



the ability
challenge

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared by The Ability Challenge
For Washington Central Unified Union School District
January 17, 2024





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Partnership Overview

Washington Central Unified Union School District (WCUUSD) and The Ability Challenge (ABC) entered into an engagement in Fall 2023 to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of its special education program. WCUUSD's leadership recognized the need to assess the District's progress, identify growth opportunities, and build on existing initiatives. This evaluation examined quantitative and qualitative information from a variety of sources, such as data and document analysis, surveys, focus groups, interviews, classroom observations, and more. In addition to gathering information from a variety of sources, a diversity of voices (e.g., students, educators, service providers, families, administrators, community partners, and others) are reflected in this review and come through in the final deliverable.

Purpose of Report

ABC's continuous improvement model is created on a foundation of evidence-based practices memorialized in our THRIVE Quality Special Education Framework (THRIVE). The Framework draws from scholarly research, input from over 1,000 educators, and decades of practical experience to outline the core competencies leaders and educators must demonstrate to develop high-quality inclusive programming that supports the needs of all learners, especially those with disabilities and other diverse learning needs.

As a starting point for our continuous improvement work, ABC engaged in a structured data collection process, aligned to THRIVE, that gathered a diverse range of information from school stakeholders, including educators, students, families, and more. We then examined and analyzed the data to identify trends, including areas of strength and opportunity for the school.

This Report summarizes what we found and presents the data in a format that is both immediately actionable and meant for deeper Districtwide reflection. The purpose of the report is not to go deep on any one particular topic or competency, but rather, to present a snapshot view of WCUUSD's inclusive practices from which continuous improvement can begin.



Overview

#	Element	Score	Analysis
1	CULTURE OF INCLUSION <i>Leaders set and hold staff accountable for a bold, clear, inclusive vision and aligned practices. Educators believe that all students can learn and grow and deeply value an inclusive, collaborative school environment.</i>	3.67	Proficient
2	STUDENT-CENTERED CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION <i>Leaders manage the implementation of evidence-based, standards-aligned, culturally responsive curriculum with clear outcomes and sequenced units of study. Educators facilitate meaningful and supportive relationships with students and deliver instruction that provides access to grade-level content for diverse learners.</i>	2.97	Fair/Emerging
3	SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF AND PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION <i>Leaders are familiar with special education laws and understand why the experiences of students with disabilities are central to decision-making in many areas. Educators understand how disability impacts learning, and engage peers to deliver integrated support that meets each student's needs.</i>	3.48	Proficient
4	EQUITABLE SYSTEMS AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT <i>Leaders allocate resources and put in place effective systems to manage the execution of quality special education programming in their context. Educators are knowledgeable about and implement those systems paying close attention to data and adjusting course as needed.</i>	2.76	Fair/Emerging
5	MEANINGFUL FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS <i>Leaders prioritize building meaningful partnerships with families and provide resources to staff to make those partnerships happen. Educators enter into effective, reciprocal relationships with families centered on empathy and cultural competence.</i>	3.10	Fair/Emerging

KEY	Starting Out 1.00-1.79	Developing 1.80-2.59	Fair/Emerging 2.60-3.39	Proficient 3.40-4.19	Mastered 4.20-5.00
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Main Take-Aways

Detailed take-aways and recommendations are embedded in each section of the report. We have also highlighted the most salient take-aways below:

- The District has evidence of promising practices for inclusion, such as effective systems for the use of data to identify students in need of intervention or strong family partnerships. However, just as there are well-functioning practices in the District, there are also areas of great need. There are inconsistencies across schools that are evident throughout the data collected and analyzed.
- The strongest element in the District is Culture of Inclusion. It is evident that leaders and educators have inclusive mindsets, though they may not always know how their practices can be adjusted to align more strongly with those mindsets.
- The greatest area for growth for the District is in the element Equitable Systems and Resource Management, which is demonstrated most acutely through the inconsistency of core systems from school-to-school and sometimes, classroom-to-classroom.
- With its strategic planning process, WCUUSD is poised to build on the most promising practices that already exist in their District in a way that begins to norm core elements of the experience for diverse learners across all elementary schools. This is particularly important for WCUUSD because all students converge at U32 and it is critical that opportunities for success are accessible for all students.

High-Leverage Recommendations

The following recommendations represent the highest-leverage opportunities to improve the quality of WCUUSD's special education program:

- Move swiftly from the delivery of this report and the Districtwide strategic plan to solidify a **Districtwide vision for inclusion**. Map the vision to specific actions in the strategic plan to clearly outline how each plan component attends to the vision, the impact of each component on diverse learners, who is responsible, and how they will be held accountable for implementing practices in service of the vision (e.g., draw connections between the vision and how that translates to practice in classrooms).
- **Conduct a gap analysis** across school sites to better understand where tiered supports are functioning well and where there is room for improvement, with a goal to (1) identify bright spots for information sharing and (2) streamline expectations for EST and intervention delivery Districtwide.
- Draft guidance materials about the **District's special education processes from initial referral through IEP creation** (i.e., Child Find) and train all stakeholders so that they understand their roles and have the knowledge necessary to serve students in



an equitable way across schools (including alignment between elementary and secondary to ensure a seamless transition).

- Provide all educators with **professional learning and coaching** on understanding, designing and implementing inclusive instructional practices including crafting **clear learning outcomes, checking student understanding, differentiation, and specialized instruction strategies** in service of meeting student needs.



METHODOLOGY

The following data collection process was completed in Fall 2023:

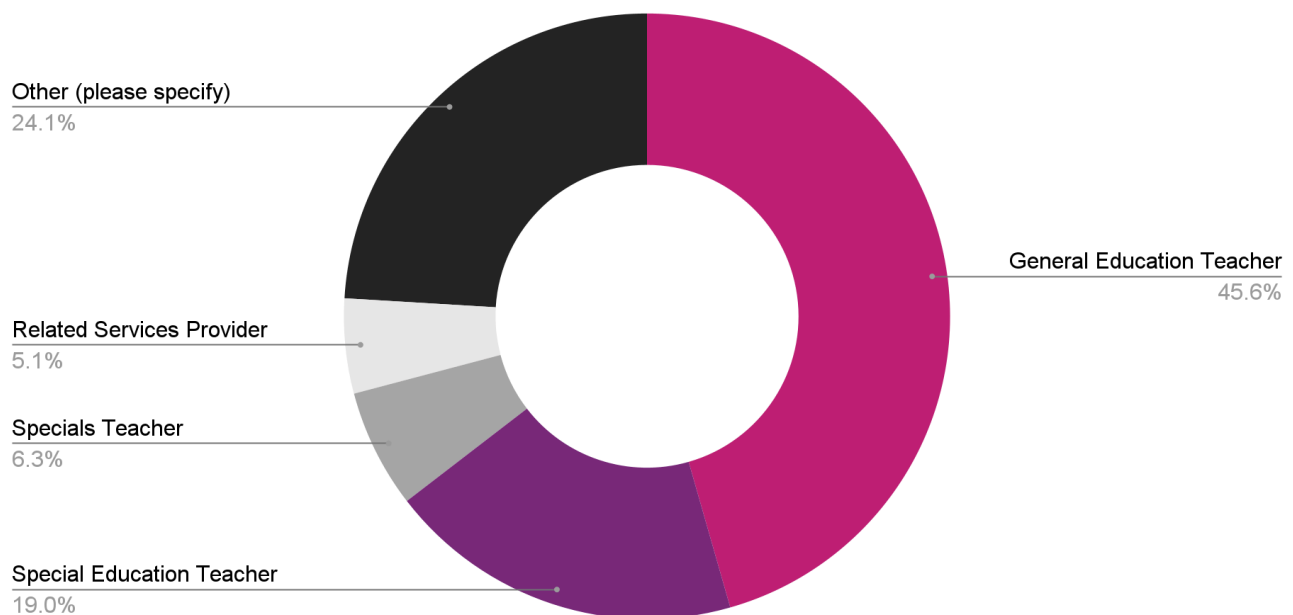
ABC conducted an on-site visit from October 25-26, 2023 to collect classroom and meeting observation data as well as conduct student interviews. Additional data was collected as a primary way of gathering data. Information was also collected through remote methods including virtual leader and educator interviews, electronic surveys, and artifact analysis.

Data was collected from:

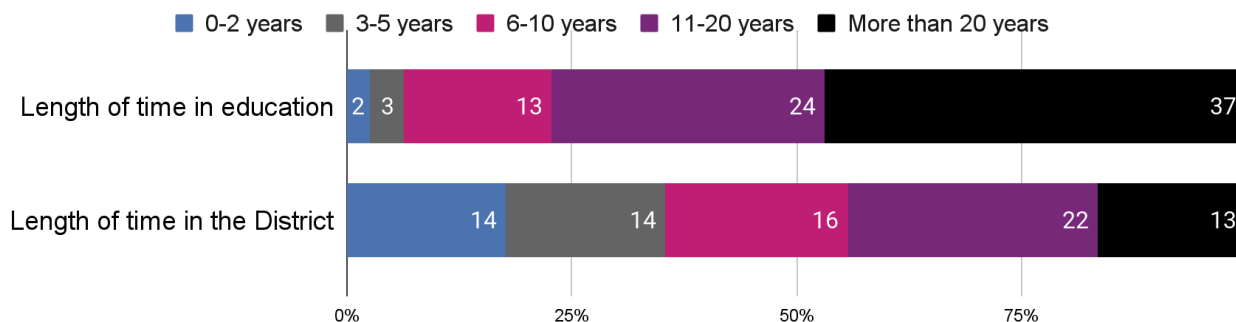
Educators:

- Interviews: 11 teachers interviewed
- Surveys: Collected from 79 educators

Number of Staff in Role Completing Educator Surveys A and B



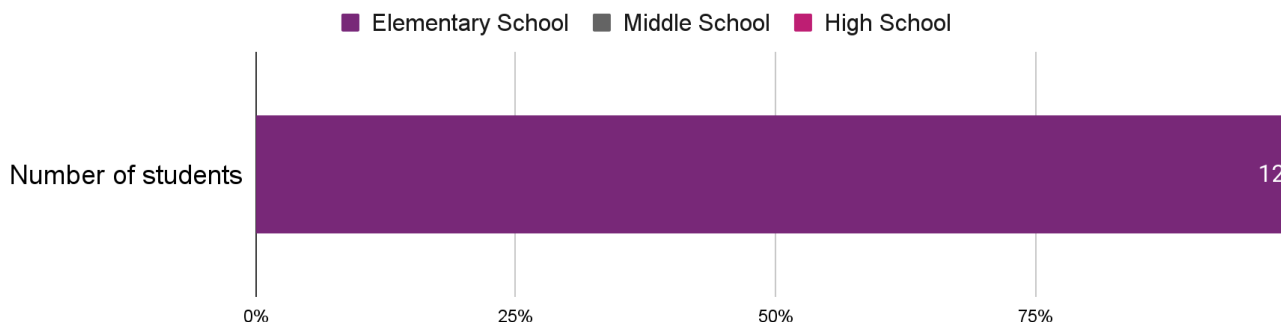
Educator Length of Time in Education vs. WCUUSD



Leadership Team Members: Interviews were conducted with 11 school and District leaders. 10 leaders completed the Leadership Team Survey.

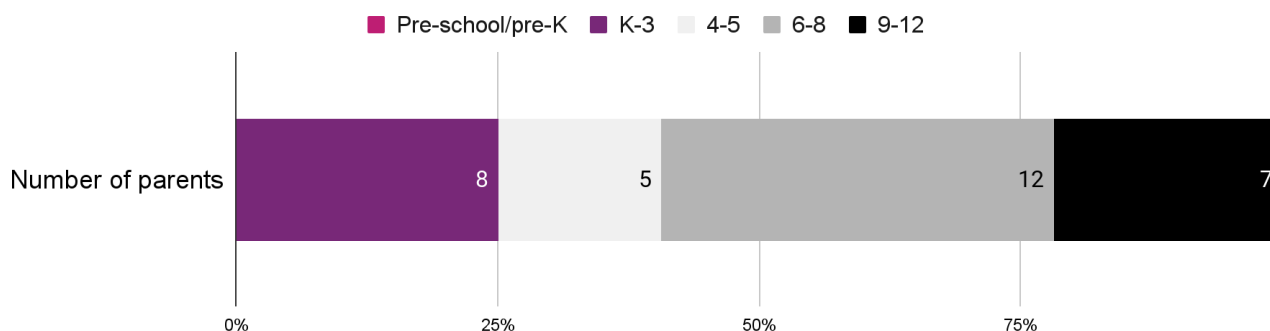
Students: 12 students spoken with via interview.¹

School Level of Students Interviewed



Families: 32 families of students with disabilities responded to an electronic survey.²

Number of parents, by grade level of oldest student with an IEP



¹ ABC would like to note that despite several efforts, only students from 2 elementary schools were made available for feedback. It is recommended that additional students be interviewed to gain a more comprehensive assessment of student experience across the district.

² One parent who does not have a child with an IEP completed the survey, but this data has been suppressed to preserve the integrity of the assessment.



Other Data Sources:

- 10 IEPs were reviewed as work samples
- 4 additional document artifacts (Mission statement, curriculum website, etc.)
- 4 meetings were observed (EST, Team Meetings, etc.)
- 43 classroom observations across all District schools



FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS BY ELEMENT

This report highlights factual findings by THRIVE element. Each element has the following components:

- **Key Takeaways:** This section identifies any overarching trends or notable findings that may be actionable for the school.
- **Primary Source Data:** This section presents figures, quotations or other primary source data that either supports the key takeaways or adds relevant information for the school's review and planning.
- **Recommendations:** Possible next steps and suggestions for improvement based on national trends, evidence-based strategies, and expert review.
- **Considerations:** Questions or considerations to use to dive deeper into data and/or to develop insight and action. As ABC intends for this report to provide as much information as possible that can be used to improve inclusive environments for diverse learners, we hope you use the content from this section to engage your team in further work around these issues.

Additional terms and definitions include:

- **Elements:** Five main themes that undergird all quality special education programming according to the THRIVE Quality Special Education Framework.
- **Success Indicators:** Research-based qualities and systemic factors necessary to meet each of the Framework's five elements.
- **Score:** Data collected from the assessment is presented in a numeric form from 1 - 5 based on an aggregation of one or more data sources.
- **Analysis:** Scores are further noted with a descriptive notation (e.g., Mastered) and color coordinated to show the relative strength or area of challenge emerging from the review.



ELEMENT ONE: CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

Element Definition: Leaders set and hold staff accountable for a bold, clear, inclusive vision and aligned practices. Educators believe that all students can learn and grow and deeply value an inclusive, collaborative school environment.

SI#	Success Indicator Name	Score	Analysis
1	Belief That Serving Exceptional Learners is a Collective Responsibility	4.48	Mastered
2	Belief That All Students Can Learn and Grow	4.31	Mastered
3	Belief that an Inclusive School Environment Benefits All Students	4.33	Mastered
4	Understanding of the Leaders' Role in Shaping Culture	3.69	Proficient
5	Understanding of the Components of Effective Change Management Focused on Inclusion	3.13	Fair/Emerging
6	Creation of a Bold, Clear Vision for Inclusion	3.37	Fair/Emerging
7	Implementation of an Action Plan for Making or Sustaining Inclusive Change	2.86	Fair/Emerging
8	Implementation of Practices for Mitigating Bias	3.43	Proficient
9	Effective formal & informal collaboration	3.42	Proficient

KEY	Starting Out 1.00-1.79	Developing 1.80-2.59	Fair/Emerging 2.60-3.39	Proficient 3.40-4.19	Mastered 4.20-5.00
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Key Takeaways

The following main points emerged as trends and key takeaways about a Culture of Inclusion:

- While staff self-report their own **strong inclusive beliefs**, they feel that others' have less of a shared responsibility for supporting diverse learners and a lower value for inclusive school environments.
- There is opportunity for improvement when it comes to **leaders understanding their role in shaping culture**, as well as incorporating the components of effective change management particularly regarding the implementation of inclusive practices.
- There is confusion about the existence and role of both **District and school visions for inclusion**, though the evidence shows this is an area receiving attention this year.
- There is opportunity to maximize the impact of training that has been provided around mitigating bias to reinforce the purpose behind putting effective and equitable systems in place, especially given the **lack of connections currently being made between training about bias and special education**.
- Though staff perceptions indicate that formal collaboration about student need is occurring, other data from leader and student interviews tells a different story. Both **formal and informal collaboration** may be an area of opportunity for the District.

Primary Source Data

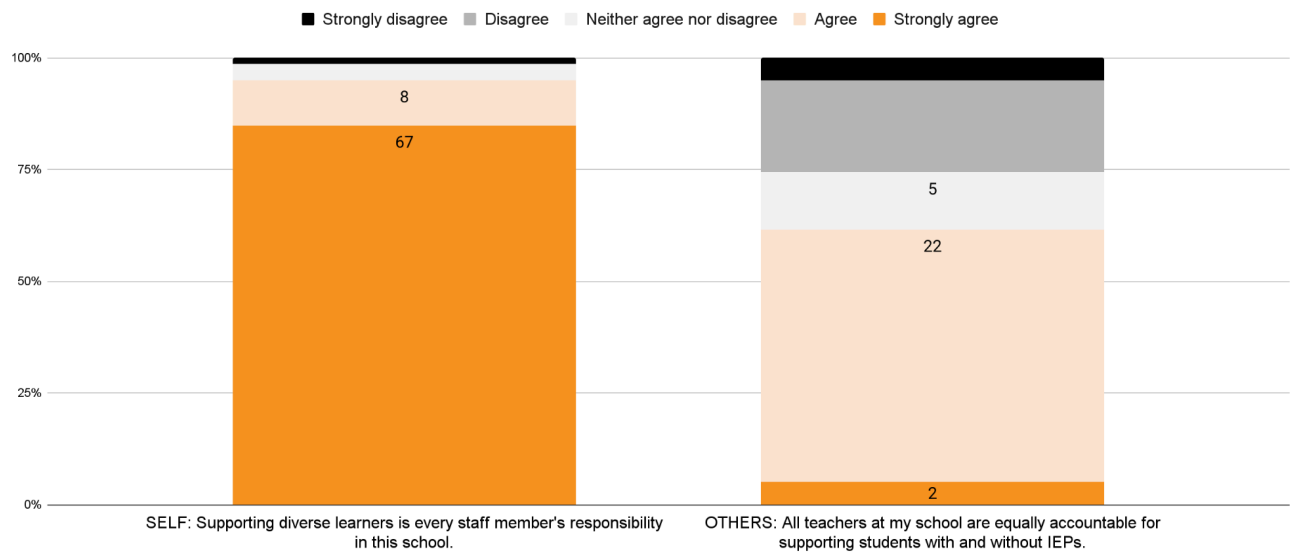
Data from this section comes from a variety of sources including educator and leader surveys and student interviews. With that in mind, it is important to view these results understanding that (1) survey results are all self-reported and an individual's perception of their beliefs may differ from their practices and (2) the student sample only included students at 2 schools in the late elementary grades (5-6th grades).

Both leaders and educators report **strong mindsets and beliefs** that all adults are responsible for ensuring that all students receive the supports they need in school. For example, when asked about whether serving diverse learners is the responsibility of all staff, 95% of educators overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed with that mindset.

Comparing this data with questions about shared responsibility in practice, responses may tell a somewhat different story. When asked about whether other teachers at their school are equally accountable for supporting students with and without IEPs, 61% of educators agreed or strongly agreed.

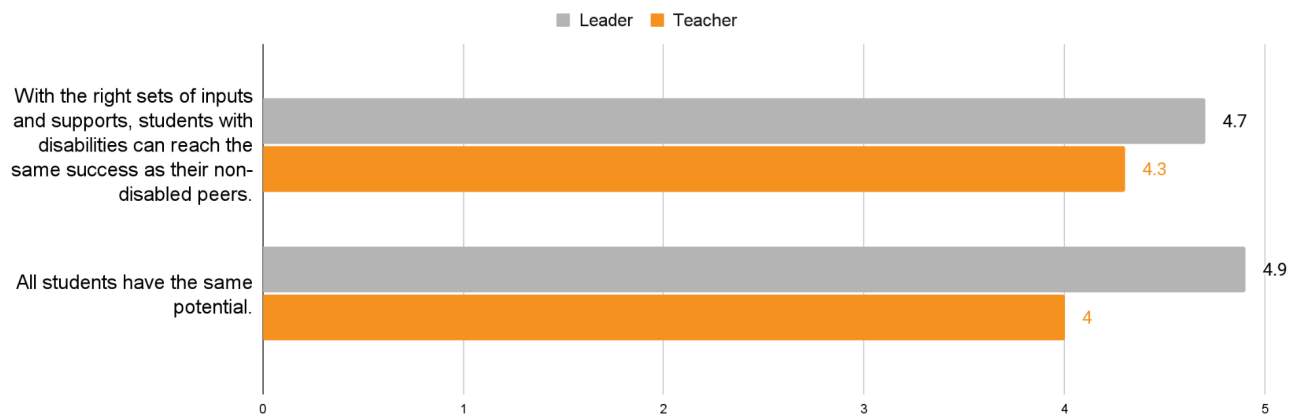


Level of Agreement from Educators on Survey Responses on Shared Responsibility in Practice



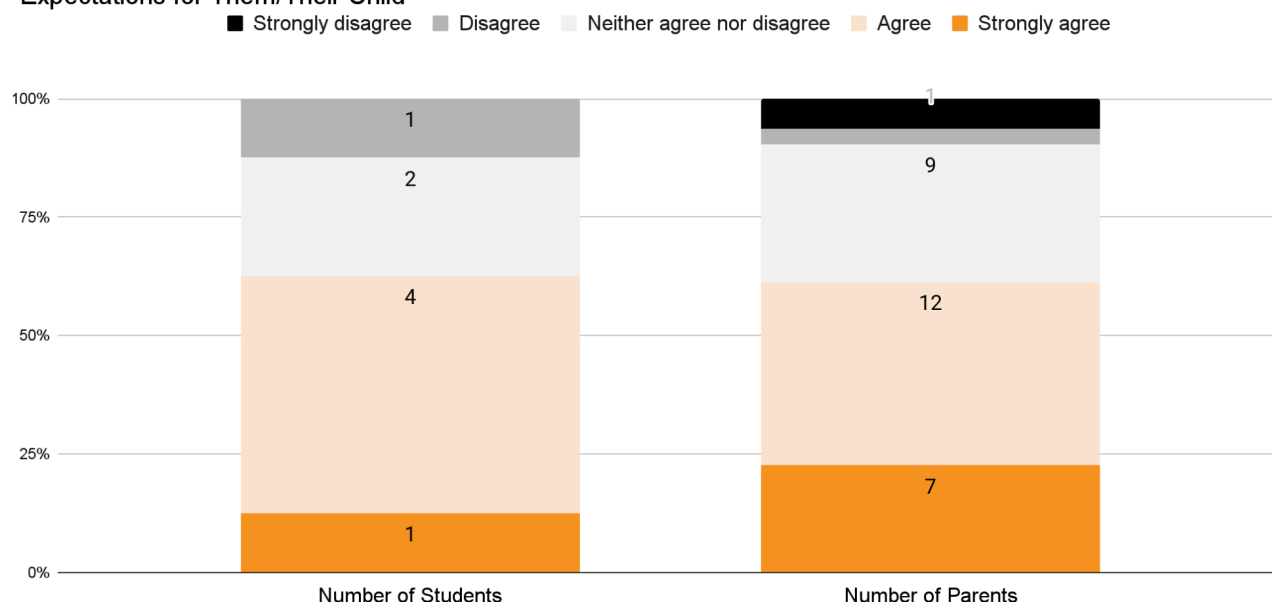
Regarding mindsets, a relative strength of the District is that staff believe that **all students can learn and grow**, especially for District leadership whose responses yielded even higher results than teachers'. When asked "With the right sets of inputs and supports, students with disabilities can reach the same success as their non-disabled peers," the average score was 4.7 (out of 5) for leaders and 4.3 for teachers. Similarly, when asked whether they believe all students have the same potential, virtually all leaders (90%) responded that they strongly agree. 35% of teachers strongly agreed and another 38% agreed.

