fifty percent of staff who responded consider these as CHALLENGES:
- ✓ Teachers in this school do not have high enough expectations for students with disabilities.
- ✓ Progress monitoring for special education students is not being implemented consistently.
- ✓ General and special education teachers need a toolkit of progress monitoring tools and training in how to use them.
- ✓ General education teachers need more focused professional development on special education and teaching students with disabilities.
- ✓ General education teachers need more focused professional development on differentiating instruction.
- ✓ Teaching assistants need more focused professional development on providing instructional interventions to students.
- ✓ Our school needs guidance and support on implementing a more systematic pre-referral intervention process (RTI or similar).
- ✓ Our school needs guidance and support to co-teach effectively.
- ✓ There is insufficient communication and collaboration among general and special education teachers and parents to help special education students make an effective transition into grade 6 at MERMS.

One statement, "Teachers in this school have expectations that are too high for students with disabilities," was ranked as NOT A PROBLEM.

Six additional comments were made by staff who completed the satisfaction survey. One staff member commends leadership for being focused on providing teachers with the tools they need to make programs the best they can be for all students and reported, "my voice, expertise and opinion are heard and considered when decisions are undertaken."

Several staff commented on the lack of time to collaborate. One felt additional time is not needed but the time available now should be used more effectively. Another stated, "The consistency with which a general education teacher is able to meet special education students' needs is directly connected to the level of support they receive from the liaison and other personnel." With regard to co-teaching, the same teacher feels "pairings should be consistent and there should be time to relationship-build and debrief with third parties throughout the co-teaching time. At least one prep period per cycle should be devoted to planning together." One teacher suggested specialists be considered when educating staff on students with disabilities.

District professional learning opportunities were commended. Manchester Essex has done extensive training on data collection with Alan Blume, and however, one staff suggested "one size fits all" trainings are not effective and would prefer trainings providing strategies for the group currently in his/her classroom.

STAFF SURVEY SUMMARY
Overall, MERMS staff feel the school delivers high quality education programs and services for students with disabilities and meets the needs of students with disabilities in the district. Clearly, staff feel there is a need for time for collaboration and planning among general educators, special educators, related therapists, and teaching assistants.

OBSERVATIONS
Many examples of best practice were observed during these observations. Clearly, students are aware of schedule and routine. In most cases, they enter classes and know where to find the class schedule and instructions. Students are offered a variety of seating options providing sensory stimulation. In one classroom, students were observed sitting at tables, in the pod area, on the floor, in beanbag chairs, and at low floor tables. Lap desks were also available for students not seated at a traditional desk.

Schedules, word walls, instructions, websites, and supporting visuals adorned white boards and bulletin boards throughout the school. In many classrooms goals and objectives for the day were posted. During several observations, students were asked to repeat or clarify verbal directions.

Many examples of technology integration were observed including extensive use of Chromebooks, SMART Boards and a document camera. Google Classroom is used in a variety of ways including managing assignments, providing feedback, and communicating with students and their parents. Several examples of differentiated instruction were also observed. Students were often provided choices regarding assignments, assessments, and in classroom environment.

On one particular day of scheduled observations a late start was required due to weather conditions. This resulted in a revised schedule (shorter periods) throughout the day. In one specialized program a Teaching Assistant had posted the revised schedule on the board, and

was observed discussing the changes and what students could expect.

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

- ✓ Posted Exemplars
- ✓ Connections made between content and student experiences
- ✓ Time limits, warnings
- ✓ Wait time
- ✓ Assistive Technology

In addition, a variety of specialized methodologies were observed including Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, Social Thinking groups, Orton-Gillingham, Visualizing and Verbalizing, and project-based learning.

Teaching Assistants supported many of the classrooms observed. In some cases, students from specialized programs were easily identifiable as the teaching assistant sat or stood in close proximity. In fewer cases, the teaching assistant moved about the classroom, interacting with many students throughout the class.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

My thanks to all staff members and parents who participated in the focus groups, surveys, and interviews.

COMMENDATIONS

Staff and parents agree that students with disabilities in Manchester Essex are provided with high quality education programs and services. Both survey data and information gleaned from focus groups is positive, overall, regarding programs and services for students with disabilities.

The Director of Student Services was praised for her support. Special educators feel the director is responsive in providing curriculum and other resources. They also agree professional learning opportunities are available to them both in-district and outside of the district. Sixty-two percent of staff agree the district provides useful professional development related to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Many staff members cited the *Reaching All Learners* Program as an example of the district's efforts to support staff in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Several general educators offered appreciation for the opportunity to take training related to language-based learning disabilities at Landmark School.

The Middle School Team Chairperson and Principal are viewed as "go-to" resources for staff when they are facing challenges related to services for students with disabilities. The Team Chairperson is described as a "trouble-shooter" and the principal is viewed as an advocate for students with disabilities and special educators.

Manchester Essex offers a wide variety of specialized programming for students and must be commended for maintaining the integrity of their programs through entry and exit criteria that are most often strictly adhered to. Currently, programs exist at the middle school level for

students with autism spectrum disorders and related challenges, social-emotional disabilities, and language-based learning disabilities. Sixty-eight percent of parents and seventy-three percent of staff feel there are sufficient specialized programming offerings at the middle school and students in specialized programs are considered appropriate for their respective programs. The IRWL Program in particular is commended for individualizing special education services. A study of IRWL student IEPs from grade six to eight shows there is typically a decrease in pullout services over the course of middle school. Students have obviously been provided with strategies that allow them to become more independent learners.

In addition to programming, there are a variety of service models available to middle school students with disabilities including support in the inclusive setting through co-taught or teaching assistant supported classes, pullout support from special educators, and substantially separate classes. The Middle School also offers a "ME" Block daily for 30 minutes. The goal is to provide students with support for executive functioning skills and homework help. Use of Google Classroom is an expectation at Manchester-Essex Middle School.

Manchester Essex boasts high quality professional and support staff. Staff working in specialized programs possess both experience and the appropriate license 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*, and *Orton Gillingham*, and staff report having appropriate materials to utilize these programs. There is a shared model of supervision for special educators. Both the principal and Director of Student Services are involved in evaluating special education staff. This is ideal as teachers have the opportunity to receive feedback regarding special education responsibilities as well as curriculum, planning and assessment. Manchester-Essex is also commended for recognizing the need for a School Adjustment Counselor at the middle school.

Staff working in specialized programs at the middle school are praised by parents, administrators, and colleagues for their dedication to students.   Teaching Assistants are highly qualified, and are provided with the opportunity to seek certification as Registered Behavior Technicians. In fact, this certification has become a requirement for Teaching Assistants in both the SWING and SAIL programs.

Manchester Essex is doing well diagnostically. Over eighty percent of parents and staff feel evaluations are thorough and comprehensive. Eighty-eight percent of parents who responded to the survey feel evaluations accurately reflect their child's needs. Seventy-nine percent of parents feel evaluation results are communicated in a clear manner that helps them understand their child's learning needs. Sixty-two percent of teachers feel evaluation results are shared in ways that provide meaningful insights into students' educational needs.

With regard to IEP services, seventy-five percent of parents feel special education teachers make modifications and accommodations as documented in the IEP. Sixty-seven percent feel general educators provide these.

Parents generally feel that they are partners in planning their child's individual education program. Eighty-eight percent feel their concerns are documented in the IEP and eighty-three percent feel their child is making progress on IEP goals.

Seventy-one percent of parents feel they receive progress updates with enough frequency to keep them informed and eighty-three percent agree staff are available and accessible.

Transition planning is accomplished in a thoughtful and thorough manner. Teachers from the elementary schools and high school are given the opportunity to meet with middle school teachers to discuss student's strengths and challenges prior to the transition.

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. Over eighty percent of staff that responded to the survey feel their school delivers high quality programs and services for students with disabilities. Seventy-nine percent of parents who responded to the survey agree that overall, they are happy with the special education services their child receives.

RECOMMENDATIONS
General Education Misperceptions
General educators at the middle school voiced several concerning misperceptions regarding special education and inclusion. Several general education teachers questioned the benefits of inclusion opining if several students with disabilities are placed in a general education classroom, there will not be a sufficient number of peer models to emulate. Several also suggested every general education class that includes students with disabilities be supported by a special educator or teaching assistant. The work of providing accommodations and modifications is largely believed to be exclusively a special education role. Teachers stated they are, "comfortable modifying for ability levels but do not have ability or expertise to deliver a different curriculum." In their words, they are, "not equipped with skills to modify."