Survey Responses on Student Potential, Leader vs. Teacher Averages (out of 5)



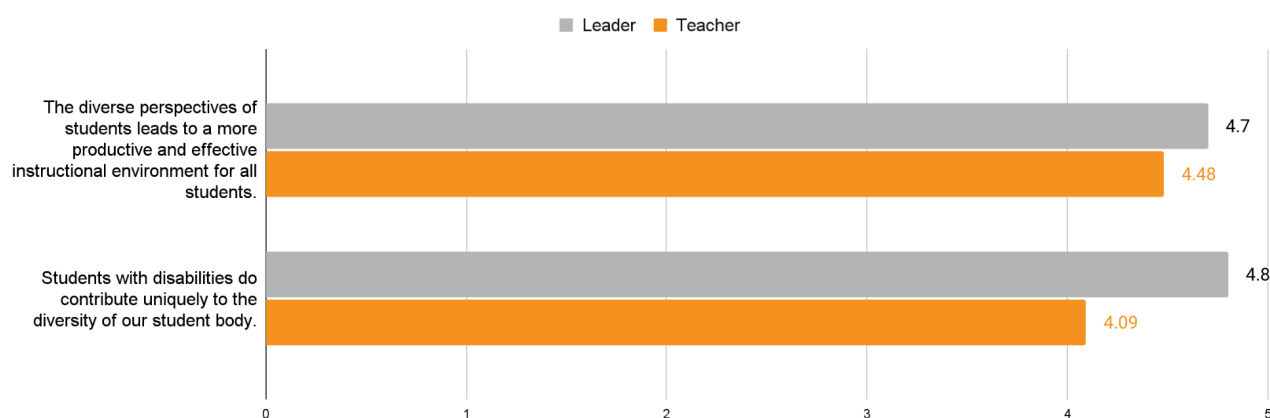
Around 61% of both students and parents agree or strongly agree that the school has high expectations for them or their child - resulting in an average score of 3.58 (out of 5) for students and 3.76 for parents of students with disabilities.

Level of Agreement from Students and Parents Regarding Whether they Believe the School Has High Expectations for Them/Their Child



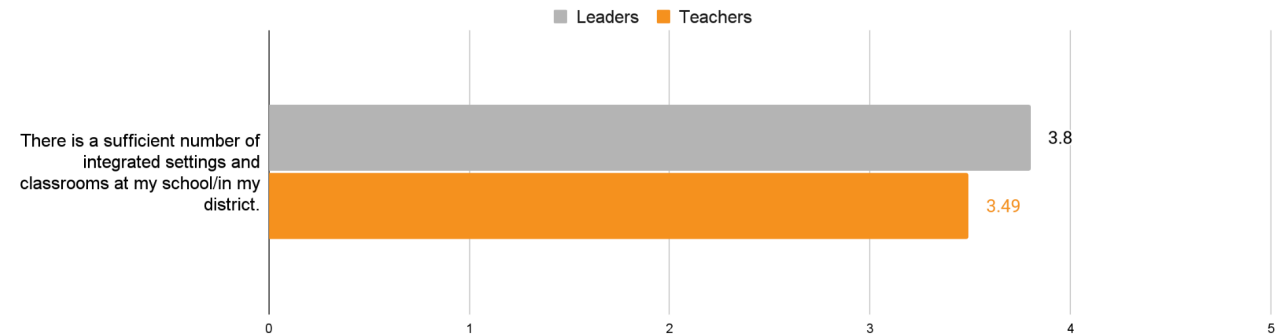
Scores showed similar trends around the **belief that an inclusive school environment benefits all students**. Responses to questions about the value of inclusion in leader and teacher surveys were relatively high with leaders scores slightly higher than teachers'. For example, when asked to respond to the statement, "The diverse perspectives of students leads to a more productive and effective instructional environment for all students," leaders' responses averaged 4.7 (out of 5) and teachers averaged slightly lower at 4.48. When asked about whether students with disabilities contribute uniquely to the diversity of the school's student body, teachers' responses averaged 4.09 (out of 5), while leaders were higher with a score of 4.8.

Survey Responses on the Value of Inclusion, Leader vs. Teacher Averages (out of 5)



Interestingly, while teachers and leaders both strongly support the value of a diverse student body, it appears that both leaders and staff feel there are insufficient **numbers of integrated settings** across the District. When asked to mark their level of agreement with the statement, “There is a sufficient number of integrated settings and classrooms at my school/in my district,” leaders’ responses scored an average of 3.8 (out of 5) and educators’ averaged 3.49.

Sufficiency of Integrated Settings, Leader vs. Teacher Averages (out of 5)

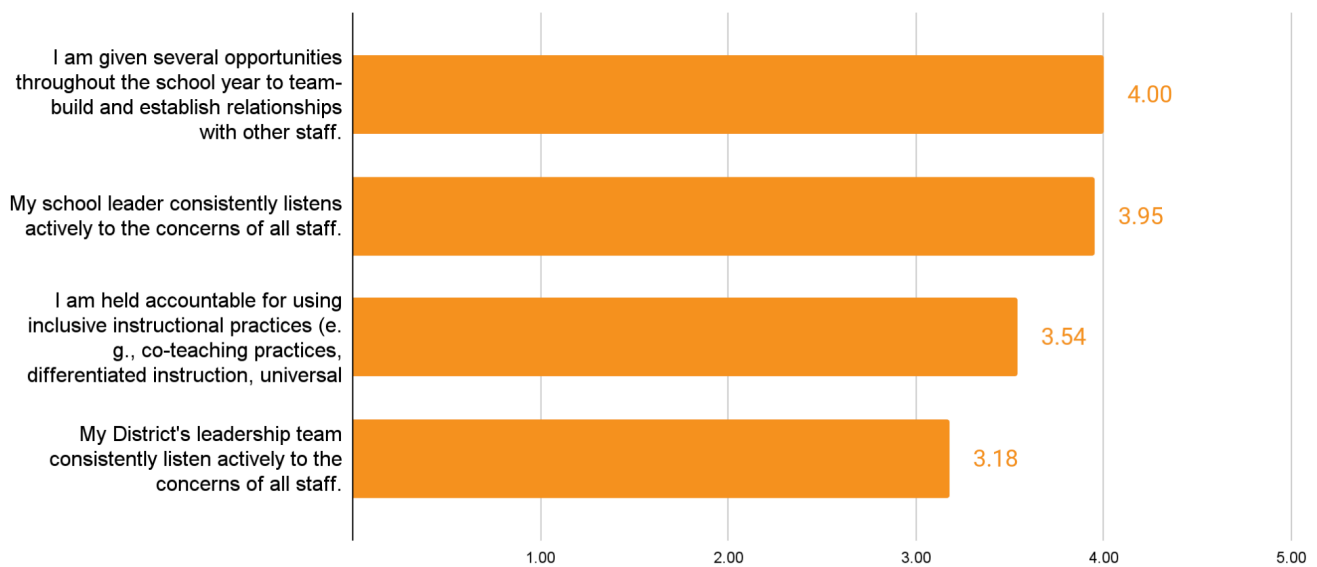


Data reveals a nuanced perspective among educators and leaders regarding their understanding of the **leaders' role in fostering an inclusive culture** within the educational setting. At the District-level, it is clear that special education plays an important role in improvement initiatives - shown by having the Director of Student Support Services as part of the leadership team and through the investment in this assessment as an aligned part of the strategic planning process.

Also on the positive side, educators express satisfaction with the ample opportunities provided for team-building (scoring a 4.00 out of 5) and generally believe that their school leaders actively listen to their concerns (scoring 3.95 out of 5).

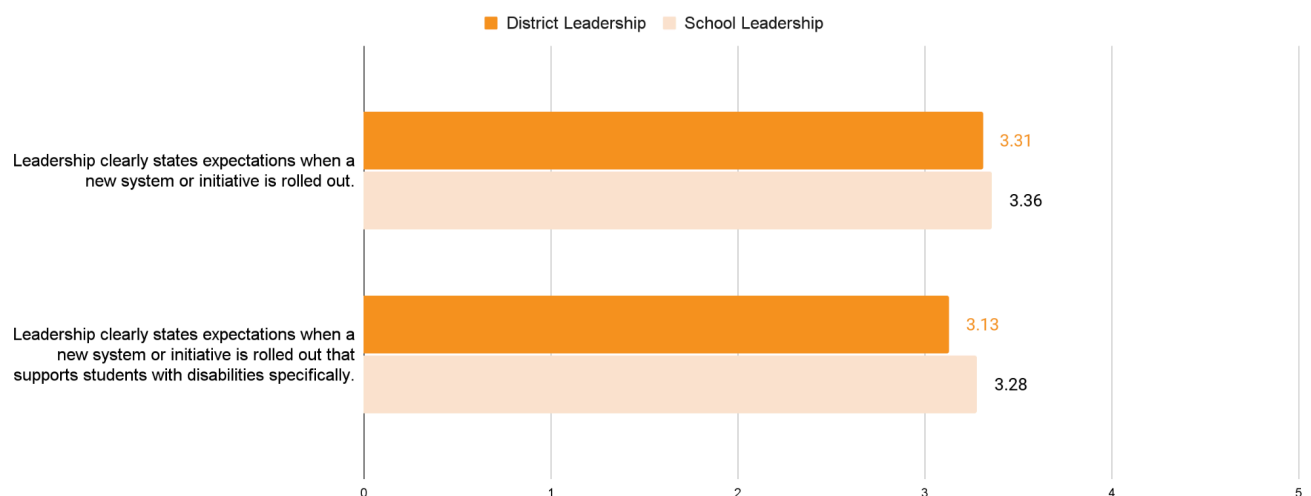
However, there are also some areas for improvement within this indicator. For example, while many educators report that their school leaders actively listen to their concerns, they are less favorable about how their District leaders listen to concerns (scoring 3.18 out of 5). Additionally, responses were mixed (with an average score of 3.54 out of 5) when it came to educators’ assessment of how they are held accountable for implementing inclusive practices - a data point that maps to whether leaders are providing oversight on the implementation of inclusion.

Average Teacher Response to Questions about Leaders' Role in Shaping Culture (out of 5)



Another important success indicator in this element is the **understanding of the components of effective change management** focused on inclusion. From survey responses, it appears that teachers feel somewhat neutral when asked about school and district leaders' clarity of expectations when rolling out new initiatives, especially when it comes to initiatives that specifically support students with disabilities.

Average Teacher Response to Questions Related to Expectations About the Implementation of New Initiatives, School vs. District (out of 5)



Average scores were even lower when asked how they feel about the sufficiency of training and troubleshooting support they have received related to the implementation of new systems and practices. Interestingly, staff were slightly more likely to agree that they have received sufficient training for implementing practices for special education specifically

(3.05 out of 5) than they were for general system-related practices (2.67 average score).

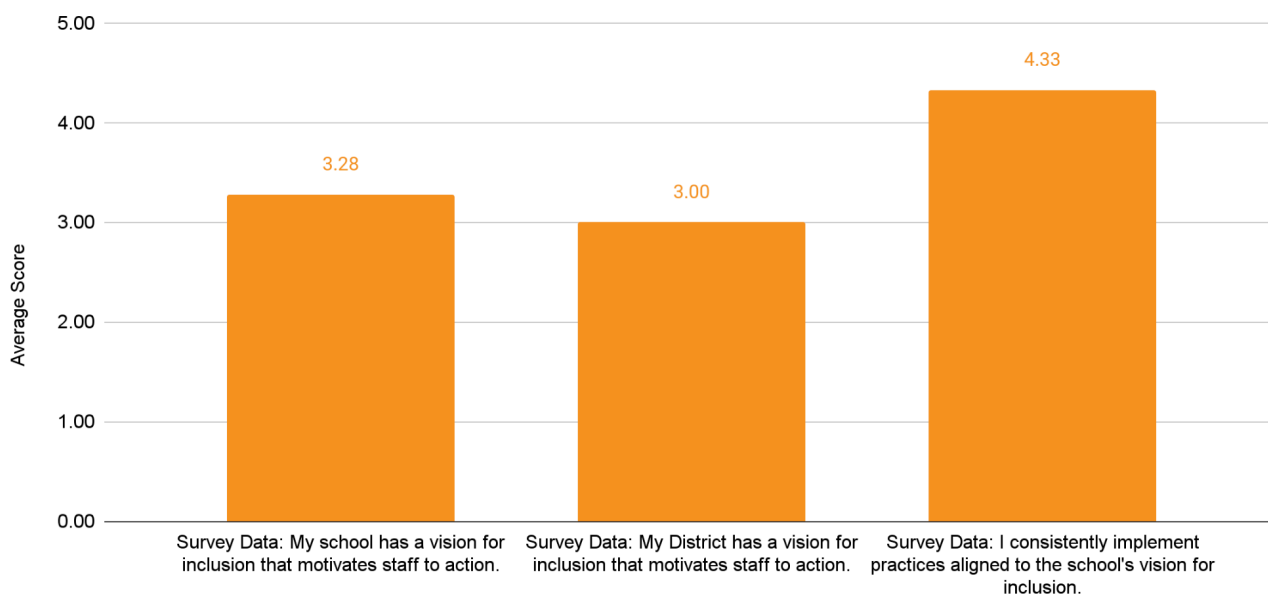
Average Teacher Response to Questions Related to Training About the Implementation of New Initiatives (out of 5)



There seems to be confusion across the District around whether there is a **vision for inclusion** and if there is one, what it is.

Despite the fact that many don't know the vision specifically, staff do seem to think they are implementing the vision. For example, in the educator survey, teachers responded with an average score of 3.28 (out of 5) when asked if they agree with the statement, "My school has a vision for inclusion that motivates staff to action." Responses from teachers about the District's vision were slightly lower at 3 (out of 5). Yet, when asked whether they consistently implement practices aligned with the school's vision for inclusion, an average of 4.33 agreed (out of 5).

Average Teacher Response to Questions Related to Vision for Inclusion (out of 5)



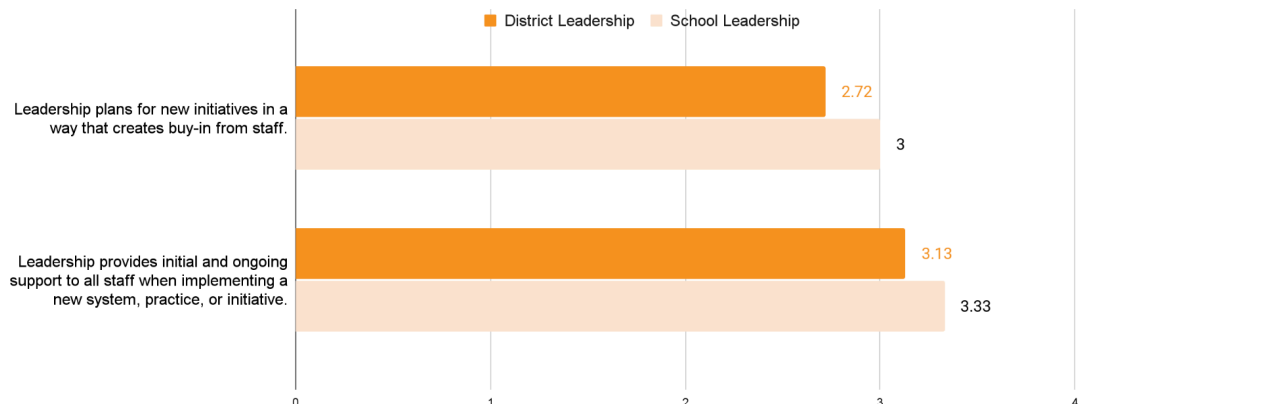
Interview data confirmed this data discrepancy, revealing that educators are not able accurately describe the school or District vision for inclusion.

"I see a variety of ways that we support students in a special education program and it's both within the classroom setting or outside. During the meetings that I attend and the work that I do in collaborating with some of the folks who provide services, we are really thoughtful about what would best support that student. And ideally we try push in and we try to start in the classroom first. And if the environment isn't the right place for them to really get that learning, then they might be pulled out for some of those services as well." - Excerpt from educator interview

"I don't think that there's like a giant vision. Well, there maybe there is. I don't know that it is." - Excerpt from educator interview

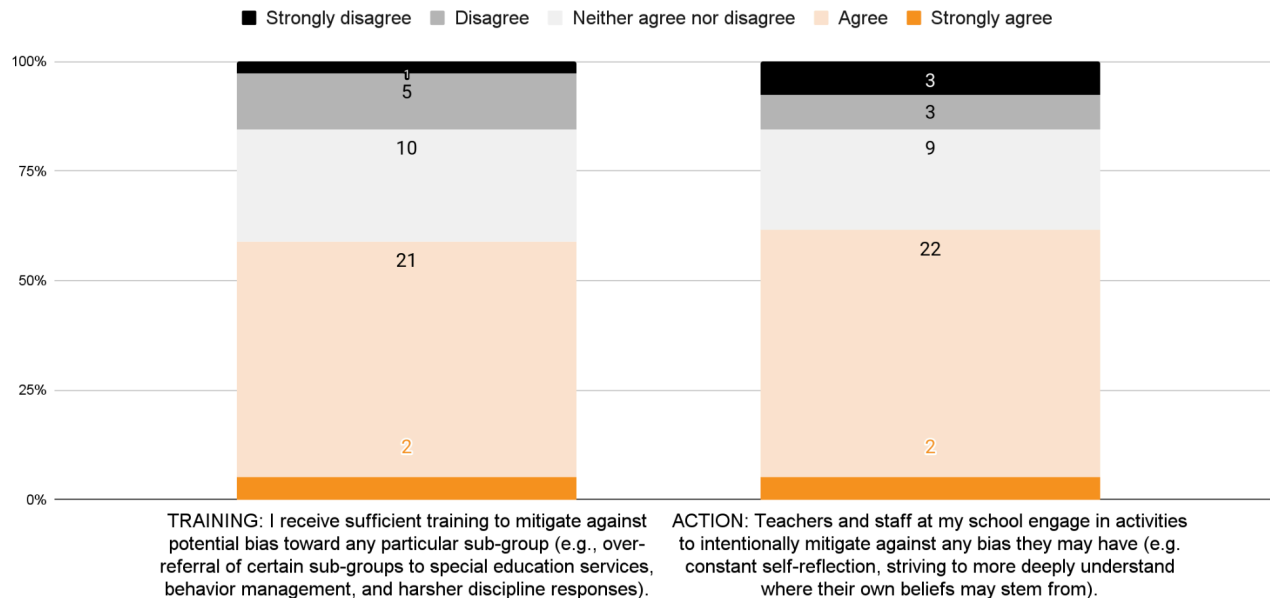
When it comes to **implementing an action plan for making or sustaining inclusive change**, staff are somewhat more likely to feel supported by school leaders than District ones, though the differences are marginal. Averages were slightly higher when educators were asked about how leaders support the ongoing implementation of systems and initiatives, than they were when asked about how leaders create buy-in prior to rolling out a new initiative.

Average Teacher Response to Questions Related to the Quality of Implementation of New Initiatives (out of 5)



There has been some District work focused on **eliminating bias**, but that work has been primarily focused on racial bias. Educators' perception of how they mitigate bias demonstrates that many feel they have had sufficient training and are integrating those techniques into their every day practice. For example, 59% agree or strongly agree that "they have received sufficient training to mitigate against potential bias toward any particular subgroup" and 61% agree or strongly agree that teachers and staff "engage in activities to intentionally mitigate any bias they may have."

Breakdown of Teacher Responses to Questions Related to Bias Mitigation



Leaders' and students' perspectives on practices to mitigate bias may differ from teachers' indicating that this training may not have helped educators make connections about how disability and ableism might impact instructional decision making. For example, according to one leader,

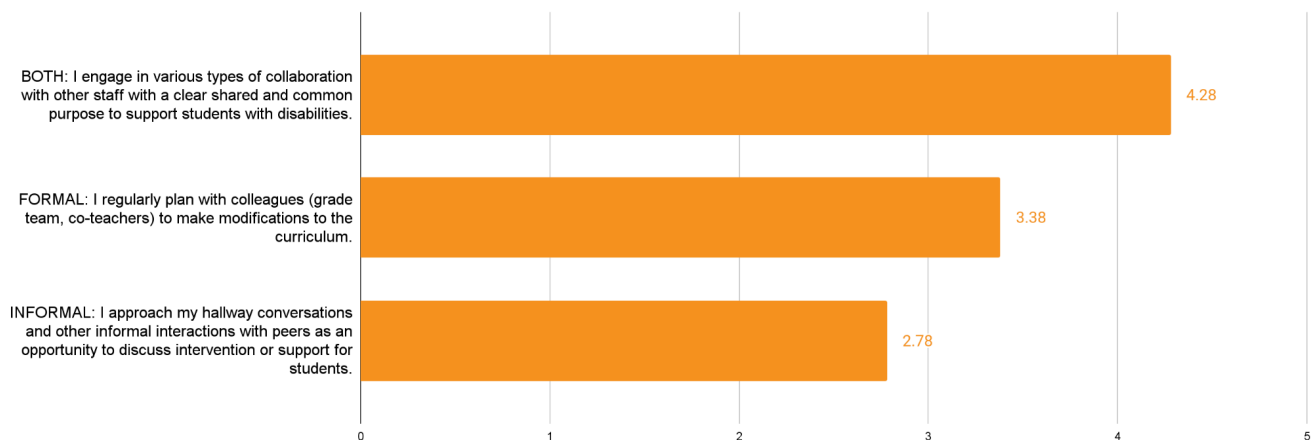
“[We have spent some time] talking about bias, but more centered around race and not disability. We’ve done book studies which had selections around disability, with mixed book groups to meet with people who were reading different books. There is always more work to do in these areas with SWDs, especially around discipline.” - Excerpt from leader interview

Further, when asked whether their teachers make an effort to learn about their culture, family, and background, one student responded,

“The only thing I wish we could have more time in my class where we can all get together and take a turn each of us talking about our history. It would give each other a better understanding of each other.” - Excerpt from student interview

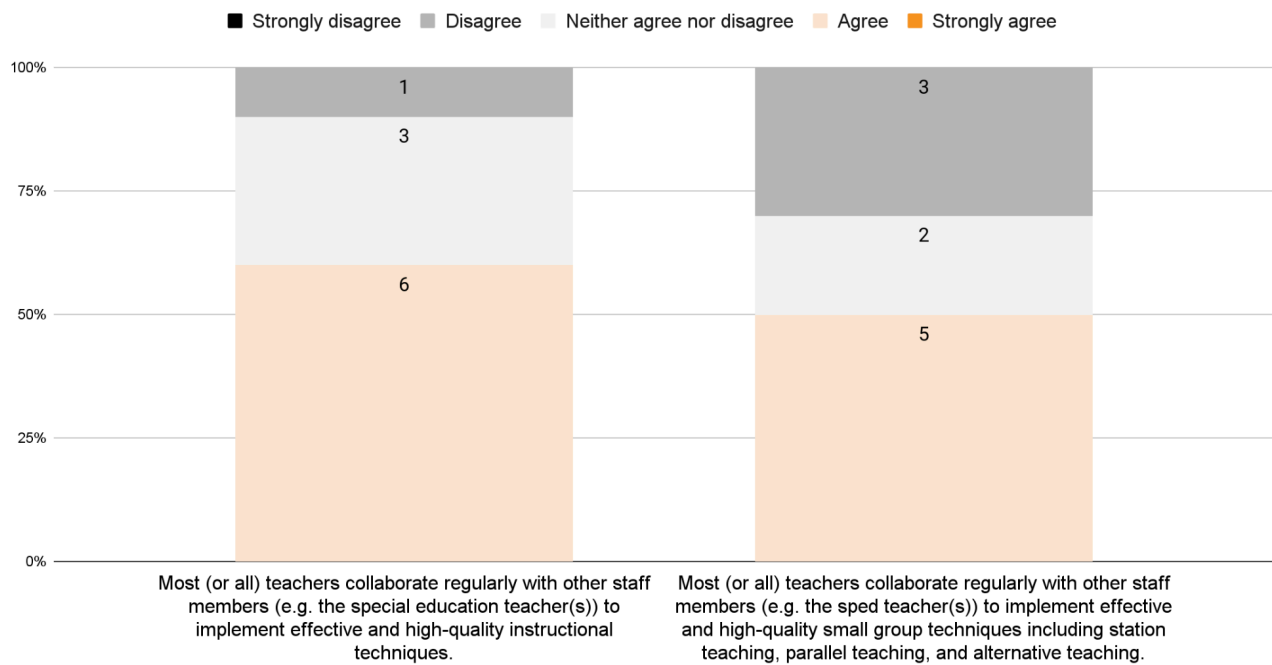
Finally, data shows there may be opportunities for building more **collaboration across the District**, focusing on more informal and non-traditional opportunities. Teacher surveys showed strong agreement when asked whether they engage collaboration with other staff. For example, when asked to respond to the statement, “I engage in various types of collaboration with other staff with a clear, shared and common purpose to support students with disabilities, scores yielded an average of 4.28 (out of 5). Averages were somewhat lower when asked about opportunities for formal collaboration to make modifications to curriculum (3.38 out of 5), but scores were much lower in response to questions about whether teachers engaged in informal collaboration (2.78 out of 5).

Average Teacher Responses Related to Formal and Informal Collaboration (out of 5)



Leaders confirmed the perspective that there is room for growth in how teachers collaborate to implement effective instruction. While around 50% of leaders agree that teachers collaborate regularly to implement effective instructional techniques, such as small groups, alternative teaching, etc., none of the responses in this area were strong in either direction, agree or disagree.

Breakdown of Leader Responses Related to Teacher Use of Collaborative Instructional Practices



Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to how WCUUSD fosters a culture of inclusion:

- Move swiftly from the delivery of this report and the Districtwide strategic plan to solidify a **Districtwide vision for inclusion**. Map the vision to specific actions in the strategic plan to clearly outline how each plan component attends to the vision, the impact of each component on diverse learners, who is responsible, and how they will be held accountable for implementing practices in service of the vision (e.g., draw connections between the vision and how that translates to practice in classrooms).
- Identify a manageable number of high-leverage recommendations to prioritize as a means of establishing consistent practices across the District, and develop a **clear action plan that accounts for roles and responsibilities** for implementation. Ensure that these recommendations are embedded in or at minimum aligned to the priorities in your Districtwide strategic plan.
- **Train District leaders in effective inclusive leadership, anti-ableist change management, and elimination of bias** to ensure shared knowledge and language prior to starting implementation of the District's action plan.
- Identify all of the systems, structures, and processes available for staff to **formally and informally collaborate** and map each opportunity to the desired collaboration that should be occurring. Where gaps are identified, develop a plan for improving

how collaboration occurs to achieve the desired result. Provide foundational training to ensure individuals responsible for collaborating have the knowledge and skills required for successful implementation.

Considerations

Leaders looking to further explore the area of culture of inclusion can ask and answer the following questions:

- How might the student experience be impacted by a lack of a shared and normed vision for inclusion across the District?
- How can the District build connections for staff between the existing diversity, equity and inclusion work and special education/inclusion to maximize the impact of all related initiatives?
- What are the Districtwide aspects of WCUUSD's culture that need to prevail across all schools consistently? How can schools maintain their unique identities and culture while also upholding the Districtwide culture?
- How might District leaders hold staff accountable for demonstrating inclusive mindsets in the classroom?



ELEMENT TWO: STUDENT-CENTERED CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Element Definition: Leaders manage the implementation of evidence-based, standards-aligned, culturally responsive curriculum with clear outcomes and sequenced units of study. Educators facilitate meaningful and supportive relationships with students and deliver instruction that provides access to grade-level content for diverse learners.

SI#	Success Indicator Name	Score	Analysis
10	Knowledge of Evidence-based Instructional and Assessment Practices for Diverse Learners	3.27	Fair/Emerging
11	Strengths-Based Understanding of Student Potential	3.29	Fair/Emerging
12	Use of Clear Teaching Outcomes	1.31	Starting Out
13	Use of Standards-aligned, Interdependent Units of Study (Academic and Social-emotional)	2.92	Fair/Emerging
14	Use of Data to Make Instructional Decisions	3.35	Fair/Emerging
15	Use of Intentional Differentiation and Specialized Instruction for Diverse Learners	3.21	Fair/Emerging
16	Use of Collaborative Approaches to Instruction	3.45	Proficient
17	Effective Planning and Co-Planning	3.37	Fair/Emerging
18	Fostering of Supportive Relationships and Learning Environments for Students	2.60	Fair/Emerging

KEY	Starting Out 1.00-1.79	Developing 1.80-2.59	Fair/Emerging 2.60-3.39	Proficient 3.40-4.19	Mastered 4.20-5.00
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Key Takeaways

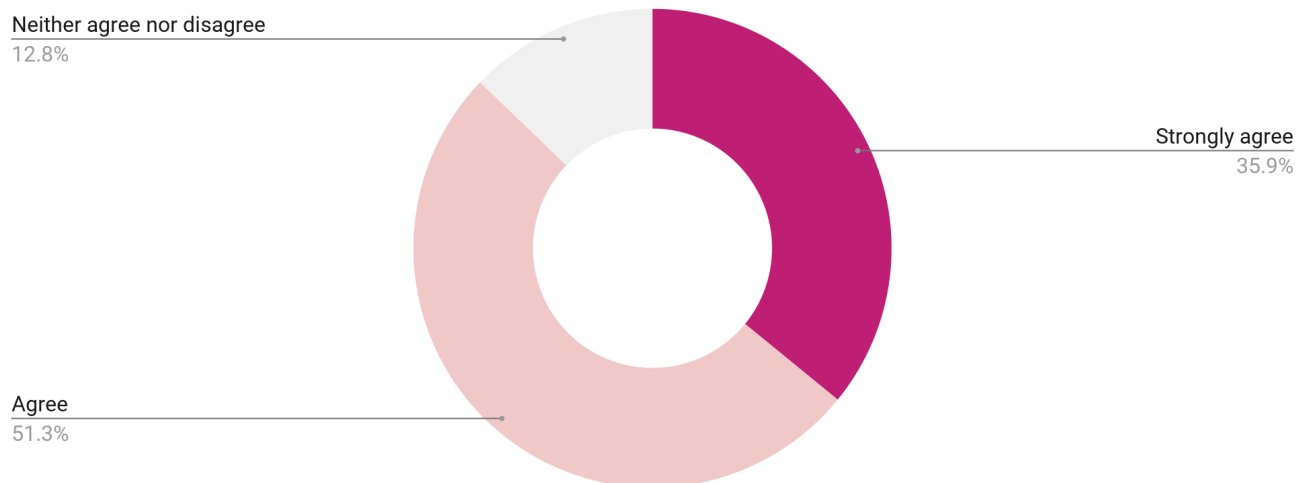
- While the District has made some strides in developing resources for curriculum and instruction, the **use of standards-aligned, interdependent units of study** is a significant area of need. Specifically, there are inconsistent expectations and practices for how curriculum is developed and implemented, with the primary grades having a more established, cohesive curriculum than upper elementary and secondary grades.
- There is a discrepancy between educator knowledge of **evidence-based instructional practices** and implementation of those practices. Specifically, observation data indicated a need to improve educator practice in **checking student understanding** in an ongoing way and effectively **responding to student misunderstanding**. There is also a need for District guidance and support to deepen educator practice in developing **clear learning outcomes** as well as **differentiation and specialized instruction for diverse learners**.
- Multiple sources indicate a lack of established structures and practices for the **use of data to drive instructional decisions**. While educators report regular practice of collecting and using data, additional data sources highlight a need to establish a cohesive District approach to collecting, analyzing and using data to monitor student progress and drive instruction.
- Educators and leaders are aligned on the need to improve the structures and support for **effective planning and co-planning** with both indicating a lack of structures to support co-planning and a need for clear expectations to ensure equal distribution of responsibilities for supporting diverse learners.

Primary Source Data

The data sources for this element include surveys and interviews with educators and leaders, classroom observations and analysis of curriculum and instruction artifacts.

Multiple data sources indicated **knowledge of evidence-based instructional and assessment practices for diverse learners** is a relative area of opportunity in this element with the indicator having an overall average of 3.27 (out of 5). Closer analysis of the data reveals educators perceive this as an area of strength with 87% of educators responding agree or strongly agree to the question “I use current and evidence-based materials and books in my classroom (e.g., printed curriculum, web-based content, etc.).”

Teacher Agreement with the Statement, "I use current and evidence-based materials and books in my classroom (e.g. printed curriculum, web-based content).



However, observational data noted an area of opportunity within this indicator. While many classrooms observed did use a variety of materials such as articles, excerpts from primary sources and complex novels, educators did not consistently implement the necessary instructional moves to ensure students were supported to effectively engage with the materials.

Excerpt from Observation Notes:

Students engaged in independent/group work, reading an article and discussing difficulty with the text. Students call the teacher over for support. The following exchange occurs:

S: "I can't read this stuff."

S: I don't understand this

T: we're going to talk about it afterwards

S: I don't know what to write

T: ok so you can write down some more; so you're looking for like...(points to lines in the text) kinda make connections across paragraphs, you know what I mean?

S: no

T: I'm just saying this part you can look for what you need and then read what's in this paragraph as a way to kinda help you.

S: Ok...

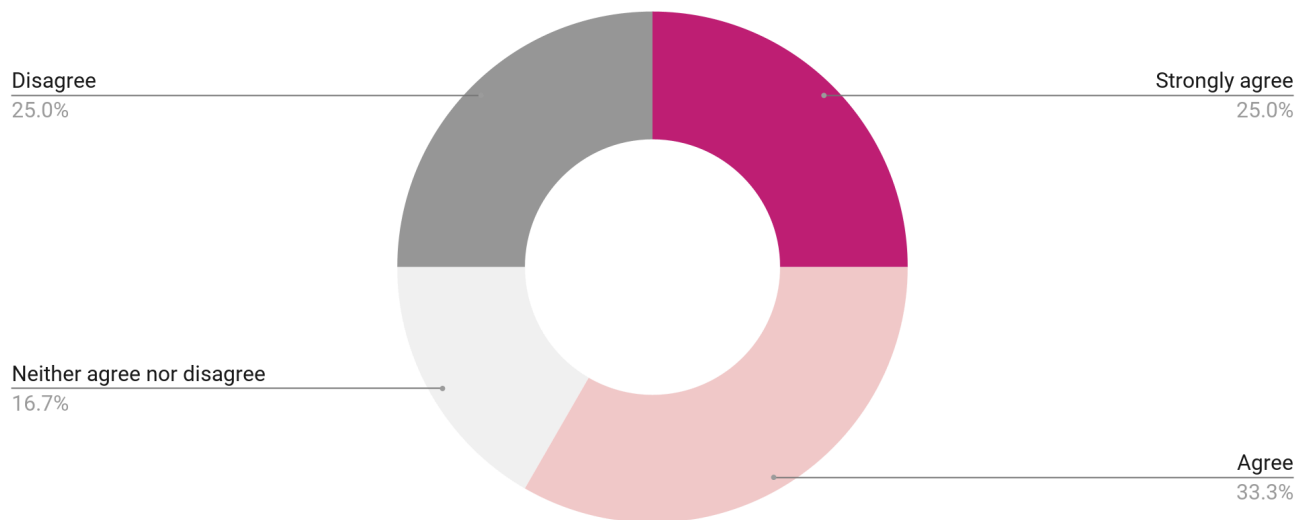
T: It'll take a couple of minutes but we'll get through it.

Teacher circulates to the next table. Students continue staring at papers and begin engaging in off-task conversations.

Strengths-based understanding of student potential is a relative area of strength for the District within this element with students and educators being aligned on their responses.

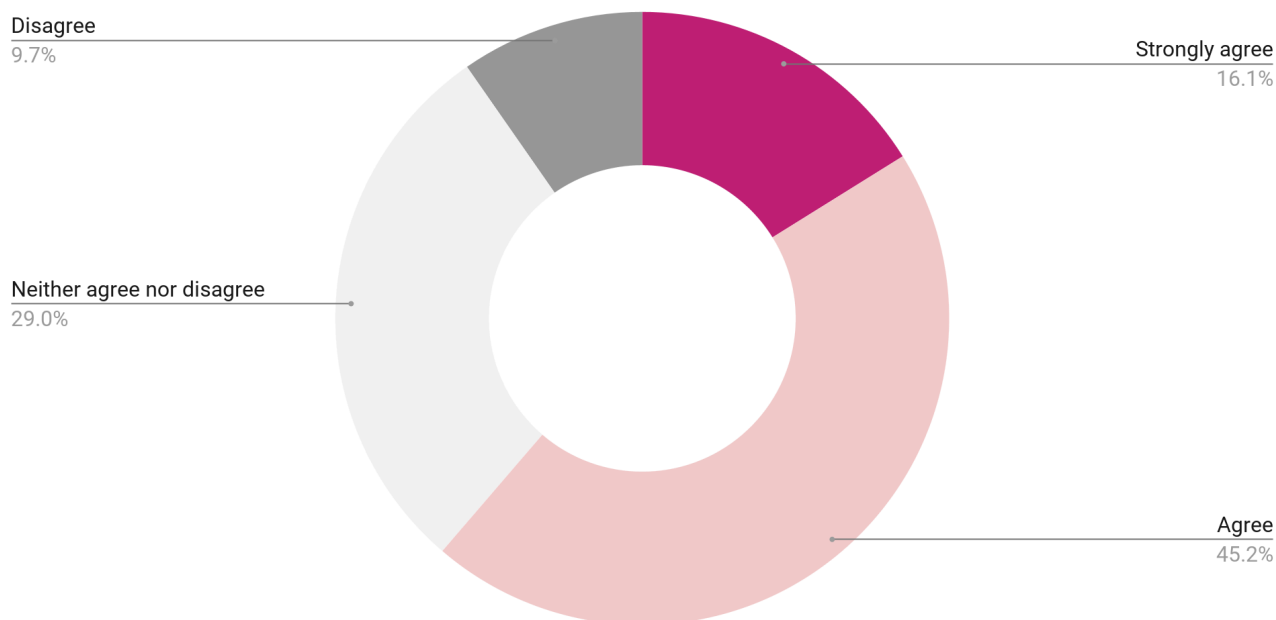
For example, the average student response to the question "My teachers know my strengths and needs" was 3.46 (out of 5) with 58% of students responding agree or strongly agree.

Student Agreement with the Statement, "My teachers know my strengths and needs."



Regarding holding high-expectations for students, the average educator response was 3.58 (out of 5) with 61% of educators responding agree or strongly agree to the question "I set high expectations for my students by assuming competence, especially for those students with disabilities (e.g., when a student with a disability appears challenged by an activity, I let the student grapple with that challenge)."

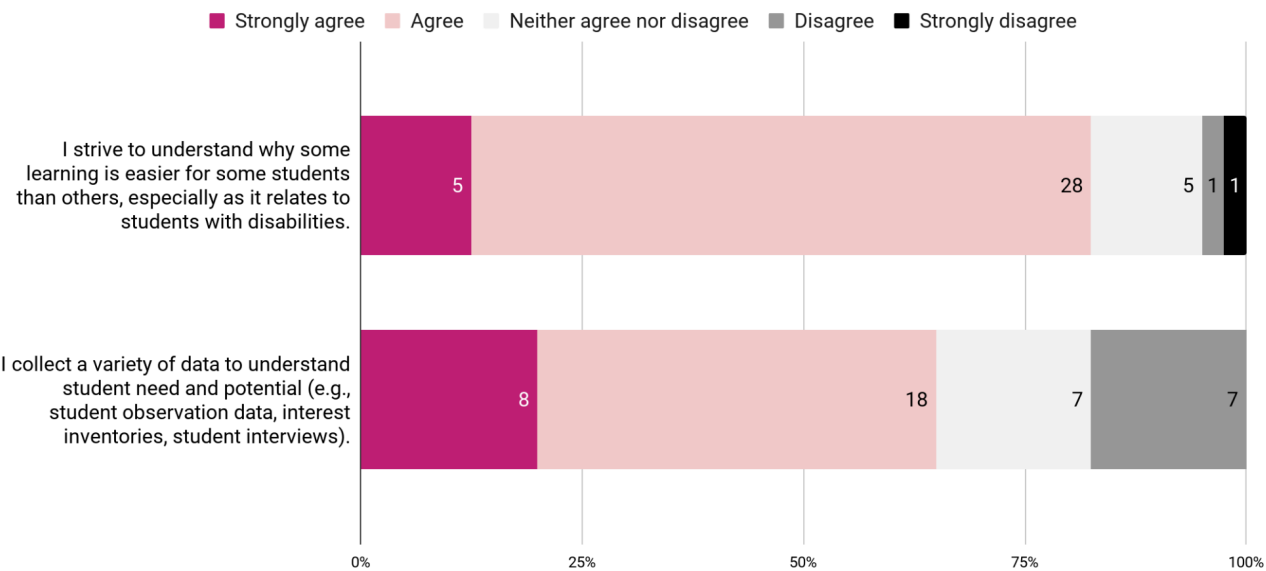
Teacher Agreement with the statement, "I set high expectations for my students by assuming competence, especially for those students with disabilities (e.g., when a student with a disability appears challenged by an activity, I let the student grapple with that challenge)."



Additional data indicated a discrepancy in teacher perception and practice in understanding student learning styles. While survey data was high, observation data did not support those conclusions. The average educator response to the question “I strive to understand why some learning is easier for some students than others, especially as it relates to students with disabilities” was 3.88 (out of 5) with 83% of educators responding agree or strongly agree.

Further, 65% of educators responded agree or strongly agree to the question “I collect a variety of data to understand student need and potential (e.g., student observation data, interest inventories, student interviews).”

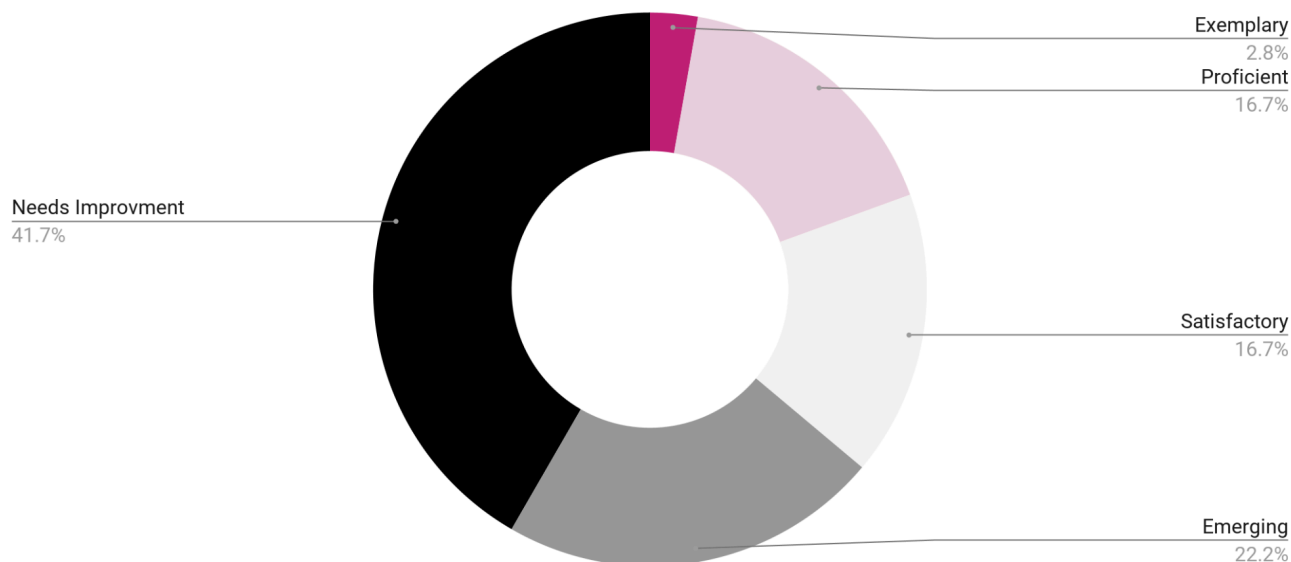
Breakdown of Teacher Survey Responses Regarding Understanding Student Learning Styles



On the other hand, observational data revealed that classroom practice did not demonstrate the same level of data use or understanding of student need.

For example, the average classroom observation score in the area of strengths-based understanding of student potential was 2.10 (out of 5). Specifically, observers noted teachers did not use ongoing methods to assess students' skill levels (e.g., checks for understanding, probing questions, etc.) resulting in a lack of awareness of need, specifically related to student struggle. Further, instructional materials and practices did not attend to diverse learning styles and educator responses were inconsistent in effectively responding to student misunderstanding.

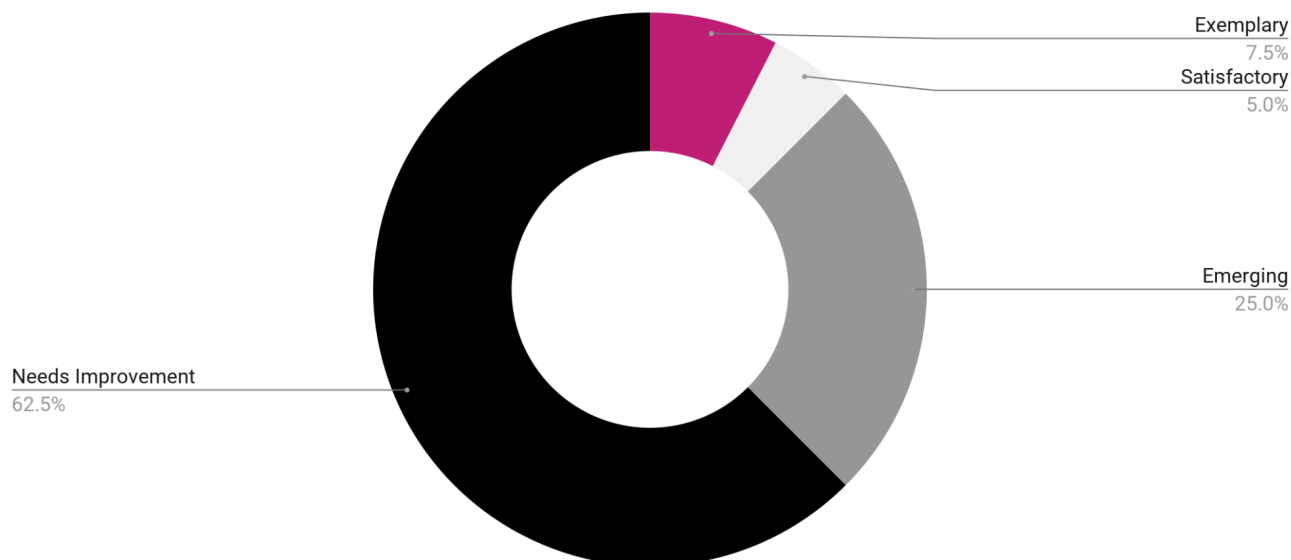
Classroom Observation Scores for Strengths-Based Understanding of Student Potential



The greatest area of need within this element is the **use of clear teaching outcomes** which yielded the lowest score across all success indicators in this element. Multiple data sources indicate a lack of District-guidance regarding the purpose and function of learning outcomes, resulting in a lack of buy-in from educators.