General educators also demonstrate a lack of understanding of specialized programming goals. It appears that when students are in specialized programs, many general educators do not feel they have a role in educating these students and, thus, are not accountable.

Teachers in general, fifty-nine percent, do not agree there is sufficient communication between special education and general education staff about the needs and progress of students with disabilities. This is perplexing given the fact that general education teachers are allotted two free blocks, one for consultation and one for prep, out of every 7 blocks. Special education personnel have done some training on the purpose of "consult time" and how it should be used. Their understanding is that consult time must be "student driven, and not focused on assignments and assessments."

A general education teacher asked, "Is consultation time for information gathering or problem solving?" Consultation time should be used as support and/or training for school personnel on

student disability related needs. This helps staff to work more effectively with students toward attaining annual goals and accessing general curriculum.

Throughout the focus groups, staff referred to employee rights as detailed in the Manchester Essex Regional School District Collective Bargaining Agreement. One teacher commented, "The association has been very active with special education." The workday of middle school unit members as documented in the agreement is 7:35 am – 2:35pm, a 7-hour day. Students arrive at 7:45am and are dismissed at 2:15pm. This leaves only 10 minutes each morning and 20 minutes in the afternoon for student support.

Teachers communicated that although the *Reaching all Learners* program is helpful, there should be additional training for teachers around the specific disability types represented in their classrooms.

Finally, general education teachers expressed the need to view assessment results prior to eligibility meetings in order to be better prepared to speak to accommodations that will be necessary.

These misperceptions must be addressed so that general educators have a solid understanding of expectations with regard to students with disabilities. Successful inclusion will require collaborative planning, shared ownership and accountability for all students, and equitable responsibility for teaching tasks.

It is recommended the district take several steps to address the issues cited above:
- Hold staff discussions on "consult time" aimed at developing a model for use of this time. If consult time is used appropriately and effectively, the need for additional professional learning on specific disabilities will not likely be necessary as each and every consult discussion will focus on students with disabilities, their unique needs, and building general education teaching capacity
- Continue providing professional development on the purpose and appropriate use of consult time
- Require a specific number of consult periods to be utilized for general education/special education/related therapist communication
- Review the Manchester Essex Regional School District Collective Bargaining Agreement with the aim of supporting teacher requests for additional consult time.
- Provide training for members of the Teachers' Association on special education regulations, specifically, least restrictive educational setting (LRE) and inclusion
- Currently, teachers may access assessments through the Team Chairperson. She reports results are available for viewing in her office a few days prior to the eligibility meeting. To protect student confidentiality, it is not recommended that copies be provided, however, team members should be reminded of this opportunity to access and review assessments before the meeting.
- Provide additional professional learning on inclusion, specifically, data and examples of the benefits of inclusion for both students with disabilities and typical students.

Perhaps there are graduates or students at the high school who would be willing to share their stories around the benefits of inclusion. "Book Groups" have also been used effectively in many districts to provide an opportunity for self-reflection and sharing of best practice. Bill Henderson, author of *The Blind Advantage: How Going Blind Made Me a Stronger Principal and How Including Children with Disabilities Made Our School Better for Everyone*, distinguishes between "an inclusion experience" (e.g., students with disabilities joining other students for a weekly swim class) and "inclusive education", where all students are together most of the day. "It has to do with frequency," he says, "and the main issue is quality. All students learn together at high academic standards, and they participate meaningfully in a range of activities, including recess and afterschool activities as well as academics. Teachers use universal design as they plan units, building in specialized instruction, accommodations, and modifications to get the general curriculum across to all students."   I recommend staff be asked to read this or a similar book over the summer and discuss as a group in the fall.

Model – Mild to Moderate Special Needs Programming
Several interviewees in the focus groups cited the rigor of the curriculum at Manchester Essex Middle School as a negative for students with disabilities. Rather than having sufficient time to teach skills and strategies, a great deal of time is spent preparing students for assessments in general education classes and getting them started on homework. The focus appears to be on curriculum rather than building skills that will serve students in the long run.

The current services model for students with mild to moderate disabilities, providing *Strategies* classes where students are taught study skills such as executive functioning, is, in theory, an excellent model. However, time in *Strategies* classes is not consistently spent on teaching strategies aimed at skill building. Rather, most attention is focused on classroom curriculum and assignments. Middle school special educators opine, working with multiple grade levels in *Strategies* classes is not ideal as it interferes with "getting students through classes." This belief is in contrast with the rationale behind these classes. It appears special educators feel responsible for ensuring students complete classroom and homework; this is taking time away from the focus on skill building. Alternative models should be explored to shift the focus from curriculum support to building skills targeted by the IEP across content areas.

It is recommended Manchester Essex consider a different model of services for students with mild to moderate disabilities. A "cross grades" model where the focus is on skills rather than grade level curriculum has been effective in other districts. Special educators ideally would hold dual certification, in a content area such as ELA or math and in teaching students with moderate disabilities. For example, a model where two special educators support students with mild to moderate disabilities could utilize two teachers, one supporting grades 6-8 in ELA and Humanities, the second supporting students in Math and Science. Educators with an in-depth understanding of both special education and content curriculum would be grounded in the principles of inclusion while demonstrating expertise in content areas. This would also result in a more efficient use of staff.

Further, it is recommended the special education Team Leader role be redefined as "Inclusion Coach," supporting consultation sessions between general and special educators, observing students and reporting back to the Teachers Assisting Teachers Team, and assisting with professional learning initiatives. It appears there are gaps between professional learning initiatives and their implementation. Although many staff reported participating in professional learning opportunities, *Reaching All Learners*, Landmark LBLD training, training with Alan Blume on goals and objectives, there were few references to implementation. An Inclusion Coach could support application of training in the classroom. The role of Team Leaders as coaches ideally will expand to include content Team Leaders coaching middle school colleagues and will positively impact school culture.

Teachers Assisting Teachers (TAT) Process
Virtually every middle school focus group voiced confusion over the Teachers Assisting Teachers process. Several suggested the many changes in administration over the last five years have led to confusion. The general educator perception of the Teachers Assisting Teachers process, a route to a schedule change or an Individualized Education Program, is troubling and has resulted in misuse of the process.

Research has shown that effective pre-referral processes reduce the number of retentions, suspensions/expulsions, and inappropriate referrals to special education (Buck, et al, 2003; DC Public Schools, 2006). The *Multi-Tiered Systems of Support* (*MTSS) Quick Reference Guide: Student Support Teams (SSTs)* may be useful in training staff (see Appendix B).

It is recommended the TAT process be overhauled. Consider a user-friendly approach with consistent timelines and a non-judgmental brainstorming session. The "30-minute meeting" approach where much of the preparation is done prior to the meeting could be considered to make TAT meeting time more productive. (See Appendix B for more information.) In addition, professional learning around the rationale behind an effective pre-referral process must be provided. Teachers should be trained in how to have effective conversations with parents about student progress without raising alarms. Teachers also need to be familiar with the continuum of general education options at Manchester Essex that must be utilized prior to consideration of special education referral.

Manchester-Essex Middle School is most fortunate to have several options for general education support including a Reading Teacher, Reading Tutor, and Interventionists as well as Guidance and School Adjustment Counselors. Special education is not, nor should it be, the only option for supporting students. The use of "Interventionists" is an excellent model for supporting students who lack specific skills. Students come with specific goals; once the goals are met, service is discontinued. Interventionists feel their program is effective but goals could be made clearer so that exit criteria are specific. It is recommended interventionists work with administration to develop a program description and clear exit criteria.

SAIL Program
MERSD is to be commended for their high rate of inclusion and lower rate of students placed in

substantially separate environments. The amount of inclusion support currently provided by some teaching assistants, however, is concerning. For example, most teaching assistants and teachers who work in the SAIL Program feel SAIL students should be supported throughout the inclusion setting; assistants would like to be in all classes. Further, general education teachers' lack of understanding around the disability and lack of comfort level working with SAIL students is also promoting the overuse of teaching assistants in the program. A random sampling of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students in the SAIL Program indicates students who receive special education and related services in the general education classroom (IEP B Grid) typically receive this support on a daily basis.

The dedication of SAIL Program staff to their students is unmistakable, however, inclusion support should be provided based on need rather than student profile. Several parents and staff suggested support is overdone, particularly the number of accommodations documented in Individualized Education Programs. Parents voiced fears that their students will not be prepared for high school and beyond. Only one-third of middle school staff agree teaching assistants are trained to promote independence in their students.