Additionally, observers noted most classrooms lacked clear learning outcomes for students, in turn leading to a lack of clarity around what students will be learning and how that learning will be assessed, which most acutely impacts diverse learners and their access to content. The average observation score for classrooms in this indicator was 1.62 (out of 5) and observers noted most classrooms did not communicate clear learning outcomes to students.

Classroom Observation Scores for Clear Learning Outcomes Communicated



Educator interviews and observation data also showed that **standards-aligned, interdependent units of study (academic and social-emotional)** is an area of growth for the District. The District has established a Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment website that houses the materials currently available for grades K-12 in core content areas. The District has also provided resources for schools to engage in collaborative work on strengthening the alignment of curriculum via 'work alike' meetings. There is no explicit reference to how the materials account for diverse learners or expectations for ensuring all students have access to the materials that are developed. Upon further analysis, it was revealed that the implementation of the resources on the website and expectations for curriculum development are inconsistent across the District.

In the primary grades, educators noted a suite of curricular resources that are available for them but also reported a need for clear guidance and expectations for what is to be used when and in which grades.

"[The District] Recently adopted Foundations in K-3, but then nothing after that. Working with iReady reading, but no guidance about what teachers need to use and don't need to use. Some use Just Words which is more of an intervention; some teachers are doing more training (IMSE), but after grade 3, there is no standardized curriculum." - Excerpt from educator interview

In the upper elementary and secondary grades, educator and leader responses varied greatly in this area. Leaders reported the use of proficiencies to guide curriculum development across the District; however, other data indicated a lack of an established process for ensuring educators are designing and implementing curriculum using quality materials.

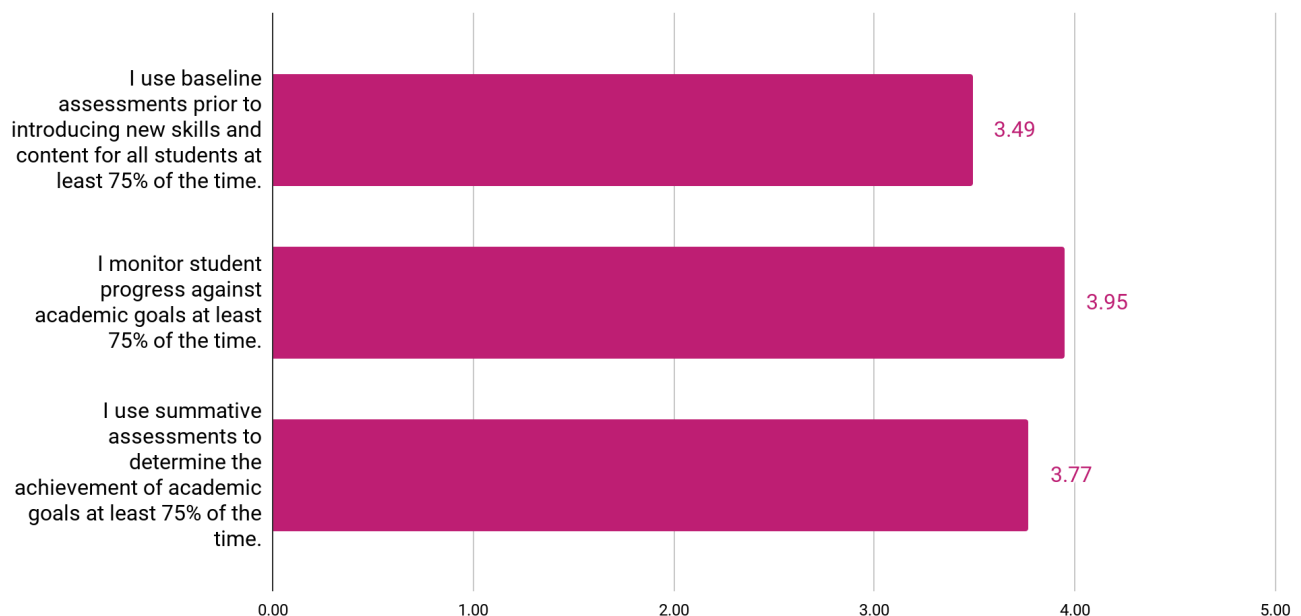
"I think the benefit is there's no statewide curriculum, which there are in many other states. And that also means that...literacy teachers or math teachers, they have the, I guess, prerogative to change their curriculum as long as it continues to meet our learning objectives and our proficiencies and all that. I would say that math and science, maybe, are a little bit different, there's a little bit less flexibility about what they're teaching. There's some little bit of flexibility about what order they're teaching it in." - Excerpt from leader interview

Educator responses indicate a more localized approach to curriculum development with each teacher designing their own materials without clear oversight or accountability for how those materials are aligned to standards or use quality materials.

"For math, they use the iReady system which is very straightforward; for the rest of it, people call it a curriculum, but it's actually a list of standards. In high school, they use the word proficiencies, but in elementary, they call them standards. Then they have Proficiency Indicators. From there, it's up to the teacher to decide how to teach it. We have never had a standard curriculum, we have a shared standard writing experience but there is no alignment." - Excerpt from educator interview

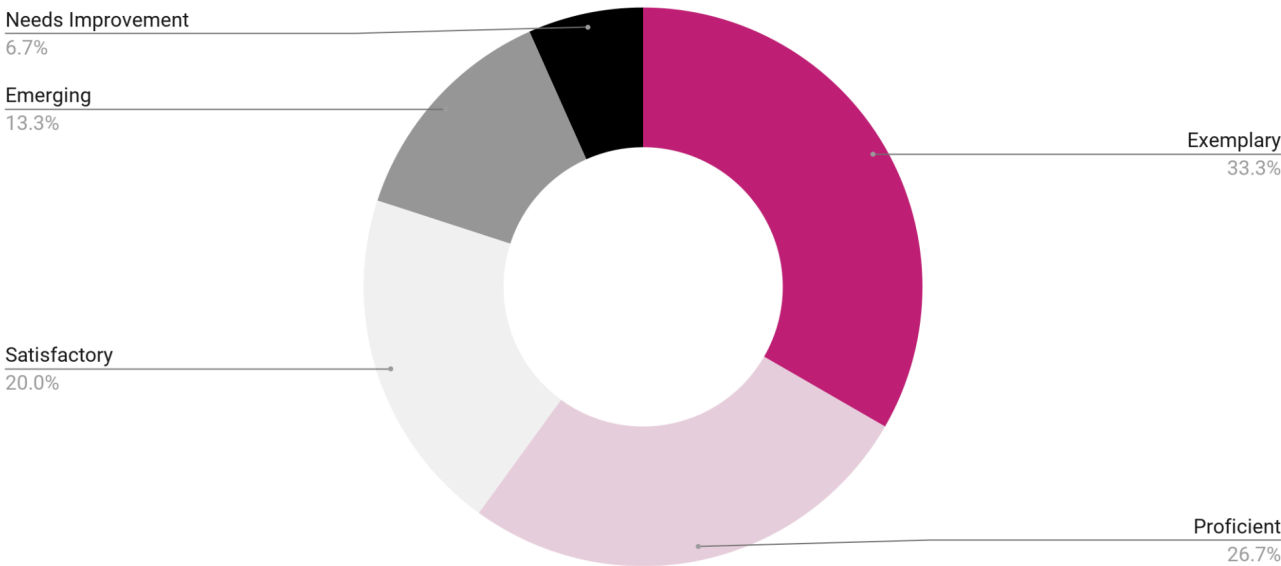
While the **use of data to make instructional decisions** is a relative strength in this element with an average score of 3.35, further analysis of data surfaced a discrepancy between educator perception and practice. Educators reported having knowledge and practice in the collection and use of a variety of data to monitor student progress towards goals.

Average Teacher Response to Questions Related to the Use of Data for Instructional Decision-making (out of 5)



However, classroom observations highlighted the use of targeted assessments to drive instructional decisions as an area of growth. Specifically, observers noted that most classrooms observed did not provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of content and educators did not consistently analyze student responses to better understand misunderstandings and adjust instruction to attend to misunderstandings.

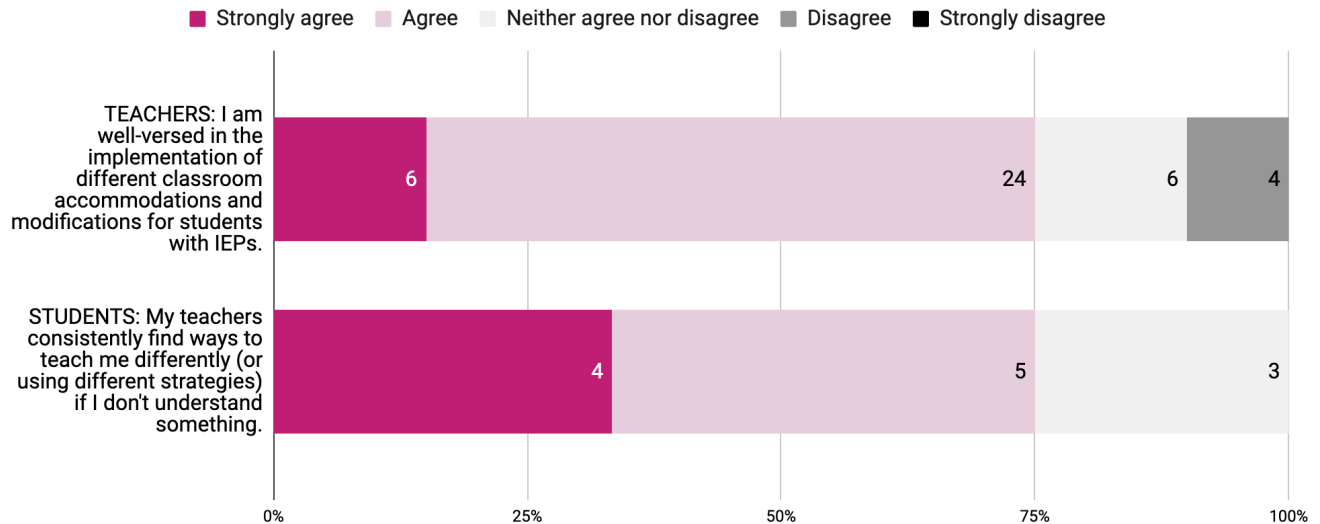
Classroom Observation Scores for Use of Targeted Assessment



The District did not provide any formal documentation, data protocols or data monitoring artifacts, possibly indicating a lack of a cohesive data monitoring system or shared practices for data-driven instruction.

Multiple data sources highlighted the **use of intentional differentiation** as an area where the District has promising practices that can be further developed into a strength. In response to the question, “I am well-versed in the implementation of different classroom accommodations and modifications for students with IEPs,” 75% of educators responded agree or strongly agree.

Breakdown of Responses about the Use of Differentiation Strategies, Teachers vs. Students

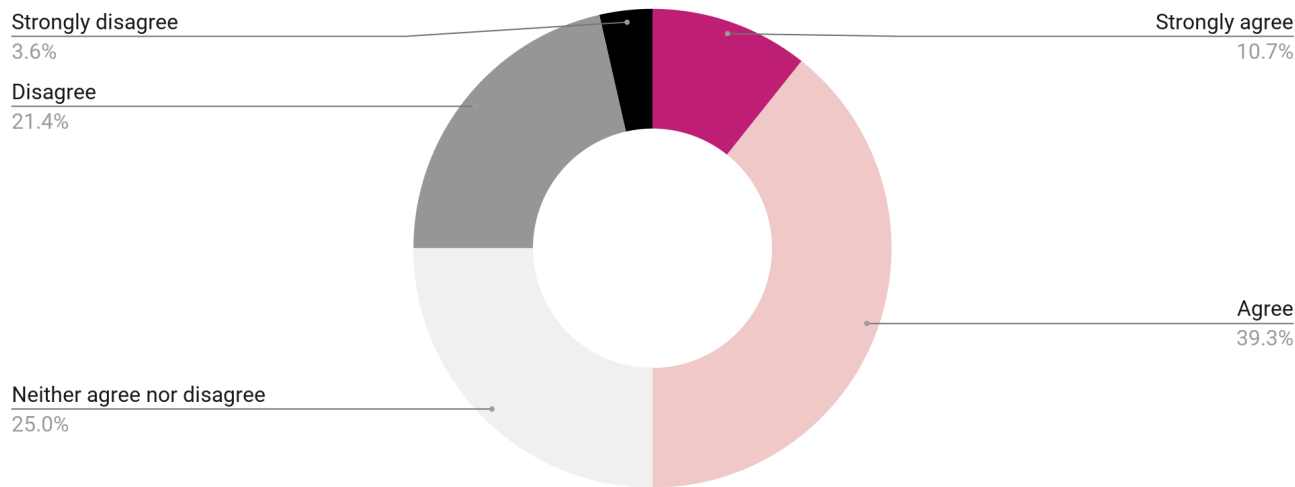


"Accommodations are so important especially in the context of literacy; If I know a student has an IEP and is getting support outside of the classroom, I need to make sure they have access to my content (audio books have been really important; closed captioning at times); It comes down to work in preparation of new units." - Excerpt from educator interview

"They give me different methods that make it easier. . .and also teach me simpler ways that I understand more. Instead of just telling me to figure it out, they help me through it." - Excerpt from student interview

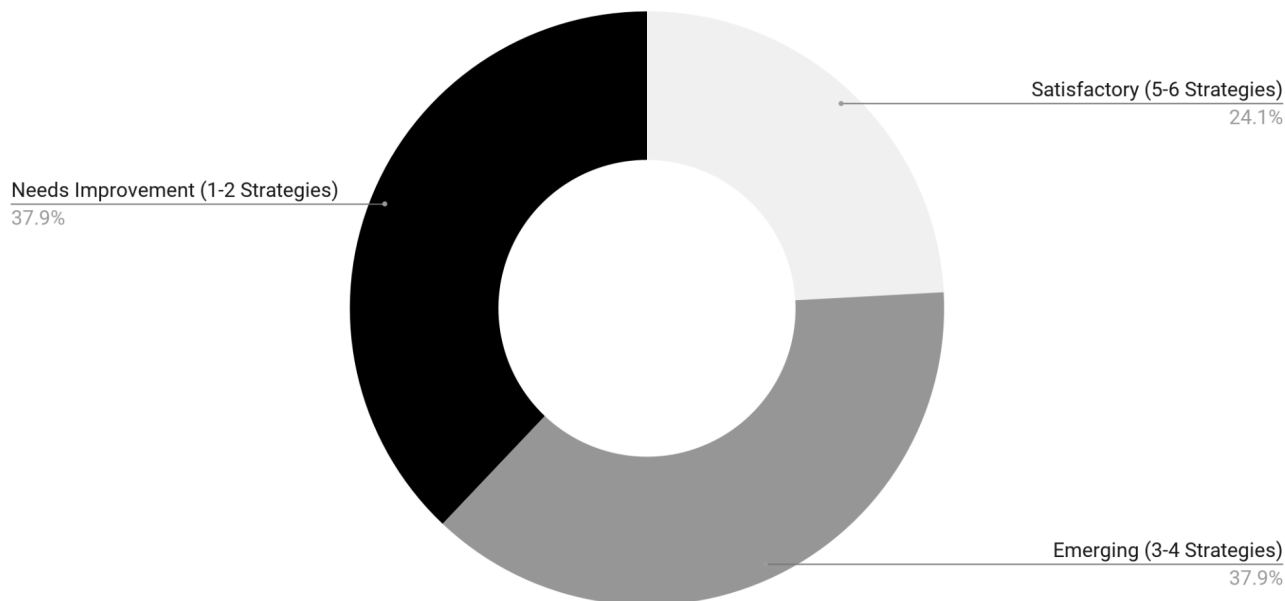
Educator survey data did reveal a significant drop in educator skill in **implementing specialized instruction** with 50% of educators responding agree or strongly agree to the question "I am able to competently implement specially designed instruction (SDI) to students who require it."

Teacher Agreement with the Statement, "I am able to competently implement specially designed instruction (SDI) to students who require it."



Additionally, observation data in this area continues to highlight the discrepancy between educator perception and practice with an average score of 1.68 (out of 5) across all classrooms observed. Observers noted that in most classrooms students were all completing the same tasks with no evidence of differentiation or specialized instruction to support student access to the general education curriculum.

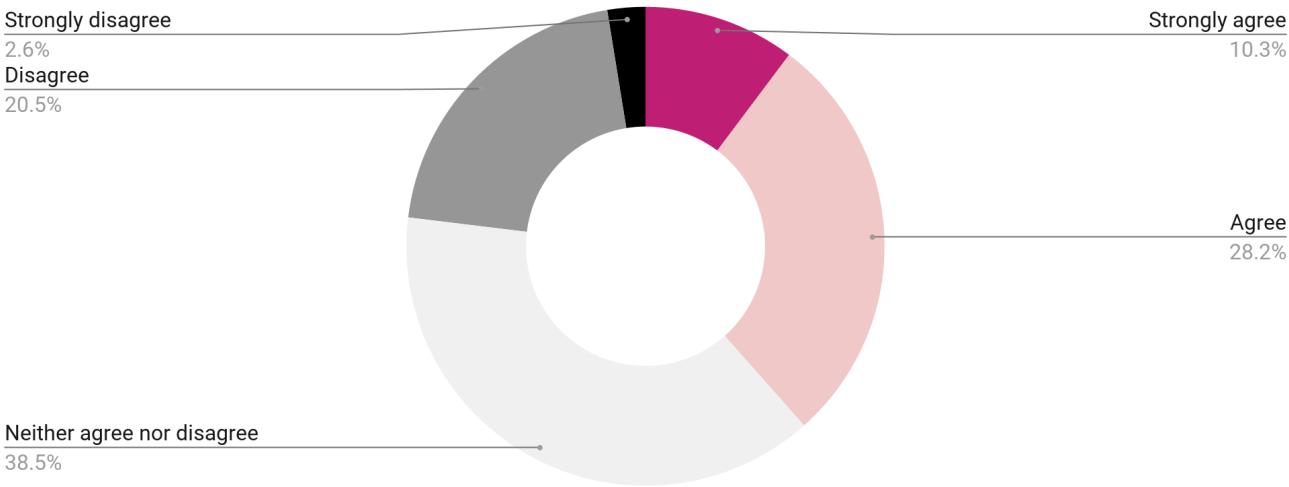
Number of Differentiation Strategies Observed Per Classroom Visit (out of 10)



Survey data highlighted educator training and support in implementing SDI as an area of growth with only 38.5% of educators responding agree or strongly agree to the question “I

am provided training or (technical) support for the implementation of specific instructional and/or behavior interventions for students with IEPs.”

Teacher Agreement with the Statement, "I am provided training or (technical) support for the implementation of specific instructional and/or behavior interventions for students with IEPs."

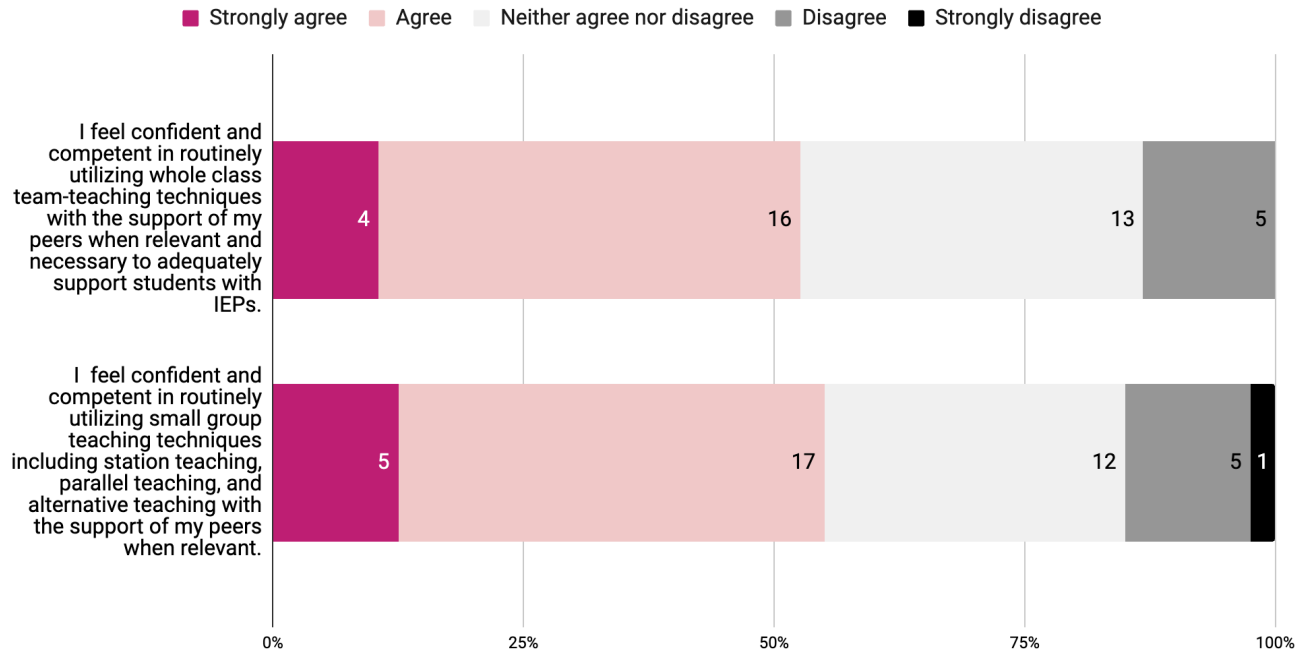


Regarding the **use of collaborative approaches to instruction**, data sources highlight this as an area of relative strength for the District in this element. Educator survey responses revealed educator confidence was similar in regards to using whole class team-teaching as well as small group instructional techniques.

In response to the question “I feel confident and competent in routinely utilizing whole class team-teaching techniques with the support of my peers when relevant and necessary to adequately support students with IEPs,” 52% of educators responded agree or strongly agree. However, 34% of educators responded neutrally and 14% of educators responded disagree.

Similarly, in response to the question “I feel confident and competent in routinely utilizing small group teaching techniques including station teaching, parallel teaching, and alternative teaching with the support of my peers when relevant,” while 55% of educators responded agree or strongly agree, 30% responded neutrally and 15% responded disagree or strongly disagree.