Ideally, at the middle school level, services for a student in grade eight will look different from the services that student received in grade six. A reduction in services in student IEPs over time typically indicates growth toward greater independence. As students learn and generalize strategies, less support is required in the inclusive setting and students are better prepared to be independent learners at the high school level. Teaching assistants must be made aware of this expectation and focus on weaning students from consistent support to independence.

SAIL Teaching Assistants expressed confusion regarding their specific roles and responsibilities. One opined the role is to specifically support one student yet teachers expect support for all students. This perception is another example of misunderstanding of the role. To optimize the benefits of inclusion, it is important for teaching assistants to be seen as supporting all students rather than being "glued" to one student in particular. During classroom observations, it was noted some teaching assistants stayed by one student, moving very little. Ideally, teaching assistants are moving throughout the room and are available to all students. This ensures a positive inclusion experience for students with disabilities. A study cited in *Sage Journals* (Etscheidt, 2005) concludes "The nature of (paraprofessional) support may be inconsistent with individual goals that are geared toward greater student independence. This is especially problematic in situations where students are assigned one-to-one paraprofessionals with no planned efforts to fade that support."

In 2014, the Administrator of Special Education at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issued a Technical Advisory (See Appendix B) regarding concerns about inappropriate utilization of paraprofessionals. The intent of the advisory was to clarify when it is appropriate to use a paraprofessional and to recommend tools to increase school district capacity to support students with disabilities. The Department is particularly concerned by reports that, in some cases, paraprofessionals have been assigned simply on the basis of a student's educational profile or to provide a teacher with temporary relief from a demanding

student. Inappropriate use of paraprofessionals may have detrimental consequences such as over-dependence, interference with peer interactions, insular relationships, stigmatization, provocation of behavior problems, or diminished student-teacher interactions.

Teams must utilize 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. Michael F. Giangreco, Ph.D., Special Education Professor at the Department of Education at the University of Vermont, also affiliated with the Center on Disability & Community Inclusion states, "The absence of conceptually-sound, evidence-based decision-making practices that account for educational support needs … increase the likelihood that supports will be inappropriately provided in ways that expose students with disabilities to inadvertent negative consequences or inadequately meet their needs."

It is recommend that Manchester Essex develop a tool to be utilized in determining whether or not support is needed in the inclusive setting. (See samples in Appendix B) Also a review of current staffing models should be considered to explore alternative ways to utilize teaching assistants. With proper planning, a teaching assistant could potentially support two classrooms during one period, minimizing "downtime."

In addition, an Induction Program, geared toward explaining roles, responsibilities and expectations, should be held annually for teaching assistants. Since some assistants are not sure who their "go-to person" is, a reminder should be provided.

SUMMARY
Overall, both teachers and parents are satisfied with programs and services at the middle school, but cite areas that could be improved. Manchester Essex has developed many excellent specialized programs and continues to look at these programs and services with an eye toward improvement.

The MERSD superintendent and Director of Student Services are to be commended for engaging in this review of special education programs and services and striving for continuous improvement.

EDCO is grateful for the opportunity to review special education programming at the middle school. 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.
teaching assistants and special educators were observed asking students about what they were doing in general education classrooms.
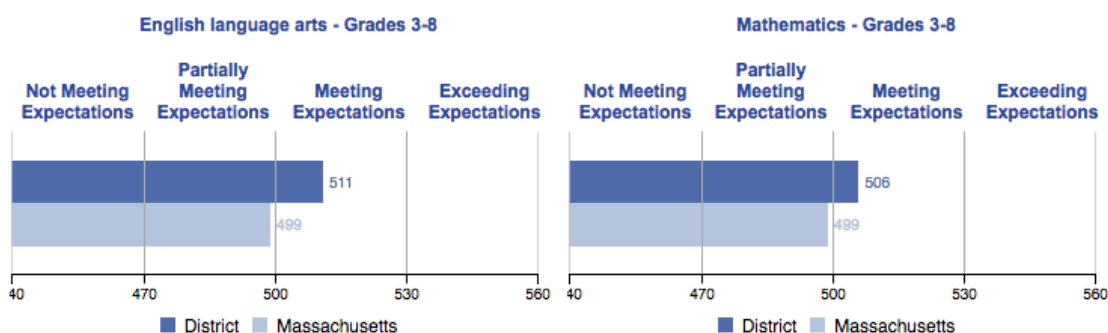
APPENDIX A
Manchester Essex Regional School District Data: (www.profiles.doe.mass.edu)

Selected Populations at Manchester Essex Regional Middle School (2016-2017)

Title	% of School	% of District	% of State
First Language not English	1.0	2.0	20.1
English Language Learner	0.3	0.7	9.5
Students With Disabilities	12.4	11.3	17.4
High Needs	19.2	19.1	45.2
Economically Disadvantaged	7.3	8.0	30.2

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

Next Generation MCAS (Average Scaled Score)

English language arts - Grades 3-8

Not Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations

District: 511
Massachusetts: 499

40   470   500   530   560

■ District ■ Massachusetts

Mathematics - Grades 3-8

Not Meeting Expectations	Partially Meeting Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations

District: 506
Massachusetts: 499

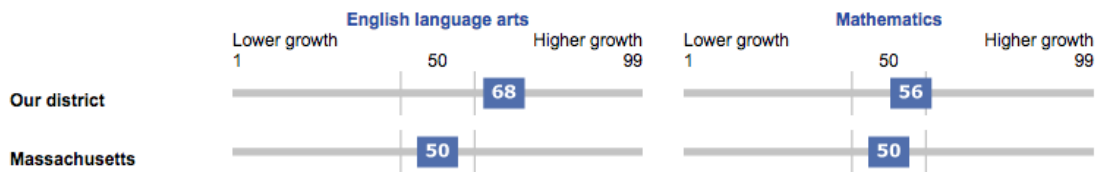40   470   500   530   560

■ District ■ Massachusetts

Legacy MCAS (CPI)

The 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 district's CPIs for 2014-2017 are below.

	English language arts - Grade 10				Mathematics - Grade 10				Science - All Grades			
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2014	2015	2016	2017	2014	2015	2016	2017
Our District	99.6	99.1	100.0	100.0	98.5	95.4	98.7	99.3	91.6	91.1	91.4	89.7
Massachusetts	96.0	96.7	96.7	96.5	90.0	89.9	89.7	89.9	79.6	79.4	78.7	78.3
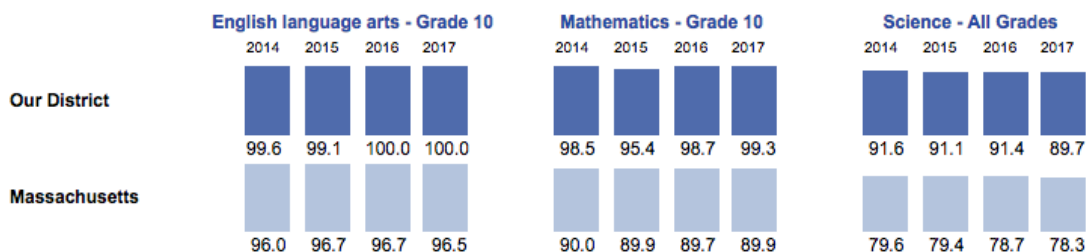
How does our district's growth compare to the state?

Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) measure gains in student achievement from year to year. SGPs between 40 and 60 represent moderate growth. Our district's median SGPs for 2017 are below. (Note: Growth values are truncated.)

	English language arts	Mathematics
	Lower growth 1 — 50 — Higher growth 99	Lower growth 1 — 50 — Higher growth 99
Our district	68	56
Massachusetts	50	50

How does our district's enrollment compare to the state?