Breakdown of Teacher Response to Questions Related to Collaborative Approaches to Instruction

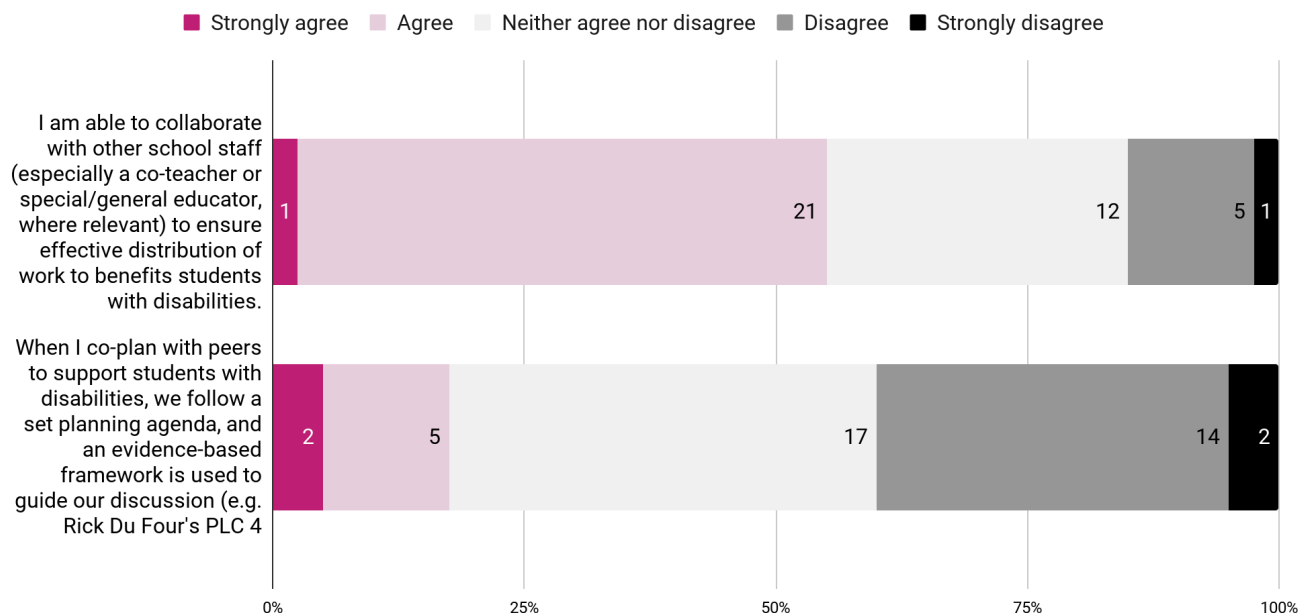


Observation data indicated that use of collaborative approaches is more of an area of growth than educator data indicates. All classrooms observed yielded an average score of 1.86 (out of 5) in this area. While the majority of classrooms observed had more than one adult present, the second adult was not frequently leveraged to support the whole class or targeted small group instruction. Often educators were engaged in a “one teach, one support” model where one person was leading the lesson and the other either floated around the classroom or worked with one or two students. Additionally, while classrooms were often set-up with students seated in groups, instruction did not reflect intentional grouping for the purpose of instruction or student to student collaboration.

For example, in one classroom observers noted that students were seated in groups completing an assignment but were still working independently. There were no clear expectations or roles for students in the groups to work collaboratively and it was not evident that students were strategically grouped.

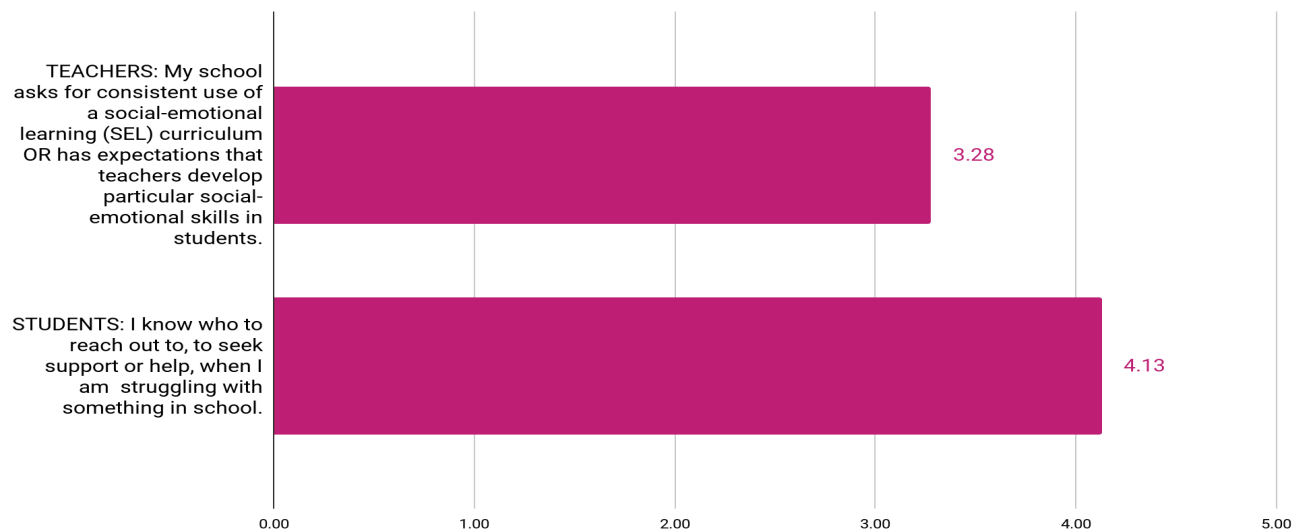
Effective planning and co-planning is another area of opportunity for the District. Educators report a need to improve collaboration across school staff in service of ensuring equal distribution of work in support of students with disabilities. Educator responses also pointed to a lack of consistent structures and practices for collaboration amongst educators.

Breakdown of Teacher Responses Related to Collaboration and Co-Planning



Fostering supportive relationships and learning environments for students emerged as a significant area of need for the District. Educator and leader data sources highlighted that the District does not have an established approach to social emotional learning or expectations around how schools attend to social emotional learning. However, student data does note a strength in student awareness of where to go in school when they are struggling and in need of support.

Average Teacher and Student Responses Regarding Primary Points of Contact for Support (our of 5)



Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to how WCUUSD designs and implements student-centered curriculum and instruction:

- Update Districtwide **guidance** for **designing and implementing curriculum** to include **expectations for alignment to standards, scopes and sequences** for all grades/subject areas and **clear learning outcomes** aligned to grade-level standards.
- Establish a Districtwide approach to designing and administering common **standards-aligned assessments**.
- Provide all leaders with professional learning and coaching on establishing and leading a culture of **data-driven instruction** and implementing structures to support **effective planning and co-planning**.
- Provide all educators with **professional learning and coaching** on understanding, designing and implementing inclusive instructional practices including crafting **clear learning outcomes, checking student understanding, differentiation, and specialized instruction strategies** in service of meeting student needs.

Considerations

Leaders looking to further explore the area of student-centered curriculum and instruction can ask and answer the following questions:

- What are the District expectations for staff around using research-based materials and instructional strategies? How are staff supported with and held accountable for meeting these expectations?
- What is your District culture around data collection and analysis to address student needs and build on student strengths? How can the District set clear expectations for staff to use data to (a) monitor progress and (b) inform future instructional decisions?
- What Districtwide structures and supports are in place to facilitate consistent co-planning and collaborative teaching practices among general and special educators?
- What does Districtwide training look like for teachers to develop their skill in providing differentiated and specialized instruction to meet the needs of all students (including the use of various whole class and small group teaching techniques)?
- How does your District approach social-emotional learning for students? How are leaders and teachers supported in implementing that approach in their buildings?

ELEMENT THREE: SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF SPECIAL EDUCATION MANDATES

Element Definition: Leaders are familiar with special education laws and understand why the experiences of students with disabilities are central to decision-making in many areas. Educators understand how disability impacts learning, and engage peers to deliver integrated support that meets each student's needs.

SI#	Success Indicator Name	Score	Analysis
19	Familiarity with Special Education Laws and Mandates	3.94	Proficient
20	Basic Understanding of the Impact of Disabilities on Learning	4.11	Proficient
21	Clear Roles and Responsibilities for Special Education	3.08	Fair/Emerging
22	Writing of Clear and Effective Documents	3.08	Fair/Emerging
23	Design and Delivery of Programming Tailored to Individual Student Needs	3.69	Proficient
24	Effective IEP Team Meetings	4.00	Proficient
25	Effective Practices for Progress Monitoring	3.46	Proficient
26	Regular Compliance Monitoring	2.75	Fair/Emerging
27	Integrated provision of related and other services	3.20	Fair/Emerging

KEY	Starting Out 1.00-1.79	Developing 1.80-2.59	Fair/Emerging 2.60-3.39	Proficient 3.40-4.19	Mastered 4.20-5.00
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Key Takeaways

The following main points emerged as trends and key takeaways about a Shared Understanding of Special Education Mandates:

- **Familiarity with special education laws and mandates** is an area of strength however leaders' knowledge of guiding policies and regulations varied across the District. While leaders can speak broadly about special education programming in their individual buildings, their ability to describe how that programming is designed in consideration of federal and local mandates was limited. Additionally, programming descriptions varied greatly Districtwide indicating a lack of aligned options and resources across buildings.
- Based on a review of a selection of IEPs, **writing and implementing clear and effective documents** is a significant area of growth for the District. Document analysis revealed inconsistent practices in compliance timelines, development of present levels of performance, the use of data to craft IEP goals and determining appropriate programming based on student need.
- The need for **clear roles and responsibilities** between all educators who support students with IEPs is an area of opportunity in the District. There is a need for clear training and support for staff to understand their roles and implement IEPs effectively.

Primary Source Data

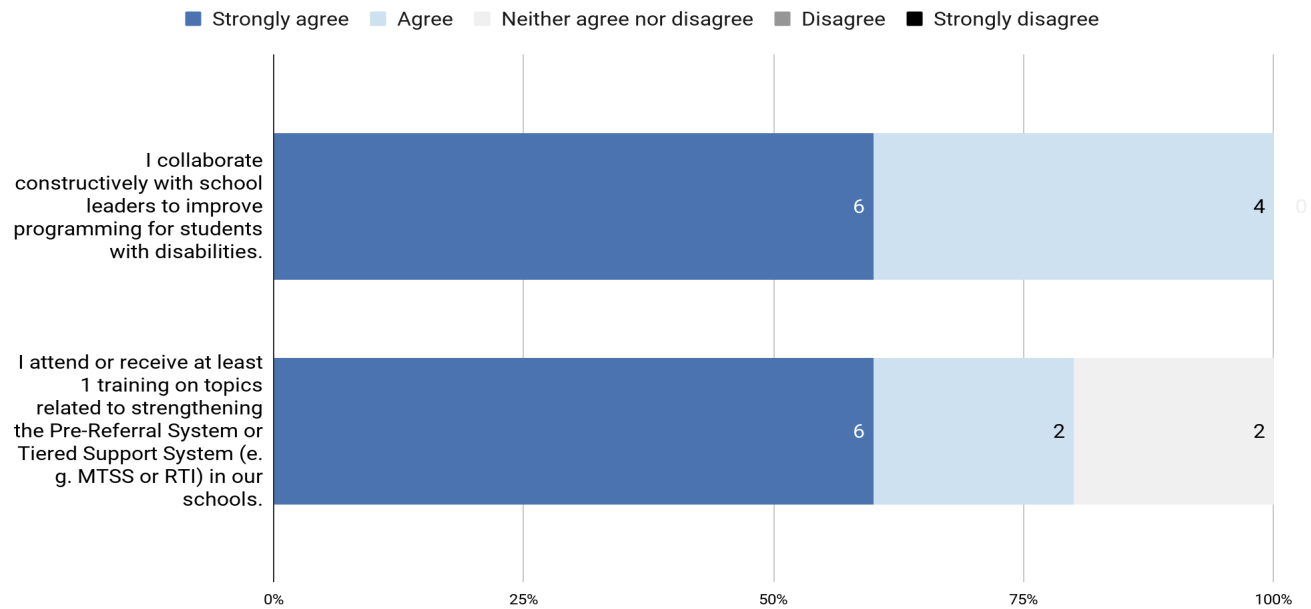
Data sources in this element include surveys and interviews from educators, leaders and students as well as analysis of work samples and classroom observations.

Familiarity with **Special Education laws and mandates** surfaced as an area of strength in this element. However upon further analysis, leader responses demonstrated an inconsistent understanding of the relationship between key concepts such as inclusion and Least Restrictive Environment with the design of special education programming in their building. Specifically, less than 50% of leaders interviewed could describe a cohesive special education program in their building and speak to how it adheres to federal and local regulations.

Leaders with the strongest knowledge of the special education programming in their building and strength in explaining how it adheres to regulations also had extensive expertise and experience in the area of special education.

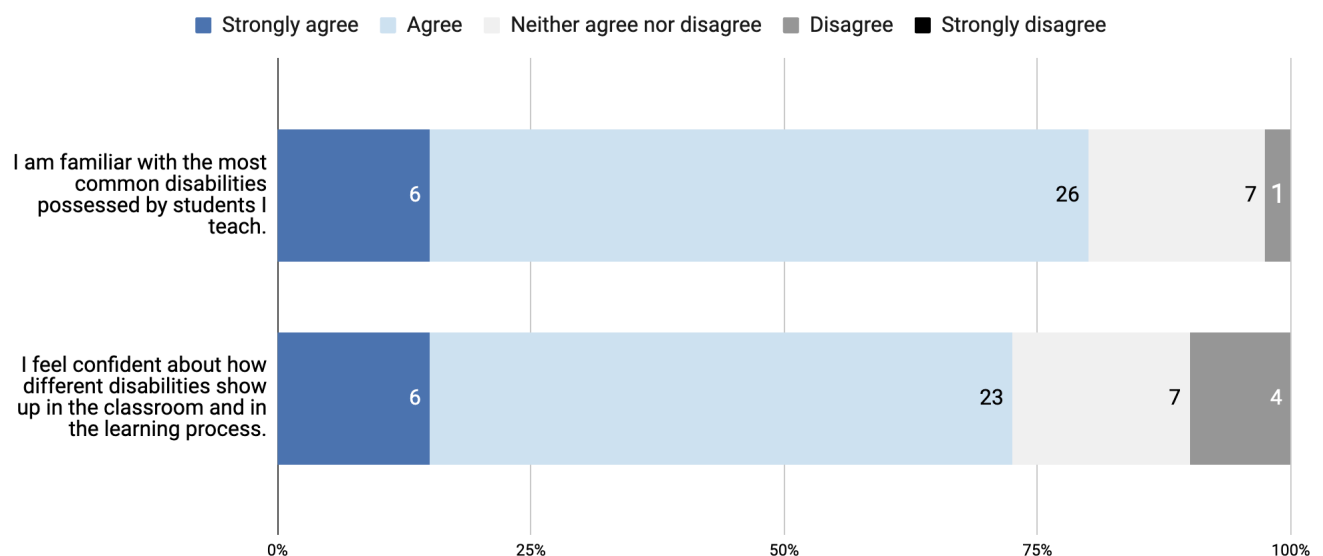
Leader survey data highlighted professional learning on topics related to the improvement of special education and intervention programming as an area of strength across the District

Response Breakdown of Leader Survey Responses Regarding Professional Learning about Disability



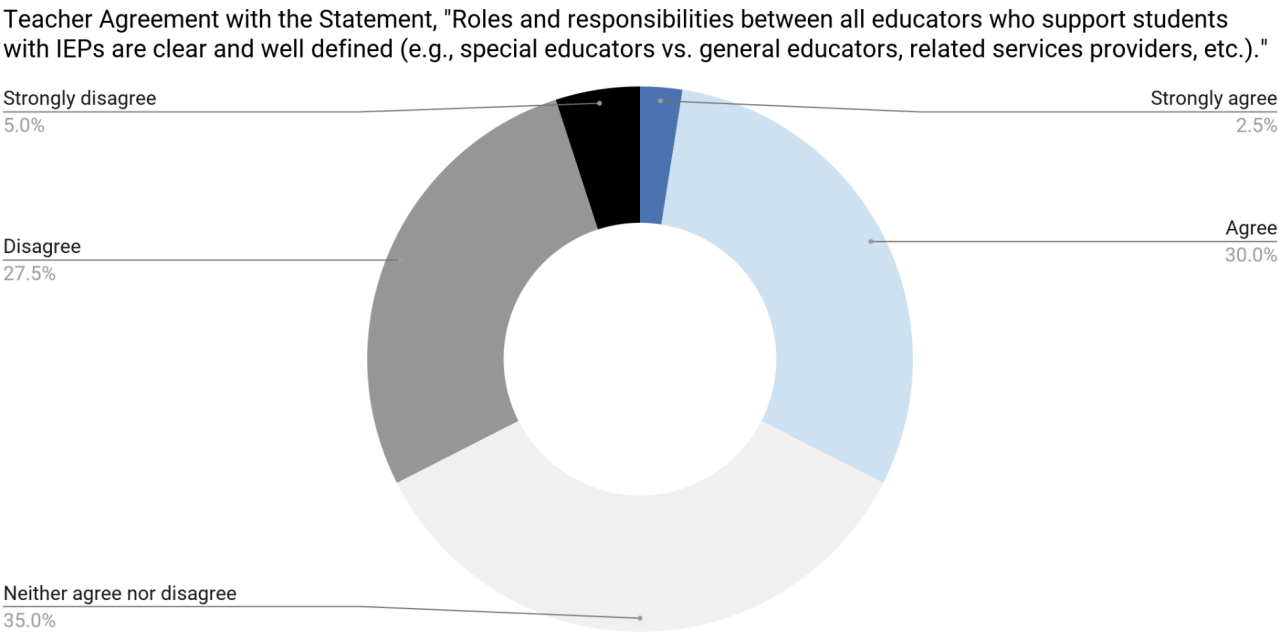
. Survey data highlights **understanding the impact of disability on learning** as an area of strength in this element; however, further analysis of the data revealed educators were less confident in understanding how disabilities impact learning than in their familiarity with the different disabilities in their classrooms. For example, 80% of educators responded agree or strongly agree when asked about their familiarity with the disabilities possessed by the students they teach. That percentage drops to 72.5% when educators were asked about their confidence about how those disabilities show up in the classroom and the learning process.

Response Breakdown of Educator Survey Responses Regarding the Impact of Disability on Learning



Interview data also suggest a potential disconnect in understanding how higher incidence disabilities impact learning (e.g., specific learning disabilities) as responses spoke to students with more intensive, lower-incidence disabilities (e.g., autism).

Clear roles and responsibilities emerged as an area of opportunity for the District. Educator survey data revealed an even breakdown in educator responses to the question “Roles and responsibilities between all educators who support students with IEPs are clear and well-defined” with 32.5% of educators responding agree or strongly agree, the same percentage of educators responding disagree or strongly disagree and 35% responding neutrally.



Leader responses to the question “How do you ensure that all teachers and staff understand their roles in supporting students with IEPs in integrated classrooms specifically?” reflected efforts to ensure teachers have access to student IEPs but those efforts fell short of ensuring teachers understand their individual roles and responsibilities with implementing the IEPs.

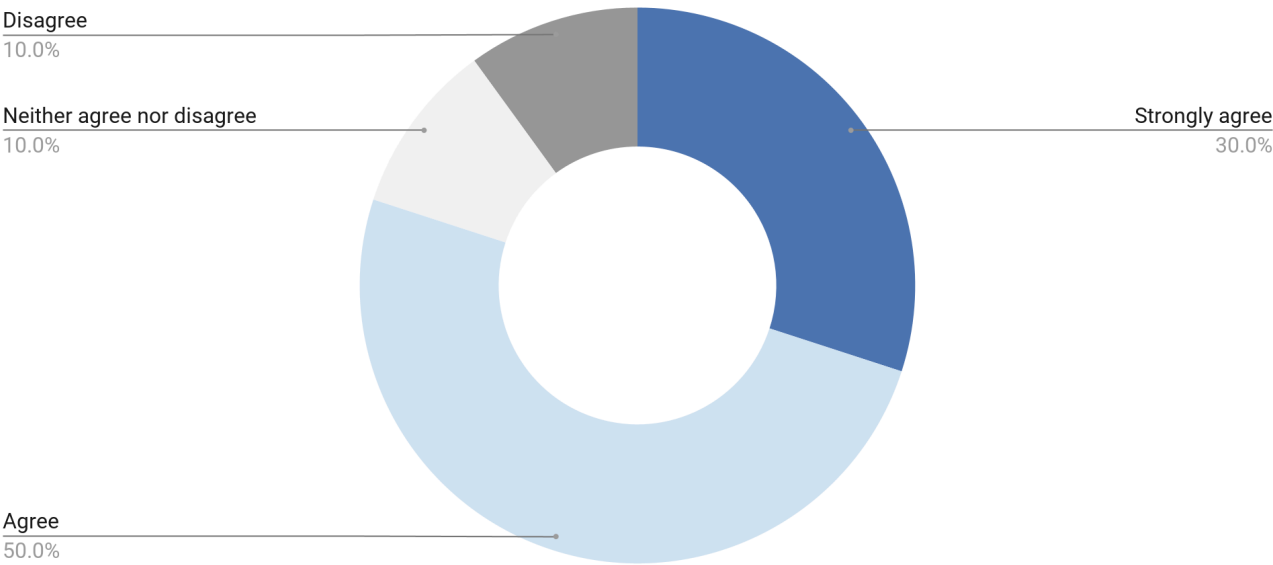
“At the start of every year we distribute IEP at a glances to every teacher who teaches a student with an IEP. We go through classes for every student and make sure they’re distributed, but they can also likely never get looked at.” - Excerpt from a leader interview

“Well, honestly, this fall, not as much as I would like. As a district, we’re doing [a statewide] training for general educators around Act 173. We’re just doing [the training] more on a one-on-one or case by case basis. And I’ll be perfectly frank, I have not even wrapped my head around yet about what’s going to happen when we’re all done with all those trainings.” - Excerpt from leader interview

In the area of **writing clear and effective documents**, analysis of a sample set of student IEPs yielded an average score of 2.16 (out of 5) and data sources revealed a slight discrepancy in leader perception of practice and actual implementation of practices.

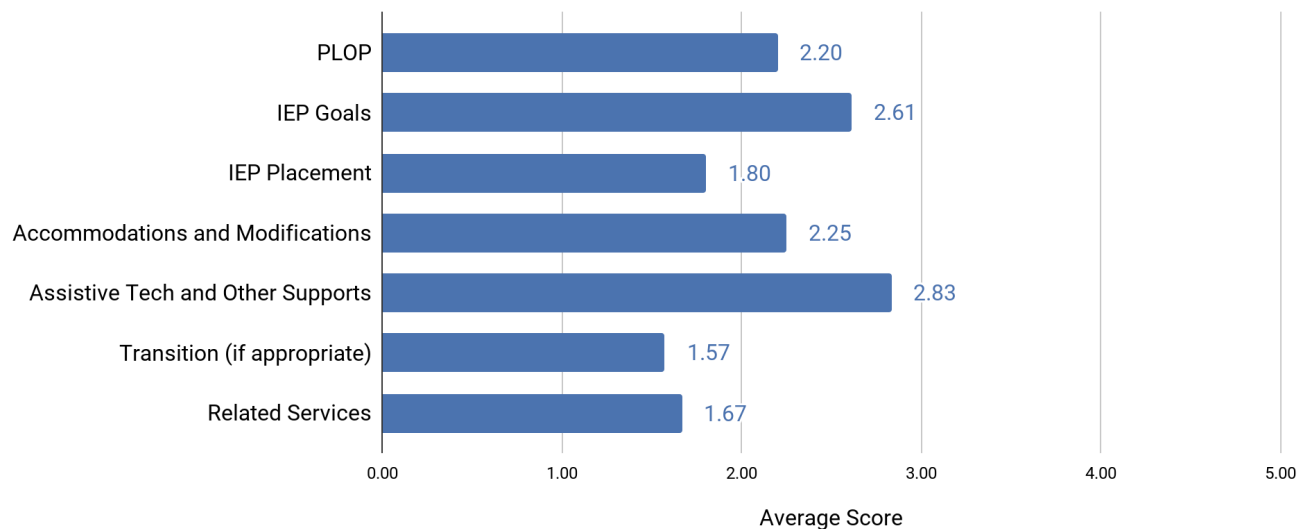
When asked about the development of data-driven IEP goals, 80% of leaders responded agree or strongly agree to the question “IEP goals are drafted by thoughtfully evaluating and analyzing different types of data (not just academic data), including classroom observational data and behavioral data.”

Leader Agreement with the Statement, "IEP goals are drafted by thoughtfully evaluating and analyzing different types of data (not just academic data), including classroom observational data and behavioral data."



However, analysis of student IEPs surfaced annual IEP goals as one of the greatest areas of improvement across all IEP components that were scored.

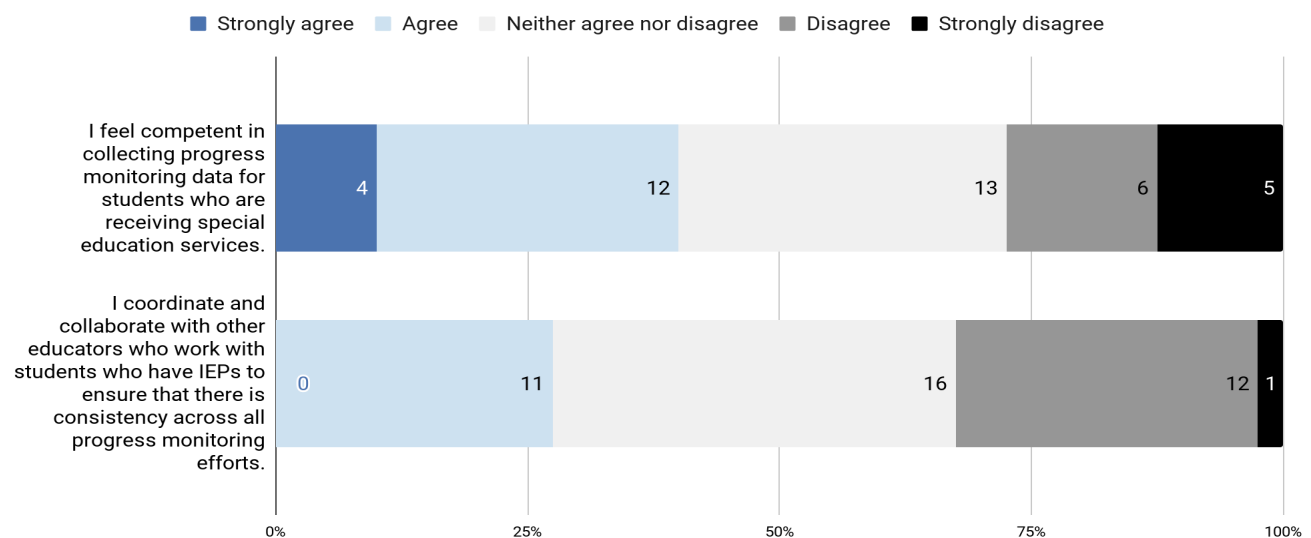
Average Score, IEP Quality Audit (out of 5)



In the area of **effective IEP team meetings**, data highlighted the District's processes leading up to and following IEP meetings as areas of strength. Leader interview data indicated an opportunity to strengthen practices for facilitation of IEP meetings including improved collaboration between IEP team members in discussing annual goals and service recommendations.

Multiple data sources indicate **effective practices for progress monitoring** as the greatest area of need in this element. Educator survey responses highlighted a need to strengthen educator skill in collecting progress monitoring data as well as streamlining progress monitoring practices across the District.

Response Breakdown of Teacher Survey Responses Regarding Progress Monitoring



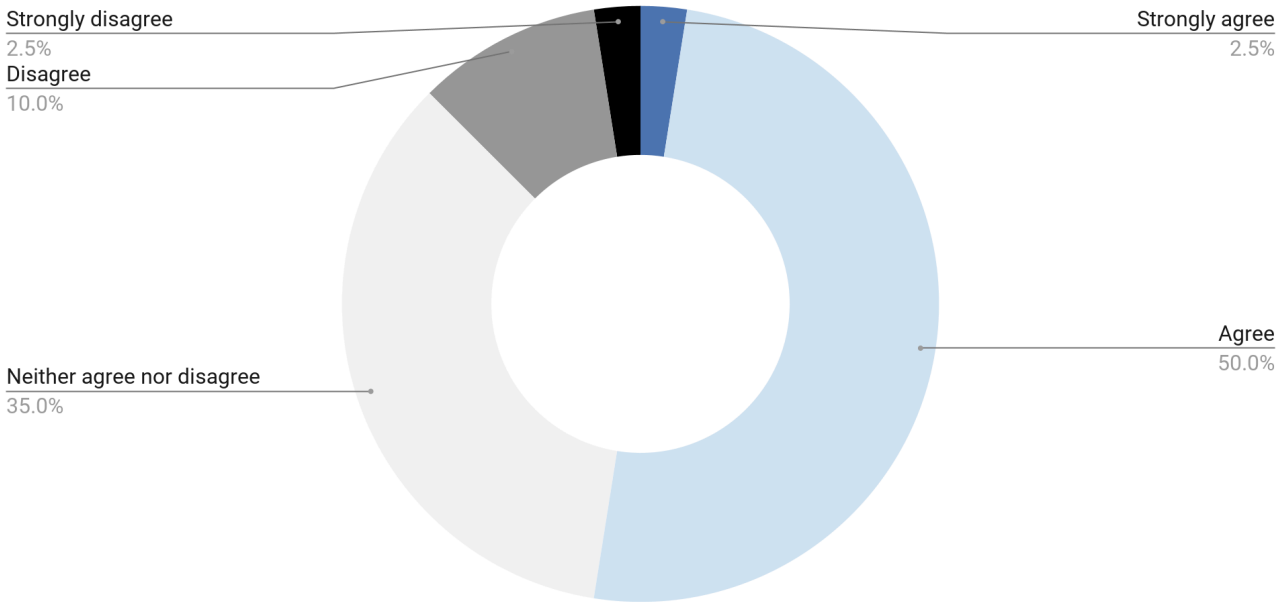
Educator interviews provided additional insight into the need for clear expectations and cohesive systems and training for progress monitoring Districtwide. In response to the question “What are the expectations for collecting and using data for progress monitoring students with IEPs?” educator responses included:

“At this point there’s no [data] except for work samples. That’s a weakness, data we’re collecting here is very limited. ”

“Nothing, I look at assessments and then do an observation. We have iReady which I look at (which is newish); I get feedback from the general education teachers, but there is no system.”

Integrated provision of related and other services is another area of opportunity for the District with educator and leader responses indicating a need to improve collaboration and communication between related service providers and all educators supporting students with IEPs. 52.5% of educators agreed when asked about routine collaboration with related service providers to ensure consistency in the implementation of student-level interventions. Improving these practices will strengthen the implementation of supports for students across all settings.

Educator Agreement with the Statement, "I routinely communicate and collaborate with related service providers to ensure consistency in the implementation of student-level interventions."



Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to how WCUUSD promotes a shared understanding of, and practices for, special education:

- Provide leaders with foundational training on **special education laws and mandates** to ensure an aligned understanding of the guiding policies in this area and to support effective management of the programming in their building.
- Develop **clear expectations for developing quality IEP documents** and provide staff with training to build their skill in crafting IEPs that include: an accurate description of the student's present levels of performance, standards-aligned goals that reflect student strengths and needs, and appropriate specialized instruction and services to provide the student access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment.
- Provide all individuals who administer **norm-referenced assessments** with an **updated training on administering, scoring, analyzing and reporting** assessment results including how to attend to any challenges during administration in the report.
- Provide all staff members who support students with disabilities with a clear overview of their **roles and responsibilities**, especially related to the implementation of specialized instruction for students with disabilities.
- Develop a Districtwide **process for progress monitoring** that includes expectations for data collection and ensure all relevant stakeholders are trained in the process.

Considerations

- How are teachers informed about specific student disabilities? What training/support is provided to general education teachers and other staff members about the strategies and related/supplemental services in an IEP and how to implement them?
- What are the collaboration structures in place for general education teachers and special education teachers to discuss student needs and specific IEP services?
- How are special education teachers supported with developing IEP goals? How are general education teachers included in the IEP development process?
- How should staff be collecting data and progress monitoring for students who need additional support? How is that data used to make decisions for continued support?

ELEMENT FOUR: EQUITABLE SYSTEMS AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Element Definition: Leaders allocate resources and put in place effective systems to manage the execution of quality special education programming in their context. Educators are knowledgeable about and implement those systems paying close attention to data and adjusting course as needed.

SI#	Success Indicator Name	Score	Analysis
28	Understanding the Relationship between Tiered Systems of Support and Special Education	2.19	Developing
29	System for Identifying and Delivering Services to Students In Need of Intervention	2.73	Fair/Emerging
30	Equitable and Efficient Staffing and Resource Allocation	3.24	Fair/Emerging
31	Whole School Schedules Designed to Facilitate Collaboration and Inclusion	2.99	Fair/Emerging
32	Continuum of Placements that Honors Least Restrictive Environment	2.88	Fair/Emerging
33	Tracking and Use of Data for Continuous Improvement of Systems	2.28	Developing
34	System for Child Find, Referral, and Evaluation for Special Education	3.02	Fair/Emerging

KEY	Starting Out	Developing	Fair/Emerging	Proficient	Mastered
	1.00-1.79	1.80-2.59	2.60-3.39	3.40-4.19	4.20-5.00

Key Takeaways

The following key points can be concluded from an examination of the data about equitable systems and resource allocation:

- While **intervention and tiered supports** are happening at every school in the District, there is not a clarity across all staff about what the system is or how it should work in practice. These practices would benefit from more guidance from the District around who should be on the teams, what protocols should be used, and how the special education referral process intersects with students receiving intervention.
- The lack of clarity around the District's **continuum of placements** (paired with differences in how schools create schedules) may be leading to more 1:1 pull out services, thereby minimizing time that students with disabilities are able to spend with their non-disabled peers, especially in smaller schools.
- While some progress has been made around common screeners/assessments for monitoring student progress in math and literacy, there is work to be done to more holistically **use data to support schoolwide decisionmaking and continuous improvement**.
- Pieces of a system of supports exist across the District and many staff understand that intervention is a necessary step before a child is referred for special education; however, the District can do more to clarify these processes, train all staff and leaders, and provide implementation support related to **Child Find, special education referral, and evaluation**.

Primary Source Data

Data from across sources indicate that WCUUSD has room for growth when it comes to how systems and resource allocation happens across schools. While individual schools may exhibit strengths in particular areas, most of the data, when averaged across the District, indicated a need for more sustainable systems.

From both survey and interview data it is unclear whether all staff **understand the relationship between tiered systems of support (MTSS) and special education**. There has been some work to define multi-tiered systems of support (or layers, as they are referred to in the District), as seen through a six-tiered approach that includes special education,³ but that messaging has not translated in a clear and uniform way across each school. Indeed, several staff members placed special education on the tiered support ladder (e.g., special education is a tier 5 and 6 approach) while others did not - furthering

³ We recognize that the District uses the terminology of "layers" in the context of their system of supports, but because the assessment's questions use the term "tier," this report will refer to tiers of support for consistency and readability.

this disparate understanding of how both systems coexist and work in tandem to support students who need support.

For example, one leader described the District's system in the following way:

Tier	Description
1	<i>Layers one and two are really primarily the responsibility of the classroom teacher. So we might look at assessment data and see that a student needs a particular approach and give it to them.</i>
2	<i>[Students] who didn't quite [perform] where we want them to be, but might need a little re-teaching or a double dose of something that would be a little more are in layer 2.</i>
3	<i>Layers 3 and 4 are typically what we think of as interventions. Layer 3 would be, [students with] some significant gaps, and we need to fill those gaps. And those are typically provided by an interventionist...in a small group.</i>
4	<i>[Students] with pretty significant gaps [but have] not been identified as needing special education yet may need one-on-one intervention with an interventionist in Layer 4.</i>
5	<i>Layer 5 is what we typically think of when we think of special education. They've got annual goals and short-term objectives. They're sticking with that specialized instruction for the long run.</i>
6	<i>And then layer six is the tip top of what you would think of as the pyramid. They need really specialized interventions, more life skills. Those would be students with intensive needs and a special educator to work with them.</i>

This data may demonstrate a lack of clarity in how folks define tiered supports, including the role of the Educational Support Team (EST) and may mirror similar inconsistencies and misconceptions around special education and the differences in those systems. According to one leader,

"I think people have a really inconsistent understanding of special ed law and special ed best practice."

There are structures in place in every District school for **identifying students in need of intervention**; however, these structures vary across settings in terms of complexity, clarity, and use of data. There was even a disconnect between how leaders and teachers described support.

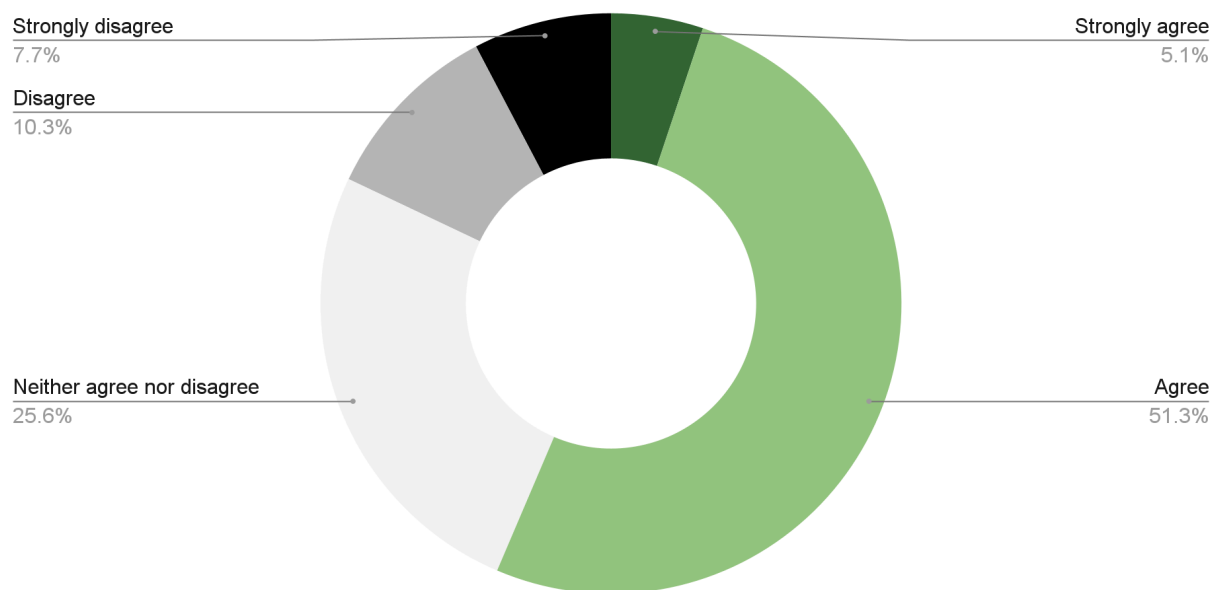
According to one leader, when asked about how tiered supports work, they explained how different implementation is across schools and even between classrooms within the same school,

"I was in a classroom the other day working with a student and the second grade teacher was amazing and ... had all these different menus going on, had the students doing all sorts of different things and bringing students in, looking at data sheets to remind them what the [students were] working on and ... I was so moved by the varying levels for kids in that classroom...Then I went into the classroom next

door and it was so vastly different. One kid had a para and the teacher said, "I don't really do much with that kid, they have a para." But we are certainly in development of classroom teachers understanding their role for students with different learning styles and different needs. We can talk about it a lot. We can make a lot of documents about it and a lot of visuals at the leadership team, but we aren't great at that dissemination into our schools." - Excerpt from leader interview

When asked whether there is a clear and unique system at school that delineates different levels of support provided to students, teachers responded with an average level of agreement of 3.38 (out of 5). Put another way, 54% of teachers believe the tiered system is clear, while 26% were unsure.

Level of Agreement from Teachers with the Statement, "There is a clear and unique system at my school that delineates support provided to students at different or unique tiers."



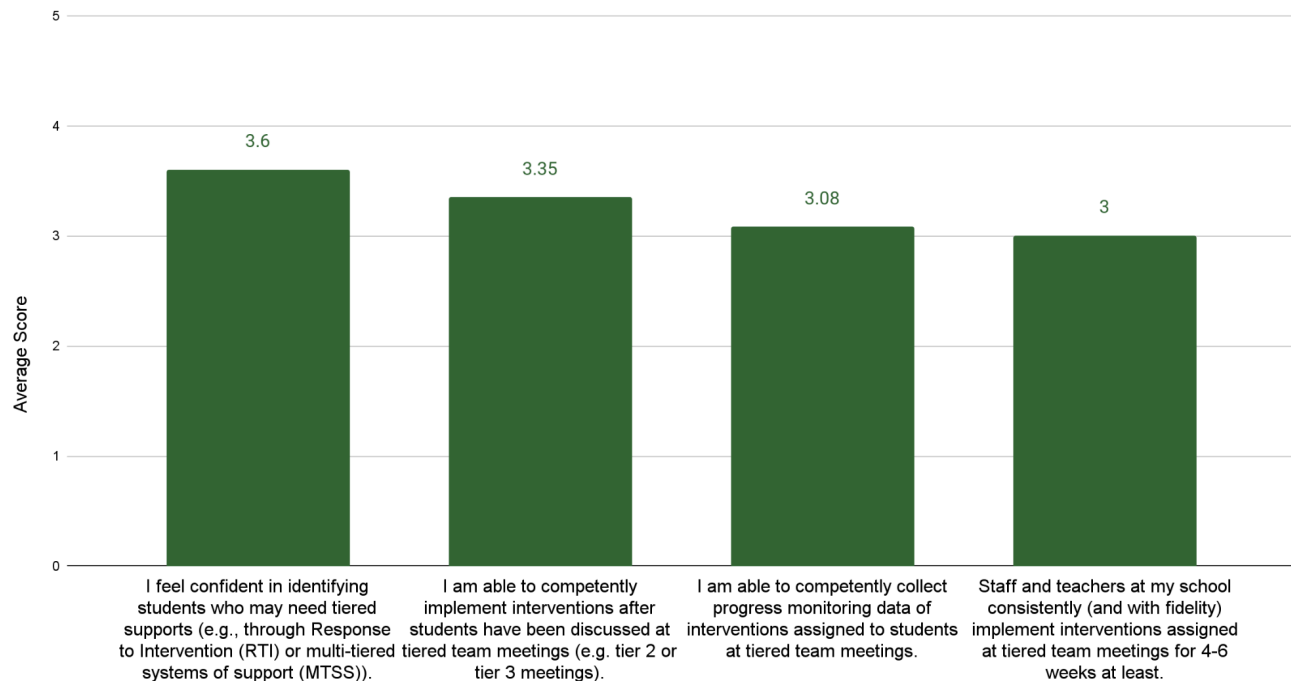
However, when asked to describe their systems, responses varied greatly from school to school. According to one educator when discussing the systems of support in the District,

"One area that our district really needs to work on is making a clear map for that." - Excerpt from educator interview

Survey data further tracks that there is a lack of clarity and shared skill when it comes to implementation of a system of supports. When surveyed about how confident they feel identifying students in need of intervention, educators averaged a 3.6 (out of 5) in their level of agreement. While slight, there was a decrease in average responses when asked both about implementing interventions and collecting progress monitoring data (3.35 and 3.08 respectively). And finally, there was a further decrease in the average educator response when asked about others' implementation of tiered interventions, averaging a score of 3

(out of 5). These differences in response rates may demonstrate that there is a discrepancy in how intervention is being addressed from school to school.

Average Teacher Response to Questions Related to Implementing and Collecting Progress Monitoring Data For Tiered Supports for Students (out of 5)



Related to **equitable and efficient staffing and resource allocation**, while leaders could not point to any instance in which funding was denied when there was a need around special education, survey scores and data hovered in the mid-range prompting questions around where individuals may be experiencing inefficiencies. For example, one principal explained,

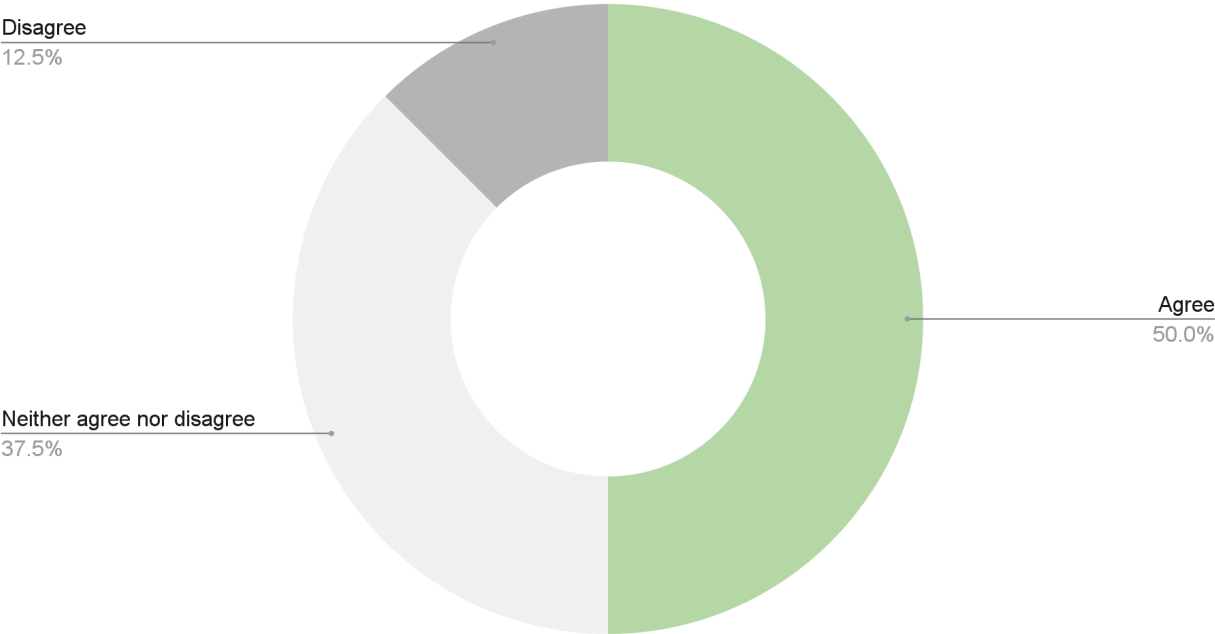
"I would say for my time here, if a kid needs something in special ed, they get it. And there isn't pushback because of a budget constraint."

Another leader interview revealed that generally schools have flexibility about how they staff programming through the consolidated budgeting process, and they also know they can go to the District office if there is a need that wasn't budgeted for.