Total enrollment	Our district	Massachusetts
	1,396	953,748

By high needs population	Our district #	Our district %	Massachusetts #	Massachusetts %
Economically disadvantaged students	111	8.0	288,465	30.2
Students with disabilities	159	11.3	167,530	17.4
English language learners	10	0.7	90,204	9.5

Teacher Data (2016-17)

	School	District	State
Total # of Teachers	37.0	130.0	72,090.0
% of Teachers Licensed in Teaching Assignment	95.7	98.5	97.4
Total # of Classes in Core Academic Areas	136	576	349,066
% of Core Academic Classes Taught by Teachers Who are Highly Qualified	91.2	97.9	96.3
Student/Teacher Ratio	10.4 to 1	10.7 to 1	13.2 to 1

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 Satisfaction Survey Results

24 responded to the survey

23 respondents by child's grade:
8   Grade 6
10   Grade 7
4   Grade 8
1   Out of District

14 respondents by specialized program
1   SWING Students with Integrated Goals
6   SAIL Social & Academic Integrated Learning
7   IRWL Intensive Reading & Written Language

24 respondents by child's disability
3   Autism
1   Communication
2   Developmental Delay
3   Emotional
2   Health
0   Intellectual Impairment
2   Neurological
13   Specific Learning Disability
2   not sure

If your child was found eligible by MERSD, in what grade level?
3 PK
7 K-2
9 3-6
3 Middle School

Evaluations are thorough and comprehensive.
43.5% strongly agree
43.5% agree
4.3% neutral
0% disagree
8.7% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Evaluations accurately reflect my child's needs.
33.3% strongly agree
54.2% agree
4.2% neutral

0% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Evaluations include specific recommendations.
33.3% strongly agree
50% agree
4.2% neutral
8.3% disagree
4.2% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Evaluation results are communicated in a clear manner that helps me understand my child's disability and learning needs.
25% strongly agree
54.2% agree
8.3% neutral
4.2% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
0% n/a

General education teachers are made aware of evaluation results.
20.8% strongly agree
45.8% agree
16.7% neutral
8.3% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

I am invited to a Team meeting at least once per year.
75% strongly agree
16.7% agree
0% neutral
4.2% disagree
4.2% strongly disagree
0% n/a

My concerns and requests are documented on the IEP or in the IEP cover letter.
58.3% strongly agree
29.2% agree
0% neutral
8.3% disagree
4.2% strongly disagree
0% n/a

The IEP accurately reflects the TEAM's discussion.
45.8% strongly agree
33.3% agree
4.2% neutral
12.5% disagree
4.2% strongly disagree
0% n/a

The IEP states how progress towards goals and objectives will be measured.
37.5% strongly agree
50% agree
4.2% neutral
4.2% disagree
4.2% strongly disagree
0% n/a

A variety of methodologies are available for consideration during the IEP development process.
29.2% strongly agree
33.3% agree
25% neutral
4.2% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Services and supports are provided as documented in the IEP
29.2% strongly agree
50% agree
8.3% neutral
0% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

My child is making progress on the goals on the IEP
41.7% strongly agree
41.7% agree
0% neutral
4.2% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
4.2% n/a

I receive progress update with enough frequency to keep me informed.
29.2% strongly agree
41.7% agree
4.2% neutral

12.5% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

The district provides information on parents' rights with regard to the Team process.
62.5% strongly agree
25% agree
4.2% neutral
0% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
0% n/a

I feel that I am an equal partner in planning my child's individual education program.
45.8% strongly agree
29.2% agree
12.5% neutral
0% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Teachers and administrators interact with me in a professional manner.
54.2% strongly agree
37.5% agree
0% neutral
0% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
0% n/a

I am encouraged by teachers and administrators to participate in decision-making.
45.8% strongly agree
37.5% agree
4.2% neutral
4.2% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
0% n/a

District staff are available and accessible.
41.7% strongly agree
41.7% agree
8.3% neutral
0% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Communication from district staff is appropriate and frequently enough to keep me informed.
33.3% strongly agree
45.8% agree
0% neutral
12.5% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
0% n/a

The district offers education about issues relevant to students and families with disabilities.
45.8% strongly agree
37.5% agree
8.3% neutral
4.2% disagree
4.2% strongly disagree
0% n/a

The special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP.
37.5% strongly agree
37.5% agree
8.3% neutral
4.2% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

General education teachers are aware of my child's disability and related needs and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP.
25% strongly agree
41.7% agree
12.5% neutral
12.5% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

General education and special education teachers collaborate to ensure the IEP is implemented.
25% strongly agree
33.3% agree
29.2% neutral
4.2% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

General education teachers demonstrate their understanding of my child's disability and related needs.
25% strongly agree
29.2% agree
29.2% neutral
8.3% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Related service providers (speech/language, PT, OT, etc.) demonstrate that they understand my child's disability and related needs.
29.2% strongly agree
25% agree
0% neutral
12.5% disagree
8.3% strongly disagree
25% n/a

I am satisfied with the amount of services my child receives from related service providers.
37.5% strongly agree
33.3% agree
0% neutral
12.5% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
4.2% n/a

I am satisfied with social-emotional support my child receives.
45.8% strongly agree
29.2% agree
8.3% neutral
4.2% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

The school ensures that after-school and extra-curricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities.
29.2% strongly agree
20.8% agree
12.5% neutral
12.5% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
12.5% n/a

The Teaching Assistant(s) demonstrates knowledge of my child's disability and related needs.
26.1% strongly agree
30.4% agree
26.1% neutral
0% disagree
13% strongly disagree
8.7% n/a

The Teaching Assistant(s) demonstrate their understanding of their role in implementing the IEP.
30.4% strongly agree
30.4% agree
17.4% neutral
0% disagree
13% strongly disagree
8.7% n/a

The Teaching Assistant(s) provide opportunities for my child to become independent.
26.1% strongly agree
47.8% agree
4.3% neutral
0% disagree
13% strongly disagree
8.7% n/a

I am satisfied with the specialized programming options at the middle school.
26.3% strongly agree
42.1% agree
5.3% neutral
0% disagree
10.5% strongly disagree
15.8% n/a

I am satisfied with the types of and amount of services my child receives in specialized instruction.
26.3% strongly agree
42.1% agree
5.3% neutral
5.3% disagree
15.8% strongly disagree
5.3% n/a

The teachers and assistants in the program work toward promoting independence and placing my child in a lesser restrictive setting.
31.6% strongly agree
47.4% agree
0% neutral
5.3% disagree
10.5% strongly disagree
5.3% n/a

Overall, I am happy with the special education services my child receives.
45.8% strongly agree
33.3% agree
4.2% neutral
4.2% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Overall, my child is happy at school.
45.8% strongly agree
25% agree
4.2% neutral
12.5% disagree
12.5% strongly disagree
0% n/a

Middle School Staff Satisfaction Survey Results

23 responded to the survey:

Respondents by Role:
2   Administrator
4   General Ed. Teacher
2   Special Ed. Teacher in sub. Separate program
5   Special Ed. Teacher
3   Related Service Provider
3   Teaching Assistant
0   Support Staff
2   Other
2   no response

COMMUNICATION
There is sufficient communication between general education and special education staff about the needs and progress of students with disabilities.

4.5% Strongly Agree
36.4% Agree
4.5% Neutral
50% Disagree
9.1% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

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.
4.5% Strongly Agree
22.7% Agree
9.1% Neutral
50% Disagree
4.5% Strongly Disagree
9.1% n/a

Adequate time is available for general and special education teachers to collaborate in planning and delivering instruction students with disabilities.
0% Strongly Agree
14.3% Agree
4.8% Neutral
52.4% Disagree
28.6% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

General education teachers are provided with sufficient information and support for helping students with disabilities in their classrooms.
4.8% Strongly Agree
28.6% Agree
28.6% Neutral
33.3% Disagree
4.8% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

I receive the support I need from the MS Chairperson when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities.
28.6% Strongly Agree
28.6% Agree
19% Neutral
14.3% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
9.5% n/a

I receive the support I need from the Student Services Director when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities.

28.6% Strongly Agree

38.1% Agree

9.5% Neutral

9.5% Disagree

4.8% Strongly Disagree

9.5% n/a

I receive the support I need from the Principal when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities.

23.8% Strongly Agree

47.6% Agree

23.8% Neutral

4.8% Disagree

0% Strongly Disagree

0% n/a

Teaching Assistants are effectively assigned in order to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities.

9.5% Strongly Agree

47.6% Agree

19% Neutral

4.8% Disagree

4.8% Strongly Disagree

14.3% n/a

Teaching Assistants are effectively utilized to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities.