While some data appears to indicate that there are plenty of resources, other data points to the opposite finding. When asked about whether staffing and special education supports are distributed in a way that supports inclusion, nearly 40% of leaders neither agreed nor disagreed. Interestingly, no leaders felt strongly about how resources are allocated in one way or the other (strongly agree, strongly disagree). Because special education can be provided by interventionists or trained general education teachers, there may be more of a challenge around allocating staffing when it comes to completing paperwork and case

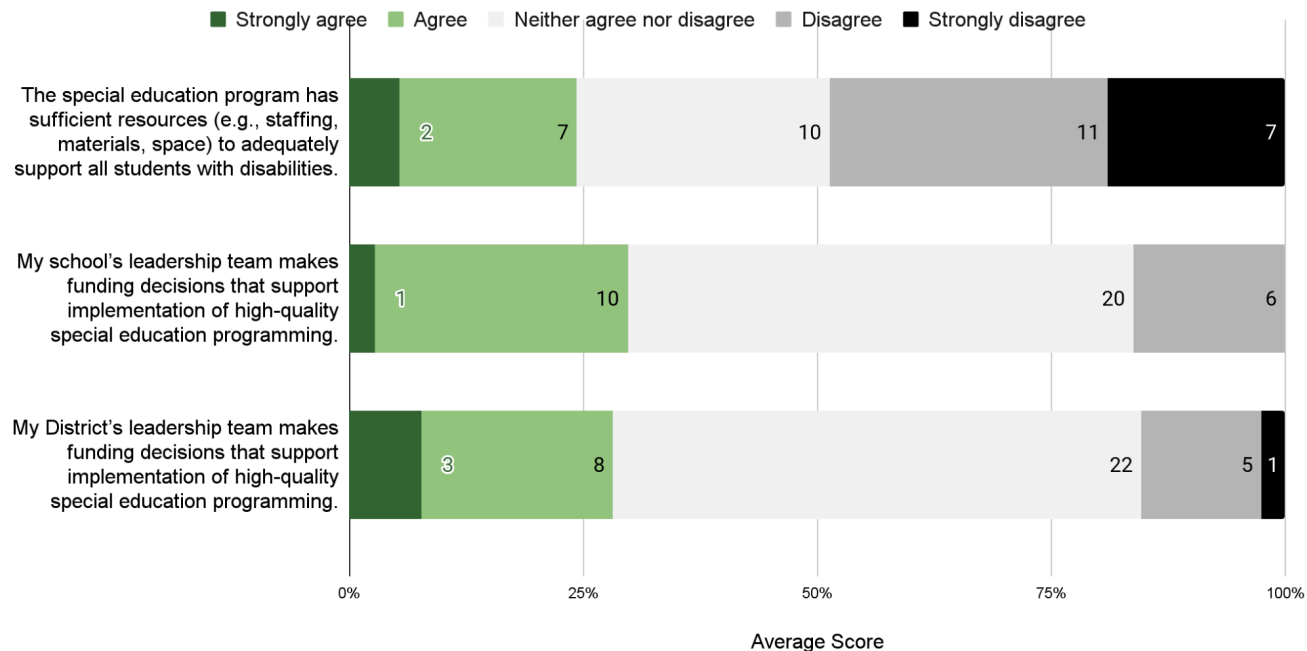
management for special educators. This seems to have gotten increasingly more challenging with the changes in funding from the state.

Level of Agreement from Leaders with the Statement, "Staffing and special education supports in the District are distributed in a way that addresses the needs of all students and supports the development of an inclusive school culture."



Similarly, when teachers were asked about the sufficiency of special education resources, most responses remained in the mid-range. For example, 54% of staff neither agreed nor disagreed when asked about whether the school's leadership team makes funding decisions that support the implementation of high-quality special education programming. 56% of educators responded similarly when asked about the District's funding decisions.

Breakdown of Teacher Responses to Questions Related to Staffing and Resource Allocation (out of 5)

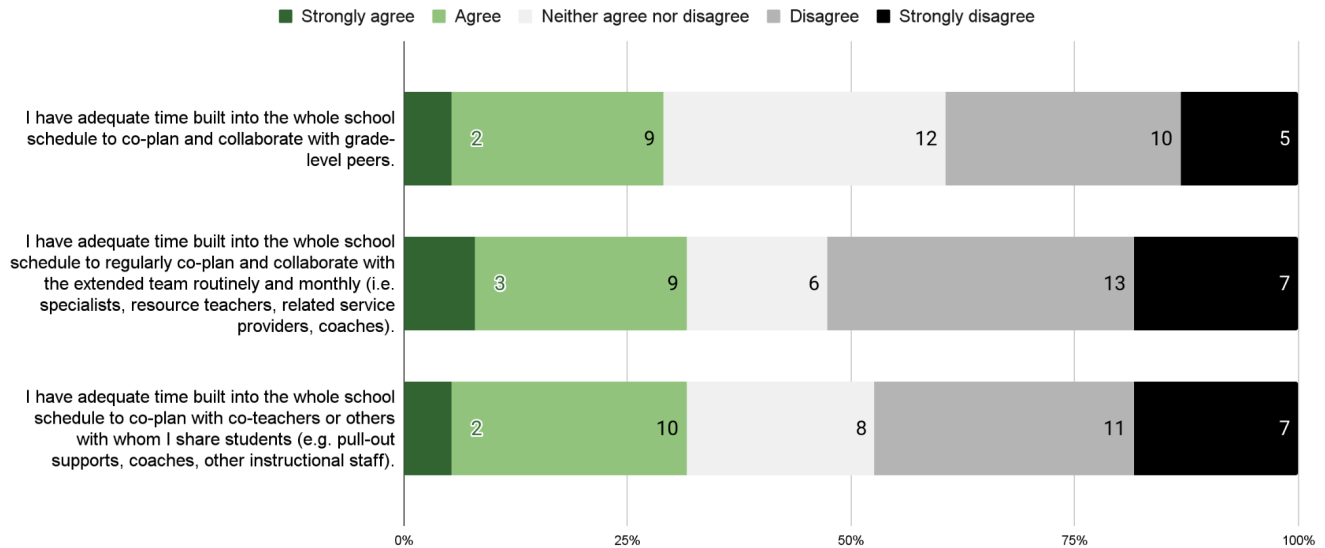


Related to resource and staffing, **whole school scheduling** is another indicator for special education efficiency and systems equity. Based on leader interviews, WCUUSD schools have vastly differing processes for determining whole school schedules that span from looking at the hardest to serve students as a first step in scheduling to having special education case managers create their schedules at the end of the process after other teachers’ assignments have been solidified.

Differences in practice have an impact on student services because special educators may have differing levels of support to create their own schedules which effects whether small group services instead of 1:1 support. This, in turn, impacts a child’s least restrictive environment. Leader interviews showed that in schools where case managers are working independently to build their schedules, they are more likely to default to individualized services rather than collectively determining student levels of need and sharing caseloads to maximize opportunities for more participation with general education peers. This is particularly salient in the District’s small schools where many services are being delivered in a 1:1 setting.

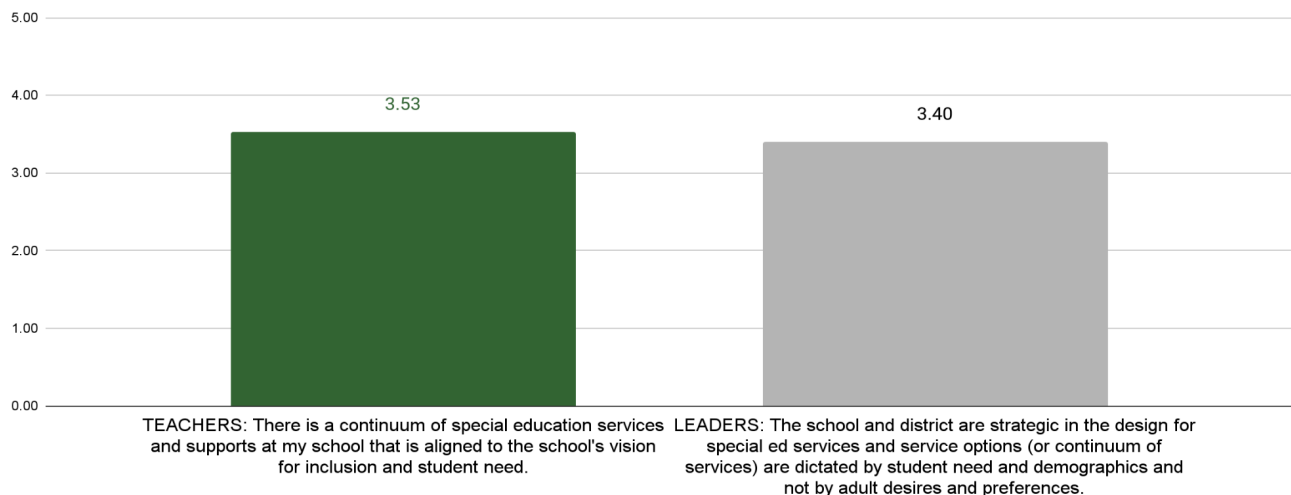
There is a consistent trend that many teachers do not feel that they have sufficient time built into the whole school schedule to co-plan and collaborate with peers. Whether it is with grade-level peers, the extended team, or other teachers with whom they share students, only just over 25% of teachers feel that collaboration time is adequate.

Breakdown of Teacher Responses to Questions Related to Co-Planning and Collaboration (out of 5)



While data indicates that service planning for special education students is highly individualized and driven by the needs of the students, there may be some confusion about what a **continuum of placements** is and whether one exists in their school.⁴ When asked about the sufficiency of the continuum of services offered at their school, teachers' and leaders' responses indicated that the options available to serve students were sufficient.

Average Response Regarding the Continuum of Services, Teachers vs. Leaders (out of 5)



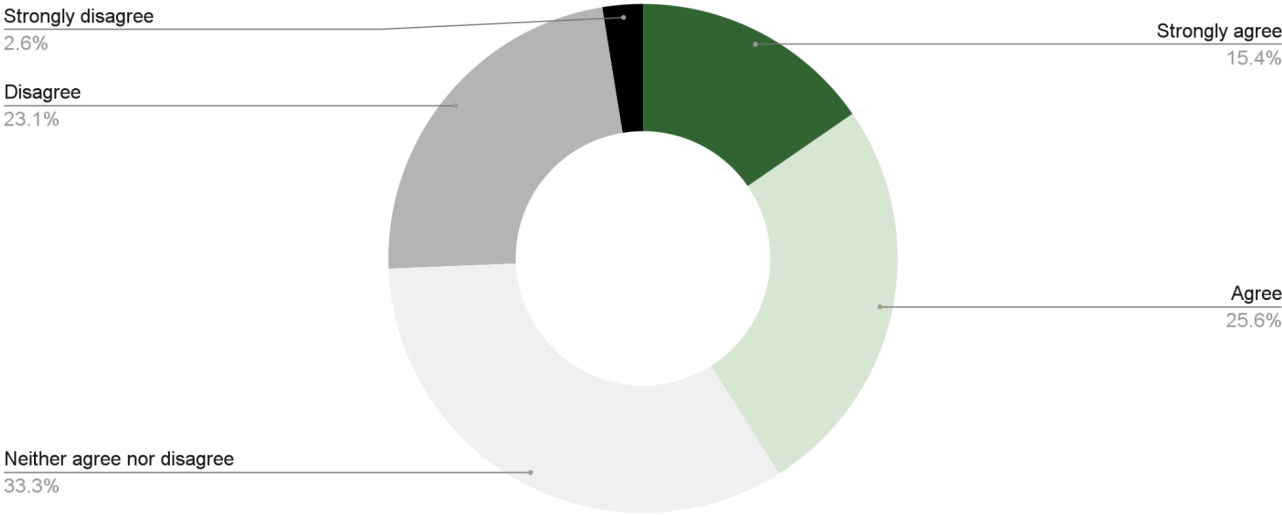
⁴ 300.115 Continuum of alternative placements.

- A. Each public agency must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.
- B. The continuum required in paragraph (a) of this section must—
 1. Include the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education under §300.39 (instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions); and
 2. Make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement.

However, when asked to describe the continuum in interviews, the programming sounded more like tiered intervention than special education. For example, some leaders described their continuum in terms of layers 5 and 6, focusing more on the systems for identifying the types of intervention rather than how a student with a disability will be supported through specialized instruction. Another leader set forth the continuum as: push-in/pull-out, paraprofessional, and out-of-district placements, indicating the insufficiency of this model. Further, because the EdDoc system has such a vast selection of service options for IEPs, there is no clear way to create uniformity in service options across schools. A system that treats special education as intervention and assigns paraprofessionals as a more intensive support for students in general education classrooms may not be meeting the purpose of special education - to (1) access grade level content and (2) remove barriers to instruction - for most students.

There is an interesting trend in how **data is or is not used for continuous improvement** of special education in the District, which is one of the indicators in this element with the most room for growth. Some teachers understand their role in collecting special education data (as shown by an average response of 3.28 out of 5 on the educator survey), but this answer may be more aligned to how educators view the use of data for instructional decision making in Element 2

Teachers' Level of Agreement with the Statement, "I know what systems are used to collect special education data and what my role is in collecting and reporting special education data."



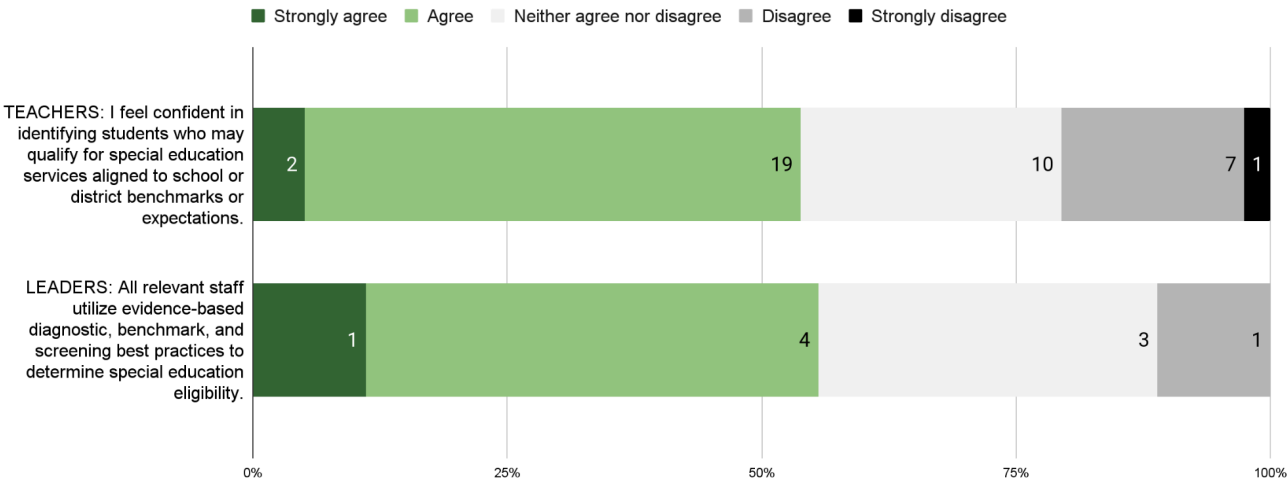
This discrepancy between the collection and use of data for individualized special education decisions and data analysis for continuous improvement was supported in interviews and meeting observations. When speaking with leaders, there were repeated mentions of using student data from data walls at the school level to identify which students were in need of additional support, but very little guidance exists for how teachers are expected to use data for more general continuous improvement of special education - both for individual teachers and schoolwide. Some leaders even mentioned that more effective use of data is a real need that has emerged. Further, in the few meetings

observed, information drawn upon was highly anecdotal and subjective. There were mentions of data collection at times, but these data were not present at the meetings nor were they referred to in any objective manner.

It should be noted that the District is in a period of planning and through this assessment and other data collection opportunities as part of the strategic planning process, they are collecting data that will be used as baseline in their continuous improvement of special education.

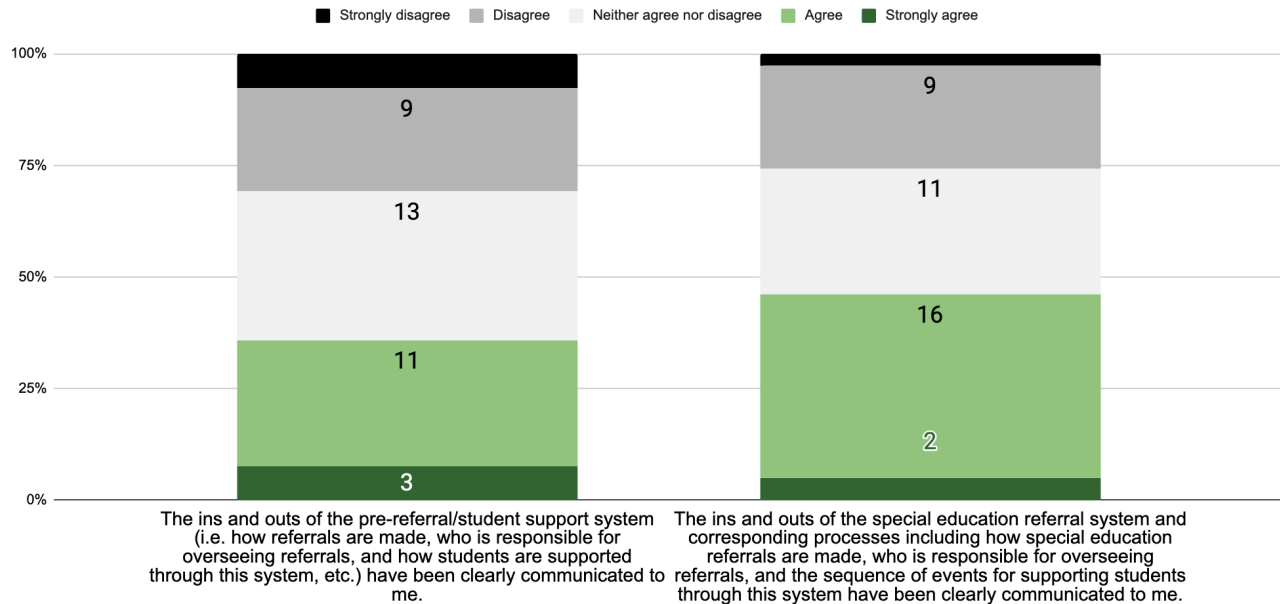
The District has a centralized evaluation team which greatly streamlines the **special education referral process** once a referral has been made. However, it is not clear whether staff understand when a referral (or re-evaluation) is appropriate or required. Staff self-report that they are somewhat comfortable identifying when a child needs a referral. When asked about whether they feel confident in identifying students who may qualify for special education, 54% agree or strongly agree. Similarly, 55% of leaders agree or strongly agree that relevant staff utilize evidence-based diagnostic, benchmark, and screening best practices to determine special education eligibility.

Breakdown of Responses Regarding the Identification of Students for Special Education Referral and Evaluation, Teachers vs. Leaders



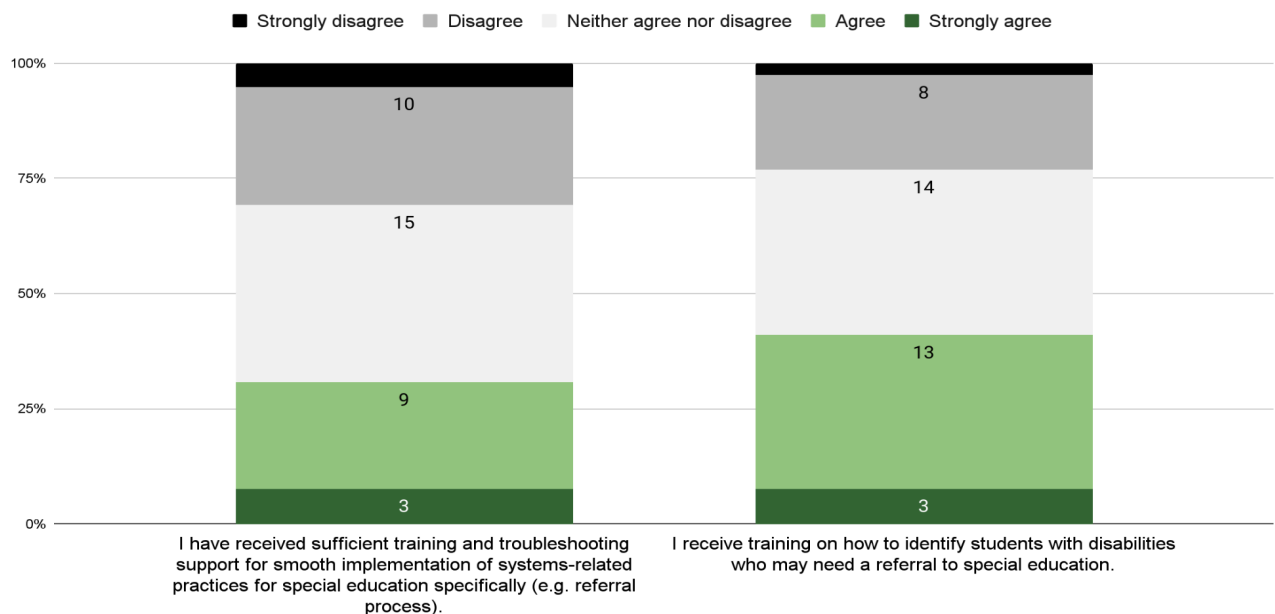
On the other hand, fewer staff members seem to understand the processes prior to and during special education referral. Only 36% of staff indicated that they agree or strongly agree that the ins and outs of the pre-referral system have been clearly communicated to them and 46% agree or strongly agree that the special education referral system has been clearly communicated to them.

Average Teacher Response to Questions Related to the Logistics of Special Education Referral and Evaluation



One root cause for this lack of clarity may be inconsistent training around referrals across the District. Only 31% of staff agree or strongly agree that they have received sufficient training and troubleshooting support for the smooth implementation of systems-related practices for special education such as referral. 41% report they agree or strongly agree that they receive training on how to identify students with disabilities who may need a referral to special education.

Breakdown of Teacher Responses to Questions Related to Training about Special Education Referral and Evaluation



WCUUSD has processes and resources for delivering intervention; however there is room for improvement, clarity, and training about systems of support starting at universal instruction through the point that a child is evaluated for special education (if appropriate).

Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to how WCUUSD builds and sustains equitable systems and resource allocation:

- **Conduct a gap analysis** across school sites to better understand where tiered supports are functioning well and where there is room for improvement, with a goal to (1) identify bright spots for information sharing and (2) streamline expectations for EST and intervention delivery Districtwide.
- Reevaluate the decision to **embed special education in the tiered system**. Offer clear guidance and support to staff about the purpose of special education and programming options, such as a defined continuum of placements.
- Draft guidance materials about the **District's special education processes from initial referral through IEP creation** (i.e., Child Find) and train all stakeholders so that they understand their roles and have the knowledge necessary to serve students in an equitable way across schools (including alignment between elementary and secondary to ensure a seamless transition).
- Create a **data-use vision map** that sets forth the District's intentions around how schools are using data for continuous improvement in the short, medium, and long term, recognizing that building a data culture is a long and intentional process.