 4.8% Strongly Agree

42.9% Agree

19% Neutral

9.5% Disagree

9.5% Strongly Disagree

14.3% n/a

The Teaching Assistants I work with are sufficiently trained to provide instruction support to students with special needs

14.3% Strongly Agree

33.3% Agree

19% Neutral

14.3% Disagree

0% Strongly Disagree

23.8% n/a

The Teaching Assistants I work with are trained to promote independence in their students
9.5% Strongly Agree
23.8% Agree
19% Neutral
23.8% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
23.8% n/a

The district provides useful professional development related to meeting the needs of special education students.
19% Strongly Agree
38.1% Agree
23.8% Neutral
14.3% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
9.5% n/a

The training sessions I attended have been helpful to me in supporting the learning of students with disabilities.
18.2% Strongly Agree
40.9% Agree
18.2% Neutral
18.2% Disagree
4.5% Strongly Disagree
9.1% n/a

Co-Teaching responses to the next 4 questions: 9 responses
Adequate training has been provided to ensure co-teaching is effective
0% Strongly Agree
22.2% Agree
22.2% Neutral
0% Disagree
11.1% Strongly Disagree
44.4% n/a

The co-teaching model I am engaged in is effective and beneficial for both general education students and students with disabilities.
0% Strongly Agree
33.3% Agree
11.1% Neutral
0% Disagree
11.1% Strongly Disagree
44.4% n/a

What are the obstacles, if any, to effective co-teaching? (3 responses)
1. No obstacles at this time.
2. Time.
3. I have not had direct training with my current co-teacher. Time to meet and plan together.

What is needed to improve so-teaching at MERMS? (4 responses)
1. Time to meet.
2. More experience with one another. In the past I have worked with my co-teacher for more than one period per day.
3. Planning time.
4. Take into consideration personalities before requiring staff to work together. If a teacher is to be evaluated on co-teaching than both parties, regular ed and special ed, need to be evaluated, not just the special education teacher.

SPECIAL EDCUCATION PROCESSES (21 responses)
Our school makes every attempt to meet the unique needs of students through the TAT process before a district referral to special education is made.
0% Strongly Agree
28.6% Agree
23.8% Neutral
23.8% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
23.8% n/a

The TAT process is clearly defined: i.e., contact person, process, follow-up procedures.
0% Strongly Agree
14.3% Agree
33.3% Neutral
23.8% Disagree
14.3% Strongly Disagree
19% n/a

The TAT Team provides helpful and appropriate interventions prior to referral.
0% Strongly Agree
19% Agree
38.1% Neutral
19% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
23.8% n/a

The TAT process is viewed as a route to an IEP.
9.5% Strongly Agree

38.1% Agree
19% Neutral
9.5% Disagree
4.8% Strongly Disagree
19% n/a

The evaluations conducted through the special education process are sufficiently comprehensive to identify students' specific strengths and needs.
33.3% Strongly Agree
47.5% Agree
14.3% Neutral
0% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
4.8% n/a

The results of special education evaluations are shared with me in ways that provide meaningful insights into students' educational needs.
19% Strongly Agree
42.9% Agree
23.8% Neutral
14.3% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree/
0% n/a

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) process in the school involves general and special education teachers as equal partners in making recommendations.
9.5% Strongly Agree
19% Agree
23.8% Neutral
33.3% Disagree
4.8% Strongly Disagree
9.5% n/a

I have the opportunity to weigh in on accommodations I will make in my classroom.
14.3% Strongly Agree
38.1% Agree
23.8% Neutral
4.8% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
19% n/a

My students' IEP goals and objectives promote skills that align with the Massachusetts curriculum standards.
23.8% Strongly Agree

33.3% Agree
28.6% Neutral
4.8% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
14.3% n/a

The special education services identified in my students' IEPs are consistently provided by special education.
23.8% Strongly Agree
42.9% Agree
28.6% Neutral
0% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
9.5% n/a

The special education accommodations identified in my students' IEPs are consistently delivered by general education teachers.
4.8% Strongly Agree
42.9% Agree
4.8% Neutral
33.3% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
14.3% n/a

The special education accommodations identified in my students' IEPs are developed collaboratively between general and special education teachers.
0% Strongly Agree
23.8% Agree
28.6% Neutral
38.1% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
9.5% n/a

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.
0%   Strongly Agree
38.1% Agree
9.5%   Neutral
28.6% Disagree
14.3% Strongly Disagree
9.5%   n/a

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

9.1% Strongly Agree
50% Agree
31.8% Neutral
4.5% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
4.5% n/a

Students with disabilities in the inclusion setting receive a benefit from interacting with and modeling typical peers.
36.4% Strongly Agree
36.4% Agree
27.3% Neutral
0% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
0% n/a

There are sufficient substantially separate programs at MERMS to meet the needs of all students.
31.8% Strongly Agree
40.9% Agree
9.1% Neutral
13.6% Disagree
4.5% Strongly Disagree
4.5% n/a

Students in substantially separate programs are taught strategies to promote independence and facilitate movement to a lesser restrictive setting.
13.6% Strongly Agree
50% Agree
13.6% Neutral
9.1% Disagree
4.5% Strongly Disagree
9.1% n/a

Students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in school-sponsored activities such as field trips, extracurricular activities, and sporting events.
50% Strongly Agree
36.4% Agree
9.1% Neutral
0% Disagree
0% Strongly Disagree
4.5% n/a

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

0%   Strongly Agree

36.4% Agree

36.4% Neutral

9.1%   Disagree

4.5%   Strongly Disagree

13.6% n/a

PARENT COMMUNICATION / INVOLVEMENT (22 responses)

Parents are given the opportunity to participate as partners in evaluating their child's needs.

27.3% Strongly Agree

50%   Agree

13.6% Neutral

0%   Disagree

0%   Strongly Disagree

9.1%   n/a

Parents are encouraged to participate in making decisions about their children's educational programs and services.

40.9% Strongly Agree

36.4% Agree

13.6% Neutral

0%   Disagree

0%   Strongly Disagree

9.1%   n/a

The school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents of children with disabilities.

31.8% Strongly Agree

50%   Agree

9.1%   Neutral

4.5%   Disagree

0%   Strongly Disagree

4.5%   n/a

My professional recommendations are valued by parents and family members.

18.2% Strongly Agree

40.9% Agree

22.7% Neutral

9.1%   Disagree

0%   Strongly Disagree

9.1%   n/a

CHALLENGES (22 responses)
Teachers in this school do not have high enough expectations for students with disabilities.
50%   Challenge
13.6%   Barrier
36.4%   Not a Problem

Teachers in this school have expectations that are too high for students with disabilities.
22.7%   Challenge
22.7%   Barrier
54.5%   Not a Problem

Regular and special education teachers don't have sufficient time to collaborate with each other.
33.3%   Challenge
57.1%   Barrier
9.5%   Not a Problem
4.5%   no response

Progress monitoring for special education students is not being implemented consistently.
66.7%   Challenge
19%   Barrier
14.3%   Not a Problem
4.5%   no response

General and special education teachers need a toolkit of progress monitoring tools and training in how to use them
47.6%   Challenge
42.9%   Barrier
9.5%   Not a Problem
4.5%   no response

General education teachers need more focused professional development on special education and teaching students with disabilities.
57.1%   Challenge
23.8%   Barrier
19%   Not a Problem
4.5%   no response

General education teachers need more focused professional development on differentiating instruction.
47.6%   Challenge
33.3%   Barrier

19%   Not a Problem
4.5%   no response

Teaching Assistants need more focused professional development on providing instructional interventions to students.
68.2%   Challenge
18.2%   Barrier
13.6%   Not a Problem
0%   no response

Our school needs guidance and support on implementing a more systematic pre-referral intervention process (RTI or similar).
47.6%   Challenge
38.1%   Barrier
14.3%   Not a Problem
4.5%   no response

Our school needs guidance and support to co-teach effectively.
57.1%   Challenge
23.8%   Barrier
19%   Not a Problem
4.5%   no response

There is insufficient communication and collaboration among general and special education teachers and parents to help special education students make an effective transition into grade 6 at MERMS.
50%   Challenge
20%   Barrier
30%   Not a Problem
9%   no response

SUMMARY
Overall, I believe that my school delivers high quality education programs and services for students with disabilities in my school. (21 responses)
9.5%   Strongly Agree
71.4%   Agree
14.3%   Neutral
4.8%   Disagree
0%   Strongly Disagree
0%   n/a

Overall, I feel MERSD is meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the district. (20 responses)
5%   Strongly Agree

65% Agree
30% Neutral
5%   Disagree
0%   Strongly Disagree
0%   n/a

APPENDIX B

Special Education Technical Assistance Advisory SPED 2014-3 (revised): Identifying the Need for Paraprofessional Support

To: Administrators of Special Education, Parents, and Other Interested Parties
From: Marcia Mittnacht, State Director of Special Education
Date: February 26, 2015

The purposes of this advisory are to:
   a. Advise school districts and parents about concerns regarding inappropriate utilization of paraprofessionals.
   b. Clarify when it may be appropriate to use a paraprofessional, as well as ensuring adequate training and supervision.
   c. Provide recommended actions and sample tools to increase school district capacity to support students with disabilities.
   d. Clarify the decision-making process for assigning paraprofessionals to individual students.

A. Introduction: Response to a Cry for Help
When school personnel or parents request a paraprofessional, they are asking for help. Something is amiss. Should a school district respond simply by assigning a paraprofessional to an individual student? Absolutely not.

"If schools respond exclusively to the request for a paraprofessional, without fully understanding the meaning behind the request, it increases the likelihood of masking the underlying issues and delaying attention to them." Instead, "the task is to identify the underlying issues so that they can be addressed."

The essential premise of this advisory is that the underlying learning needs of each particular student - that is, the root causes of the teacher's or parent's "cry for help" - must first be determined. Then there needs to be consideration of the full array of supports and services that may successfully address the student's unique needs. Districts must not restrict their consideration to use of a paraprofessional.

B. Concerns Regarding Inappropriate Use of Paraprofessionals
Data reflecting substantial increases in the number of special education paraprofessionals raises concerns about whether districts are effectively responding to the educational needs highlighted by requests for a paraprofessional.

The Department is particularly concerned by reports that, in some cases, paraprofessionals have been assigned simply on the basis of a student's educational profile or to provide a teacher with temporary relief from a demanding student. This may leave unaddressed key issues such as (a) improving teacher ability to educate a full range of students with disabilities; (b) building capacity in general education to design curriculum and instruction for mixed ability groups that include students with disabilities; and (c) changing or improving student behavior.

The Department is also concerned that paraprofessionals have been assigned responsibilities that require the skills of a licensed teacher - for example, making curriculum decisions, planning lessons or designing adaptations, as compared with implementing decisions made by the teacher.

There have also been reports of inadequate training and supervision, making it impossible for a paraprofessional to be effective. And, paraprofessionals may continue to be assigned even though other services or supports could more appropriately address the student's learning needs. Inappropriate use of paraprofessionals may have detrimental consequences such as over-dependence, interference with peer interactions, insular relationships, stigmatization, provocation of behavior problems, or diminished student-teacher interactions.

This is not to say that paraprofessional services should never be used. As with any other special education service, paraprofessionals are inherently neither appropriate nor inappropriate for a particular student. Appropriate use of paraprofessionals depends, to a large extent, on whether the paraprofessional has the requisite skills to address effectively one or more aspects of a student's unique needs and whether the paraprofessional is adequately trained and supervised to be effective. Importantly, appropriate utilization of paraprofessionals also depends on consideration of whether there are other service or support options that would be a better choice because they would address effectively these same learning needs and offer additional advantages such as fostering greater independence. The process for weighing these considerations and making a decision as to whether a paraprofessional should be assigned to a particular student, will be discussed in section E of this Advisory.

C. Over-Arching Goal of Promoting Students' Independence
It is the essential mission of elementary and secondary education to prepare all students for successful adult life, which may include independent living, competitive employment, further postsecondary education or training, and participation in the life of their community. State and federal special education laws recognize that independence is a key factor of adulthood and our public schools must always strive to build independence in our students, particularly as they begin to approach adult life.

In order for these core educational principles to be realized, decisions regarding special education and related services (and, in particular, decisions regarding paraprofessional services) must be made in a way that allows the unique learning needs of each student to be met and that, at the same time, allows each student to become as independent as possible, particularly in preparation for the end of secondary education.

The following recommended actions are intended to respect and promote these essential principles.

D. Recommended Actions: School District Level
Whole school approach. School districts can develop greater regular education capacity to effectively serve diverse learners. School district leaders should review the use of paraprofessionals within the context of the whole school environment and consider adopting a tiered model of supports such as Massachusetts' Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Data gathered in the analyses of students' needs can be compiled into a chart or matrix, and reviewed by school-based teams to make decisions regarding system-wide allocation of services and supports. Effective use of school-based student support teams (SSTs) may reduce the number of retentions, suspensions/expulsions, and referrals to special education. SSTs may also assist in reducing the inappropriate use of paraprofessionals. See the MTSS quick reference guide for student support teams.

District culture. Some may unconsciously believe that a one-to-one paraprofessional is always needed for a student with a particular kind of educational profile. It is important for the district community to examine its own assumptions and to challenge those that perpetuate a status quo

that can result in unintended negative consequences. District leaders may find it fruitful to share data on the use of paraprofessionals and to discuss with students, their families and special educators together how to achieve the best instructional services, and aim for the best academic and non-academic outcomes for students. Involving families in this discussion will assist in fully considering how the community as a whole, not just the school, can help to achieve successful adult life outcomes for all students.

E. Recommended Actions: Individual Students
The IEP decision-making process. State and federal special education law require an IEP Team to make all decisions regarding the assignment of a paraprofessional to a particular student. The Team makes this decision solely on the basis of whether paraprofessional services are appropriate to meet the unique learning needs of the particular student so that he or she will have the opportunity to receive FAPE in the least restrictive environment and at the same time prepare for "further education, employment, and independent living."

Breaking down the IEP Team decision-making into a three-step process, that considers use of paraprofessionals within a broader context, may substantially increase the likelihood of using paraprofessionals appropriately and effectively. First, at least one member of the Team should be fully informed about the general education environment and the expectations that typical students are expected to meet in the coming year. In that context, the Team examines information available from evaluations and other information which may include concerns of the parent, and previous progress with earlier IEPs. The Team then identifies all of a student's special education needs arising from the disability and presenting barriers to the student's learning. The Team must differentiate among needs that can and should be met in the general education environment with accommodations or minor modifications and needs that that must be met through the delivery of specially designed instruction so that the student receives FAPE.

Second, the IEP Team considers the goals that are most important for the student to accomplish during the upcoming year and considers these goals in the context of the general curriculum, it's available support services as well as the entire range of specially designed instruction, related services and accommodations that can meet the student's particular needs.

Finally, the Team then determines the extent to which needed services can be delivered in the general education classroom and which services may require removal from the classroom. Research supports that most students with disabilities have better outcomes when they are fully included in the general education classroom, and the Team is tasked with carefully considering the risks and benefits to the student when removal appears to be necessary. It is at the intersection of these two important priorities -- the least restrictive environment (the general education classroom) and the promotion of independence, that the Team may consider the use of a one to one paraprofessional. If a one to one paraprofessional can increase the student's access to the general education environment or assist in moving toward more independence, then generally the Team should identify use of the paraprofessional.

This decision-making process offers the following advantages: (1) it assists the Team to assign paraprofessionals when necessary to meet the individual student's unique special education needs, (2) precludes assignment of a paraprofessional based on limited information - for example, solely on the basis of a student's diagnosis or the needs of a teacher, and (3) seeks to ensure that service or support options (other than a paraprofessional) are also considered and utilized if they would address effectively a student's learning needs and offer additional advantages such as fostering greater independence.

Training and supervision. School districts have an affirmative obligation to ensure that all paraprofessionals are trained and supervised so that they will be able to provide the services for which they are responsible, as reflected in federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) policy guidance. Therefore, once an IEP Team decides that a paraprofessional is needed for a student, the Team has a responsibility to determine the means by which a paraprofessional will have sufficient training and supervision. This may occasionally require additional services or consultation in the IEP.

Develop a plan for fading paraprofessional support. It is important that paraprofessional services continue in amount and duration only as needed. For many students, other services or supports can be substituted for some or all of a student's paraprofessional services. Therefore, whenever an assignment of paraprofessional services is initially made, the Team should discuss and develop a plan for reviewing the continued need for these services, including a process to review and monitor the student's progress and determine whether the student's need can be met with other services or supports. The Team may establish criteria which, if met by the student, will trigger initiation of the IEP amendment process to consider a change in services. The family is a critical partner in the planning process, with the family made well aware of any potential changes in the student's program and engaged throughout the process. There is no "standard" plan for fading paraprofessional services--each will be individually tailored for the particular student.

Anchor district policies and procedures with best-practices for student leadership. Depending on the age of the student involved, the student may be a "driver" but at all times will be a participant in whatever actions are taken. Keep the student's needs and desires at the center of discussions and to the extent possible, involve the student in the planning and actions taken. If, after all, the purpose is to promote independence, then the student should be able to take pride in actively working toward his/her increased independence and full participation in the life of the school. With the student central to the process, educators and families alike must remember that each student is different and may need different approaches, and different amounts of time to respond to different actions. Anticipate that some students may need paraprofessional support in one or more areas for years, while others may move forward in leaps and bounds toward independence.