Considerations

Leaders looking to further explore the area of equitable systems and resource management can ask and answer the following questions:

- What is the difference between special education and intervention and does the current system adequately meet the different student needs?
- How can leaders more effectively communicate a clear, streamlined, and equitable tiered support system that is aligned across the District, but still gives flexibility and autonomy to school teams for implementation?
- What are the steps for building a more intentional data culture around special education continuous improvement?
- How can the District ensure that students with IEPs receive their services in the least restrictive environment, and that those services meet the dual purposes of special education - providing access to grade level content and removing barriers to learning?

ELEMENT FIVE: MEANINGFUL FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Element Definition: Leaders prioritize building meaningful partnerships with families and provide resources to staff to make those partnerships happen. Educators enter into effective, reciprocal relationships with families centered on empathy and cultural competence.

SI#	Success Indicator Name	Score	Analysis
35	Belief in the Value of Engaging with Parents and Families as Partners	3.14	Fair/Emerging
36	Belief that Parents and Families want the best for their Children	3.03	Fair/Emerging
37	Belief in the Value of Engaging with Empathy	3.58	Proficient
38	Understanding Cultural Competence	3.16	Fair/Emerging
39	Effective and Regular Communication with Family	3.35	Fair/Emerging
40	Family Training and Development	2.36	Developing

KEY	Starting Out	Developing	Fair/Emerging	Proficient	Mastered
	1.00-1.79	1.80-2.59	2.60-3.39	3.40-4.19	4.20-5.00

Key Takeaways

The following key points can be concluded from an examination of the data about family partnerships:

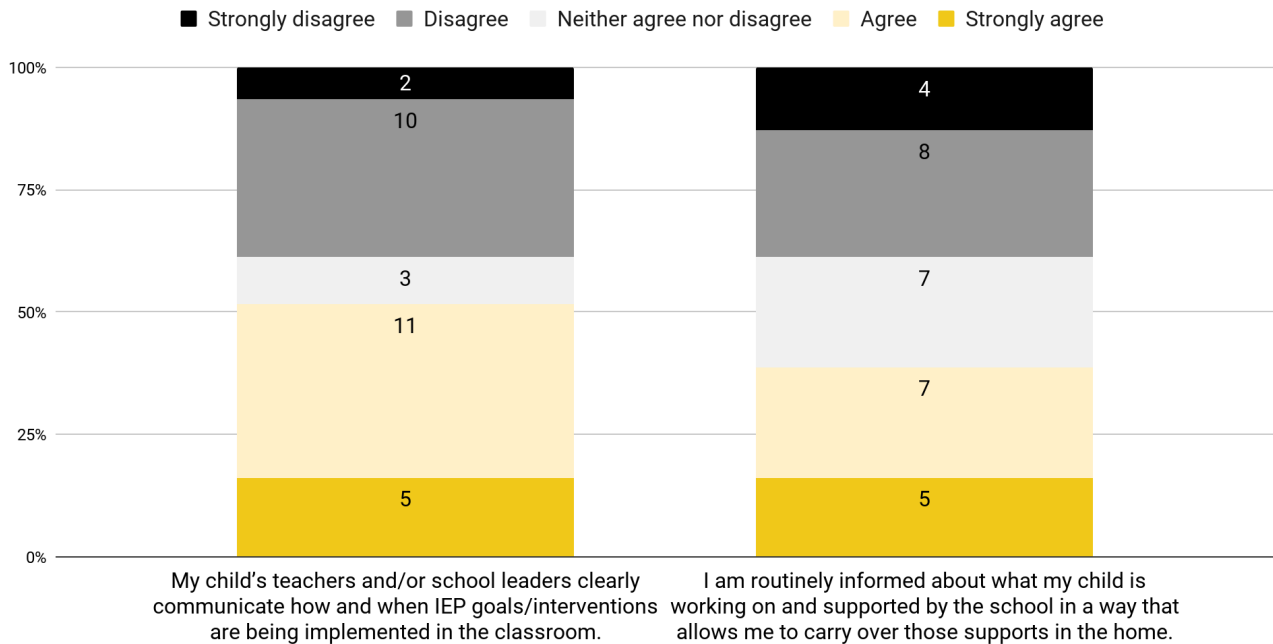
- **Parent feedback is variable across the District**, with strong feelings on both sides of the spectrum - some parents feel their children are well-served by their schools, while others feel their children's needs are not being met at school.
- Many schools are communicating with parents and parents feel the school engages them in some helpful ways. However, **more consistent and meaningful partnerships** may be helpful for driving increased engagement for students.
- Across the District, parents express that they are not provided with **opportunities to learn more about special education**, nor are they engaged in ways that allow them to carry over school and classroom supports at home. This trend seems more acute for students in the older grade levels.

Primary Source Data

Much of the data in this section comes from parent surveys, with additional data pulled from staff and leader interviews. The following charts show how data was distributed across several of the responses with the highest and lowest average responses.

Parent data indicates a neutral to positive feeling about the extent to which district staff **believe in the value of engaging with parents** and families as partners. For example, 52% of parents agree or strongly agree that their child's teachers and school leaders clearly communicate how and when IEP goals/interventions are being implemented in the classroom. That number drops to, 39% of parents responding agree or strongly agree when asked if they are routinely informed about what their child is working on in a way that allows them to carry over the supports in their home.

Breakdown of Responses to Parent Survey Questions regarding Engaging Families as Partners



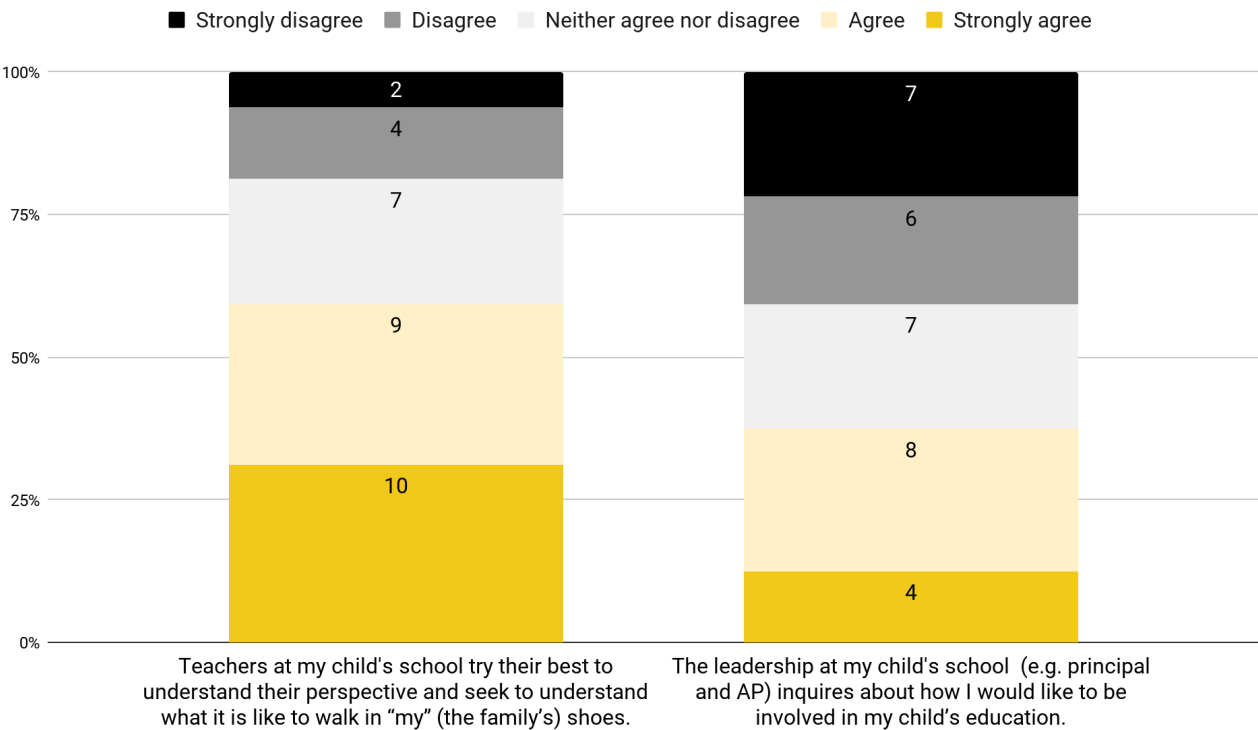
Data points to the conclusion that educators **believe that parents want the best for their children**, but there is some inconsistency in how that is operationalized. This can be seen by looking at the data around how much investment staff are making to deeply engage parents. Parents report that some schools are investing the resources to engage parents, while in other settings, educators are less likely to seek family partnership regarding student learning needs and goals. This quotation from a parent demonstrates one perspective:

"We have had to ask multiple times for regular meetings and materials to help support our child. Even asking for consistency with our requests, it frequently does not happen. If we do not request regular meetings, documents, and support materials, they are not offered or suggested to us. We have asked for requests to be made to better support our child since we know them best and it has been actively denied without good rationale...I do not believe that the supports in place for our child are there to support them, I believe they are there to scoot them along. I get the sense of a "good enough" mentality rather than getting to know them as a learner and addressing their specific learning disability to help get them back on track and, maybe even up to grade level." - Excerpt from parent survey response

Parents are more positive when describing how staff **engage from a place of empathy**, though their perspectives about teachers are seemingly stronger than how they view school leadership. 59% of parents believe (agree or strongly agree) that teachers try their best to understand their perspectives and seek to understand what it is like to walk in "my" (the family's) shoes. However, only 38% agree or strongly agree that leadership inquires how they would like to be involved in their own child's education. While these two data

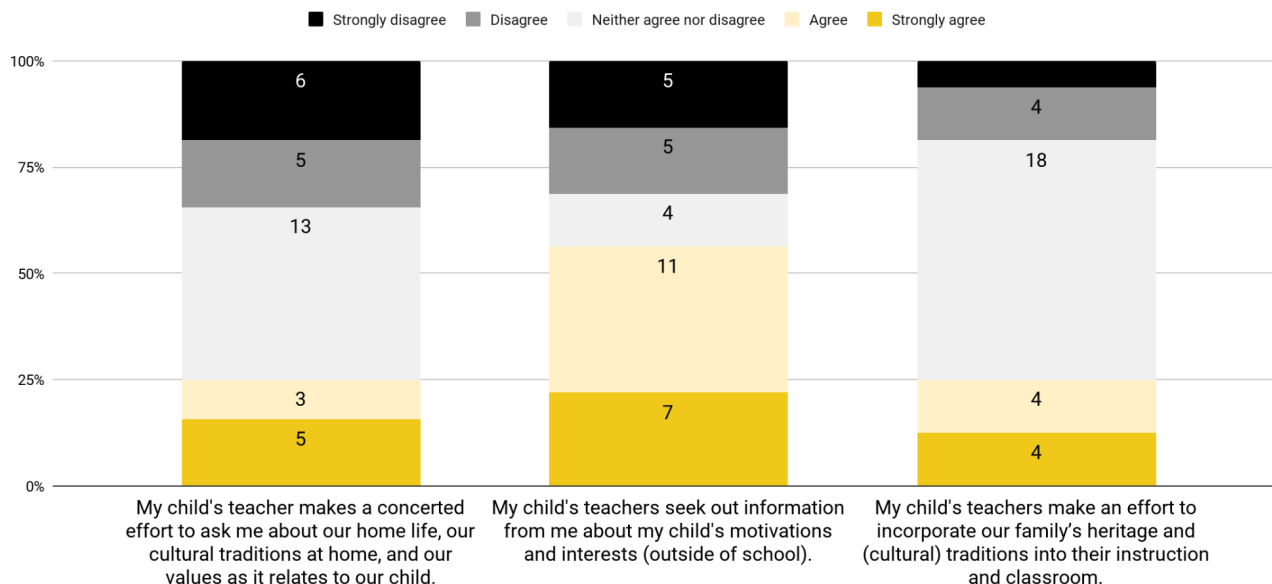
points are not necessarily an apples to apples comparison, the gap could be evidence of differences in how parents view teachers versus leaders.

Breakdown of Responses to Parent Survey Questions Regarding Engaging with Empathy



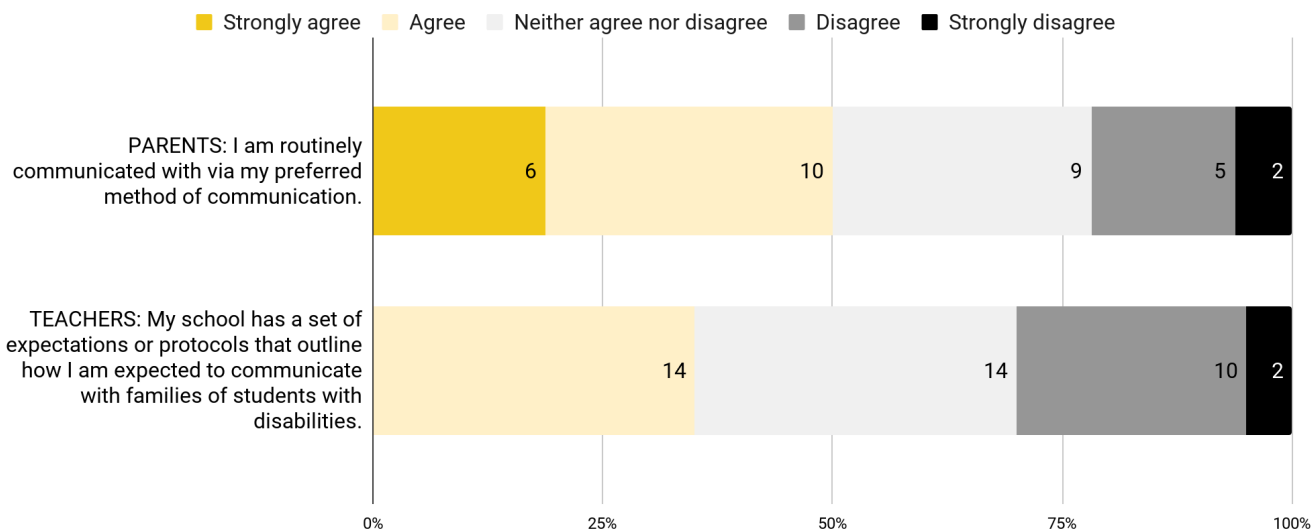
25% of parents agree or strongly agree that their child's teacher (1) asks them about their home life, cultural traditions, and values; and (2) makes an effort to incorporate their family's cultural traditions into their instruction and classroom. Interestingly, a larger percentage of responses indicated parents neither agreed nor disagreed on these topics, perhaps pointing to parents' lack of knowledge about how teachers incorporate culture into their classrooms. 56% of parents agree or strongly agree that their child's teacher seeks out information from them about their child's out of school motivations and interests.

Breakdown of Responses to Parent Survey Questions Regarding Cultural Competence



Regarding **school and family communication**, while only 35% of teachers feel their school has a set of expectations or protocols that outline how they are expected to communicate with families of students with disabilities, 50% of parents maintain they are communicated with via their preferred method.

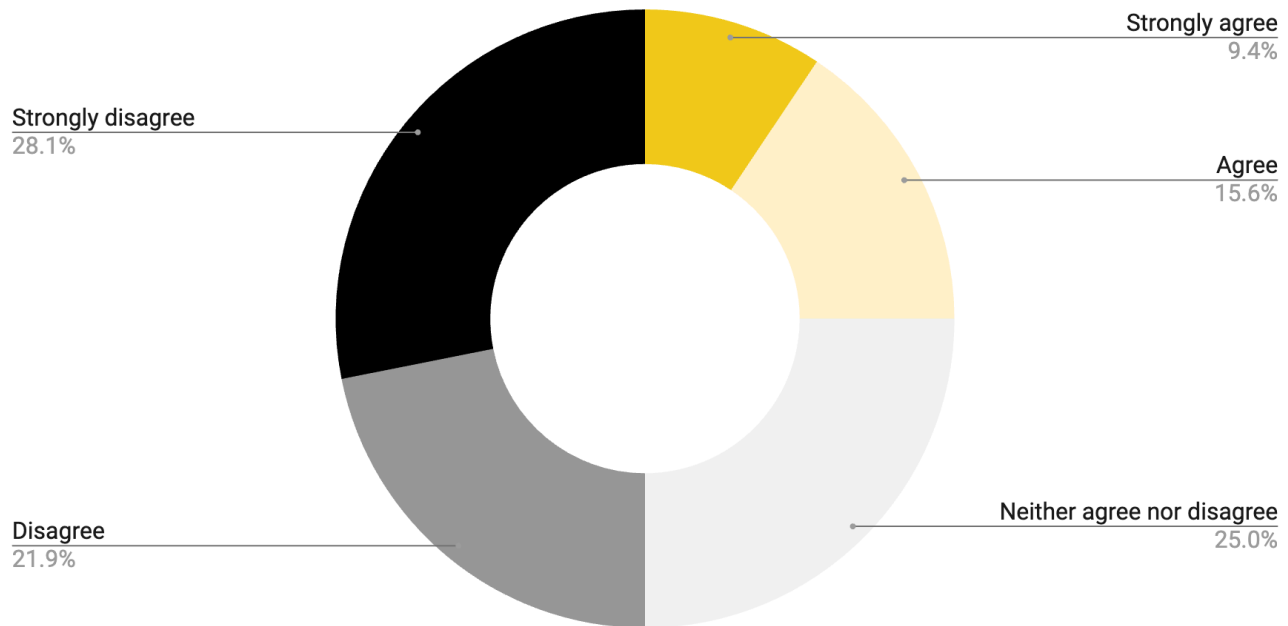
Breakdown of Survey Responses Regarding School Communication, Teachers v. Parents



The District had its lowest score in this element when it came to **family training and development** with an average score of 2.36 (out of 5) across all data sources. 75% of parents responded that they disagree, strongly disagree, or neither agree nor disagree that they are

regularly offered opportunities to attend parent workshops or training to support their child with an IEP.

Percent Response to Parent Survey Question, "I am regularly offered opportunities to attend parent workshops and/or training to support my child with an IEP."



Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to how WCUUSD engages and builds partnerships with families of students with disabilities:

- Develop clarity around **Districtwide expectations for engaging with families** and ensure that all staff (teachers, leaders, providers, etc.) know and understand what those expectations look like in practice.
- **Offer parent workshops and training** to help parents understand how disability impacts learning and navigating school systems to ensure students' needs are being met. Consider offering the same content to educators so all parties have a shared language and are operating from the same playbook.
- Consider engaging a **Districtwide special education parent group** to raise concerns, offer feedback across schools, and build more of a parent-facing culture that can try and address some of the variations in parent partnerships between schools.

Considerations

Leaders looking to further explore the area of family partnerships can ask and answer the following questions:

- How does parent sentiment vary from school to school? Are there trends about strengths and opportunities for growth that can be gleaned by looking at data cut by school?
- What should culturally appropriate family engagement and partnership look like in special education? How can the District honor differences across family populations as a positive attribute?
- How can the District support school staff to build more processes for educator/parent collaboration when it comes to implementing interventions and strategies from school in the home setting?

CONCLUSION

This needs assessment was developed from a set of practices grounded in research and designed to pull across populations, perspectives, and platforms to garner over 250 discrete data points. What emerges is a snapshot picture of WCUUSD's current Districtwide practices. When that information is viewed through ABC's THRIVE Quality Special Education Framework and compared with national practices, trends and recommendations chart the path forward.

The report has multiple access points (e.g., reviewing data charts, working on recommendations, engaging with considerations) and it is incumbent upon District leadership to determine how to leverage the results to make the changes most appropriate for its students. ABC looks forward to continuing to partner with WCUUSD on this journey.

Our team would like to thank the leadership of Washington Central Unified Union School District for your partnership throughout this process. Special thanks to Kerra Holden, Director of Student Support Services who served as assessment lead from the District office. Additional thanks to building leaders for being instrumental in ensuring that ABC had access to the individuals, spaces, and documentation necessary to complete this review. Deep gratitude to the students, staff and families of WCUUSD for your input and participation.

APPENDIX: SCORES BY SUCCESS INDICATOR CHART

Element	SI	Success Indicator Name	Score	Analysis
Element 1: Culture of Inclusion	1	Belief That Serving Exceptional Learners is a Collective Responsibility	4.48	Mastered
	2	Belief That All Students Can Learn and Grow	4.31	Mastered
	3	Belief that an Inclusive School Environment Benefits All Students	4.33	Mastered
	4	Understanding of the Leaders' Role in Shaping Culture	3.69	Proficient
	5	Understanding of the Components of Effective Change Management Focused on Inclusion	3.13	Fair/Emerging
	6	Creation of a Bold, Clear Vision for Inclusion	3.37	Fair/Emerging
	7	Implementation of an Action Plan for Making or Sustaining Inclusive Change	2.86	Fair/Emerging
	8	Implementation of Practices for Mitigating Bias	3.43	Proficient
	9	Effective formal & informal collaboration	3.42	Proficient
Element 2: Student Centered Curriculum and Instruction	10	Knowledge of Evidence-based Instructional and Assessment Practices for Diverse Learners	3.27	Fair/Emerging
	11	Strengths-Based Understanding of Student Potential	3.29	Fair/Emerging
	12	Use of Clear Teaching Outcomes	1.31	Starting Out
	13	Use of Standards-aligned, Interdependent Units of Study (Academic and Social-emotional)	2.92	Fair/Emerging
	14	Use of Data to Make Instructional Decisions	3.35	Fair/Emerging
	15	Use of Intentional Differentiation and Specialized Instruction for Diverse Learners	3.21	Fair/Emerging
	16	Use of Collaborative Approaches to Instruction	3.45	Proficient
	17	Effective Planning and Co-Planning	3.37	Fair/Emerging
	18	Fostering of Supportive Relationships and Learning Environments for Students	2.60	Fair/Emerging
Element 3: Shared Understanding of Special Education Mandates	19	Familiarity with Special Education Laws and Mandates	3.94	Proficient
	20	Basic Understanding of the Impact of Disabilities on Learning	4.11	Proficient
	21	Clear Roles and Responsibilities for Special Education	3.08	Fair/Emerging
	22	Writing of Clear and Effective Documents	3.08	Fair/Emerging
	23	Design and Delivery of Programming Tailored to Individual Student Needs	3.69	Proficient
	24	Effective IEP Team Meetings	4.00	Proficient
	25	Effective Practices for Progress Monitoring	3.46	Proficient
	26	Regular Compliance Monitoring	2.75	Fair/Emerging
	27	Integrated provision of related and other services	3.20	Fair/Emerging

Element	SI	Success Indicator Name	Score	Analysis
Equitable Systems and Resource Management	28	Understanding the Relationship between Tiered Systems of Support and Special Education	2.19	Developing
	29	System for Identifying and Delivering Services to Students In Need of Intervention	2.73	Fair/Emerging
	30	Equitable and Efficient Staffing and Resource Allocation	3.24	Fair/Emerging
	31	Whole School Schedules Designed to Facilitate Collaboration and Inclusion	2.99	Fair/Emerging
	32	Continuum of Placements that Honors Least Restrictive Environment	2.88	Fair/Emerging
	33	Tracking and Use of Data for Continuous Improvement of Systems	2.28	Developing
	34	System for Child Find, Referral, and Evaluation for Special Education	3.02	Fair/Emerging
Meaningful Family Partnerships	35	Belief in the Value of Engaging with Parents and Families as Partners	3.14	Fair/Emerging
	36	Belief that Parents and Families want the Best for their Children	3.03	Fair/Emerging
	37	Belief in the Value of Engaging with Empathy	3.58	Proficient
	38	Understanding Cultural Competence	3.16	Fair/Emerging
	39	Effective and Regular Communication with Family	3.35	Fair/Emerging
	40	Family Training and Development	2.36	Developing