F. Conclusion

Paraprofessionals may be an essential service for some disabled students. Yet, their inappropriate use can waste resources, limit a student's potential for independence, and leave key issues unaddressed. To respond to these potential challenges, system-wide changes can substantially increase the capacity of a school district to respond appropriately to a wide range of learners, and consideration of paraprofessional services for an individual student must be integrated into the IEP decision-making process for determining all of the student's unique special education needs and how they should be met.

The cause is important. The goal is the right one: successful adult life!

Examples: The following examples are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive.

Student W is identified as presenting learning needs that are substantially different than those typically met by the general education teacher. The IEP Team might conclude that a paraprofessional, even with appropriate training and instruction, would not have the expertise or skills to meet these needs and that co-teaching with a special education teacher or collaboration between the special education and regular education teachers would appropriately address Student's underlying learning challenges.

Student X is identified as needing supplemental instruction. She also needs facilitation with peer interactions. After identifying her underlying educational needs, the IEP Team would consider the range of options that would meet those needs. The Team might determine that a paraprofessional is appropriate or that additional special education services (such as consultation to the regular education teacher and a social skills group) would better address Student's underlying learning difficulties. If a paraprofessional is to be assigned, the Team would discuss how to ensure the paraprofessional will be adequately trained and supervised.

Student Y has severe behavior problems. The needs might be identified as two-fold - both to safely contain and over time to reduce and eliminate Student's aggressive behaviors. The IEP Team might conclude that a paraprofessional is needed to help safely manage Student Y's aggressive behaviors while developing and implementing a plan to reduce, replace and/or eliminate the behaviors; but that paraprofessional services would not be able to address the underlining causes of Student's aberrant behaviors (and potentially could aggravate them); and that a behavior consultant and functional behavioral assessment are needed to develop a plan for more effectively addressing the Student's behaviors. The Team would also consider whether additional consultation services (perhaps from the behaviorist) may be needed to ensure appropriate training and supervision of the paraprofessional. Finally, the Team determines behavior criteria which, if met, would trigger a process for re-consideration of the need for paraprofessional services.

Student Z has significant mental health disabilities and is not making effective progress in the regular education classroom. The regular education teacher has little understanding or experience with the needs of students with this severity of mental health needs. The IEP Team would need to determine whether it may be sufficient to provide more or different consultation services to the regular education teacher; whether consultation services combined with a paraprofessional (who is appropriately trained and supervised) are needed to allow the student to access the curriculum and make effective progress; or whether Student's mental health needs are so significant that a different educational model is required for Student to receive an appropriate education.

STUDENT NEEDS ANALYSIS (SAMPLE FORM 1)

1. Describe the current instructional setting:

A. Grade: _____ Type of Class: _____ # of Students _____

B. Identify current classroom staff (including support staff) and times of availability

C. Identify current student needs and areas of concern (if behavior is at issue, conduct a functional behavioral assessment).

D. Identify current general education supports (co-teachers, volunteers, peer tutors, etc.)

2. Describe any issues voiced by the family that are related to the areas of concern identified in the school.

CHECKLIST TO DETERMINE THE STUDENT'S NEEDS AS THEY MAY RELATE TO THE NEED FOR A ONE-TO-ONE AIDE (SAMPLE FORM 2)

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

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

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

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

STUDENT NEEDS ANALYSIS (SAMPLE FORM 3)

Health / Personal Care
- Student requires non-medical specialized health care support (i.e., feeding, assistance with braces or prosthesis).
- Student has in Individualized Health Care Plan.
- Student requires positioning or bracing multiple times daily.
- Student requires health-related interventions multiple times daily.
- Student requires full toilet care.
- Student requires direct assistance for dressing.

Behavior
- Student presents with serious behavior problems with ongoing incidents of injurious behaviors to self and/or others.
- Student presents as over-active and has difficulty focusing attention.
- Student runs away.
- Student has a functional behavioral assessment and a behavior intervention plan.
- Student needs an adult in close proximity to supervise social interactions with peers at all times.

Instruction
- Student needs verbal prompts to participate in a group, stay on task, and follow directions.
  - Frequency/Rate: _____
- Student needs physical prompting to participate in a group, stay on task, and follow directions.
  - Frequency/Rate: _____
- Student needs visual prompts/picture supports to participate in a group, stay on task, and follow directions.
  - Frequency/Rate: _____
- Student needs support to utilize augmentative or assistive technology.
- Student needs extensive modification to all curriculum content.
- Student needs an adult in constant close proximity for direct instruction.

Mobility
- Student requires individualized assistance to transition to and from class, at all times during the school day.

Pre-Referral: 30-Minute Meeting
Teachers Supporting Teachers (TST)

Purpose Setting: (2 min.)
The purpose of this meeting is to assist _____ in developing alternative intervention strategies for _____ .

Problem Analysis: (6 minutes)
- ❑ Facilitator states behavior and goal
- ❑ TST interviewer presents summary information
- ❑ TST members ask clarifying questions to gain better understanding

Interventions Developed: (8 minutes)
- ❑ Facilitator reviews brainstorming guidelines and invites everyone to participate
- ❑ Brainstorming to generate list of intervention strategies Each strategy is recorded on chart paper without judgment
- ❑ Facilitator ends brainstorming after 8 minutes or when brainstorming ends

Teacher Selects Interventions /Implementation Plan Developed: (10 minutes)
- ❑ Teacher reviews strategies on chart: questions, clarifications, discussion
- ❑ Teacher selects strategies for implementation
- ❑ Facilitator clarifies, restates chosen strategies
- ❑ Strategies are recorded on TST referral form
- ❑ Facilitator/team plan for support/implementation
- ❑ Plan recorded on TST referral form

Follow-up Established: (4 minutes)
- ❑ TST members and teachers select appropriate follow up time
- ❑ Time frame is recorded on TST referral form
- ❑ Form is copied and distributed to TST members, teacher and appropriate team and/or specialists

To successfully implement a tiered system of support, schools must cultivate a collaborative school culture in which all staff take responsibility for the success of all students. As part of this collaborative culture, it is important that staff have time, a place, and a process for engaging in collaborative problem-solving. This Quick Reference Guide outlines how Student Support Teams (SSTs) can be used to encourage such collaboration among staff to ensure that all students are having all their needs met in safe and supportive learning environments and are able to be successful in and out of school.

What is a Student Support Team?
Also known as Intervention Teams, School-based Problem Solving Teams, or Child Study Teams, Student Support Teams (SSTs) are a formalized structure for a group of educators, administrators, and other staff to meet regularly to address concerns about individual students or groups of students. SSTs are designed to support students both by anticipating and preventing issues before they occur and by providing interventions and/or resources when issues do arise. At the same time, SSTs support staff members by introducing teachers who bring an issue to the team to new strategies and building their capacity to support a wide range of students; teachers are able to generalize successful new strategies beyond the SST process to meet the needs of other students in their classrooms, including struggling students and students who have already mastered the content being taught. Often, SSTs are also responsible for academic and non-academic whole-school initiatives, particularly those related to positive school culture and climate and academic tiered systems of supports.

> Examples of issues that may be brought before SSTs:
> - Academic struggles
> - Poor attendance
> - Discipline problems
> - Health-related issues
> - Substance abuse
> - Potential for retention
> - Need for enrichment

Why Build a Student Support Team?
In addition to helping students to achieve both behavioral and academic success in the general education environment, research has shown SSTs to have the following benefits for students, teachers, and administrators in schools that utilize them:

1. SSTs can provide immediate assistance to teachers and students, focused on both prevention and intervention, in contrast to the "wait-to-fail" model.
2. SSTs can assist educators with problem-solving for individual cases and with building capacity in intervention strategies to support current and future students.
3. SSTs can lead to improved teacher retention rates and higher job satisfaction.
4. Administrators can review types of issues that are repeatedly brought before the SST to direct resources and identify areas of need for professional development.

> Research has shown that effective SSTs reduce the number of retentions, suspensions/expulsions, and inappropriate referrals to special education (Buck, et al, 2003; DC Public Schools, 2006)

5. SSTs can significantly reduce the number of inappropriate referrals for special education evaluations (evaluations that do not find a student eligible for services).
6. SSTs can significantly reduce the number of student retentions, suspensions, and expulsions.
7. SSTs can foster stronger, more collaborative relationships among staff, including administrators, helping staff to develop shared expectations for all students and a sense of responsibility for the success of all students.

Common Elements of Effective Student Support Teams

While schools typically customize their SSTs based on the specific needs of their staff and student body, the following are common elements of effective SSTs:

1. The primary goal of SST interventions is increased success of students in the general education curriculum and within the general education classroom.
2. SSTs are tasked with looking at the whole child, taking into consideration a student's academic and non-academic needs, including family needs and medical needs where applicable.
3. SSTs collect and consider both academic and non-academic data.
4. Anyone can submit a problem to or ask for input from SSTs, including school staff, family members or legal guardians, and students.
5. There are no parameters for the issues that can be brought before SSTs.
6. In addition to suggesting classroom-based strategies and interventions, SSTs may recommend school- or community-based supplemental supports.
7. SSTs may propose student/family-focused or school-focused interventions.
8. The intensity of all supports and/or interventions recommended by SSTs will vary depending on an individual student's or group of students' needs.
9. SSTs have regular communication with students' families and engage them in the problem-solving process.
10. SSTs have regularly scheduled meetings, generally weekly or bi-weekly, to discuss concerns that are brought forth regarding a student (or a group of students facing similar challenges) or to follow up on earlier cases.
11. SSTs are action oriented, and meetings result in assigned next steps.
12. Sending teachers come to SST meetings prepared to share data on the student(s) being discussed, including data collected through the various support strategies already tried.
13. SSTs monitor the progress of students and the effectiveness of interventions over multiple meetings.
14. SST meetings do not automatically result in a referral to special education, though SSTs may recommend a special education evaluation in some cases.

> Examples of data artifacts:
> - Student work samples
> - Formative/summative assessments
> - Progress monitoring data
> - Universal screeners
> - Student or family interviews
> - Observation data
> - Attendance records
> - Discipline/referral records

Who should be on a Student Support Team?

SSTs provide a vehicle for staff from across the school community to engage in a team approach to problem-solving. While members may be added to SSTs in certain instances based on the student being discussed or the issue being addressed, there should be a core group of staff that attends regularly scheduled meetings. This core group should always include an administrator, as research has shown that administrator participation is an important factor in an SST's effectiveness (Rafoth & Foriska, 2006). In larger schools, especially high schools, there may be a need for multiple SSTs to support the needs of the student body. These SSTs may be organized by grade level, subject area, or area of expertise. When a school has multiple SSTs, department heads or grade level chairs may take on the administrator role on an SST. Below is an example of the core members of one Massachusetts district's SST, as well as the staff who are often asked to attend a meeting based on a particular student or group of students' needs:

Core SST Members	Additional Members
• Principal or other building administrator • General education teacher(s) • Special education team chair and/or special education teacher(s) • Interventionists • Guidance counselor or school psychologist • Related service providers (e.g. Speech-Language Pathologist) • School social worker • Family member or legal guardian of student(s)	• ESL teacher • School nurse • Subject area and/or reading specialist(s) • Department Head and/or grade level chair • Central office personnel • 504 Coordinator • Personnel from state agencies or community organizations (e.g. DCF; Boys and Girls Club) • Student(s) (generally secondary) • Translator

In addition to staff members, many districts invite members of community organizations to participate in meetings when appropriate. In some cases, the students themselves, especially from the upper grades, may also be invited or asked to attend an SST meeting to share their perspective on the issue being discussed. In all cases, families should be encouraged to take part in the entire SST process. Family members are often excellent sources of information for the SST and can help to identify and prevent potential problems early.

Strategies for Fostering Family Engagement in the Student Support Team Process
To encourage family engagement with SSTs, schools can*:
1. Inform families of the SST process
2. Have a team member speak with the parent ahead of time so they know what to expect at the SST meeting
3. Hold meetings at convenient times for parents and provide accommodations, such as translators
4. Make the parent an equal member of SSTs and state this explicitly at meetings
5. Avoid using acronyms or jargon (for example, RTI, DIBELS, etc.)
6. Use child-first language and never label a child
7. Set a positive tone by asking all team members, including the parent, to describe the student's strengths
8. Ask the parent to share with the team about their child's life outside of school
9. Provide families with regular updates on the implementation of the decided-on supports/interventions
10. Ensure that any request from the family for an evaluation for special education is honored
    *Adapted from District of Columbia State Improvement Grant

Suggestions for Getting Started
1. Identify a place and time for regular SST meetings and ensure that members are given release time to attend; keep a calendar of regularly scheduled SST meetings and decide on a way to track requests and data.

2. Consider assigning roles to help the SST to function smoothly. These roles may include chairperson (often the administrator), recorder, timekeeper, and a point person for each case.
3. Have a confidentiality agreement that SST members sign at the beginning of the year or as they join the team.
4. Identify the sources of academic and non-academic data that are available to the SST and sending teachers.

Conditions that support SST effectiveness:
- Staff awareness of the SST and its purpose
- Support from administration
- Release time for SST core members and invited members to participate
- A clearly defined problem-solving process

5. Identify the resources within the school and district, as well as in the community, that are available to the SST for supporting teachers, students, and/or students' families.
6. Develop or adapt a protocol for collaborative problem-solving that the SST will follow to 1) concretely define the problem being brought before the team, 2) brainstorm solutions, and 3) design an action plan, assign action items, and identify next steps.
7. Develop or adapt protocols and accompanying forms for teachers or families to bring an issue to the SST and for notifying families of upcoming SST meetings involving their children.
8. Outline a process for working with the staff member or family member who requested support to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention that was implemented.
9. Inform staff and families about the formation of the SST, its purpose, and the process for requesting help.

Choosing Interventions and Monitoring Student Progress
Once an SST has reviewed all relevant data, heard from the sending teacher and/or family member, identified available supports and resources, and brainstormed potential interventions and/or extension activities, the team develops an action plan. Action plans include recommended interventions or activities, how they will be implemented (by whom, how often, in what setting[s], and for what period of time), and how they will be evaluated, including what data will be collected.

When the SST has agreed on a strategy or course of action for addressing an issue, a follow-up meeting is scheduled to assess the effectiveness of the chosen intervention or activity, preferably within 4-6 weeks. At these meetings, SST members give updates on action items from previous meetings, look at multiple sources of data regarding student progress, and decide on next steps.

Sample SST interventions/supports:
- Connect family with community-based mental healthcare provider
- Give student options for demonstrating knowledge
- Assign staff member to daily check-in with student
- Pair student with a younger child as a "Big Buddy"
- Enroll student in after-school program
- Give student frequent and specific feedback on schoolwork and/or behavior

At follow-up meetings, SSTs may decide to 1) continue the current intervention with the same or increased frequency and intensity and monitor the student's or students' progress; 2) try a new intervention if the current strategy is not having the desired effect; 3) bring the SST process to a close if the issue has been resolved to the team's satisfaction; or 4) refer the student for a special education evaluation if there is evidence that a student is struggling as the result of a disability. The first three options also apply when assessing extension activities.

Questions that an SST may ask when reviewing data to choose an intervention or evaluate its effectiveness:

1. Does the intervention match the student's or students' needs?
2. Is the intervention evidence-based and does it have proven results with students with similar issues?
3. What types of evidence were collected to measure the effectiveness of the intervention?
4. Did the student(s) experience academic and/or behavioral success as a result of the intervention?
5. Was the intervention implemented for a sufficient amount of time?
6. Is there evidence that suggests they should continue with the same intervention or try a new intervention?
7. Are there resources available to support the student or his or her teacher that have not been considered?

Student Support Team: Tools and Resources
- District of Columbia Public Schools SST Manual: http://www.dcsig.org/sstresources.htm
- National School Reform Faculty – Materials and Protocols: http://www.nsrfharmony.org/protocol/a_z.html
- San Francisco Unified School District Sample SST Forms: http://www.healthiersf.org/Forms/index.php#sst
- Student Support Center: http://www.studentsupportcenter.org/services/SST.shtml

Additional References
- Buck, G. H., Polloway, E. A., Smith-Thomas, A., & Cook, K. W. (2003). Prereferral intervention processes: survey of state practices. Exceptional Children, 69, 349-360.
- District of Columbia State Improvement Grant, District of Columbia Public Schools (2006). *Student support teams*
- *manual: Finding the keys to student success* (2nd edition). Washington, DC: Author.
- Hehir, Thomas, with Lauren Katzman (2012). *Effective Inclusive Schools*: *Designing Successful Schoolwide Programs.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rafoth, M. A., & Foriska, T. (2006). Administrator participation in promoting effective problem-solving teams. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*, 130-150.