



Walker Consulting at the Walker Trieschman Institute

Wilmington Public Schools
Program Evaluation of Services and Settings for
Students with Disabilities

EVALUATION REPORT

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Submitted by:

Julie Muse-Fisher, Consultant
John Verre, Director
Walker Consulting
Walker Trieschman Institute
Needham, MA

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Executive Summary

The Wilmington Public Schools Director of Student Support Services requested an evaluation of the special education programming across the District, including Pre-K, elementary, middle and high school. This request originated in part as a result of the District's findings from their 2017-2018 Coordinated Program Review where DESE found that the District's special education programs and services are not regularly evaluated. The purpose of the evaluation is to clarify the current status of the special education programming, contribute to planning for improvements in the services, and provide recommendations regarding future development of services and programs. Walker Consulting collected quantitative and qualitative data, examining the four focus areas formulated in collaboration with the District.

Walker Consulting completed this program evaluation over a period of three months and the findings and perspectives are detailed in this report and summarized here.

Wilmington's rate of determining students eligible for special education (rate of eligibility) is slightly higher than the Massachusetts state average. There are a number of factors that are contributing to the high rate of eligibility, including the following:

- Lack of tiered interventions
- Inconsistent use of instructional support teams (IST)
- District perspective and implementation of Section 504
- Underuse and/or lack of familiarity by staff of District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP)
- Pressure from parents and outside partners and lack of confidence by staff

Related to the lack of tiered interventions is the inconsistency of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) throughout the district. Possible deficits in the curriculum, parental pressure, lack of available interventions outside of special education, gaps in foundational skills, and a lack of resources were all cited during staff interviews as reasons why students may end up with an IEP, rather than as a result of a strong eligibility determination process.

In recent years, Wilmington has expanded special education programming capacity based on the needs of its students. In addition to creating new programs to address the changing needs of its student population, Wilmington has started to provide more inclusion opportunities for students. Significant changes in leadership over the last five years has impacted the District's rate of success with these efforts.

The specialized programming for students with disabilities in Wilmington has a solid foundation, and there are programs available for students who present with language based learning disabilities, autism, and social/emotional impairments. In addition to these, the Life Skills and Post Grad programs are other programs available to students

based upon their individualized needs. Data provided by Wilmington indicates that the number of students who are placed out of district has decreased over the last four years. This may be attributable in part to the recent expansion in specialized programming.

Another highlight is that many students with disabilities in Wilmington have the opportunity to spend part of the school day in inclusive settings. However, the district has not yet clearly articulated what best inclusionary practices look like. It is evident that although the District is moving toward inclusion, there is not yet a clear vision and action plan in place to support this effort. Staff are seeking professional development about co-teaching and inclusive practices and would like more opportunities for collaboration and co-planning between general educators and special educators and educational assistants.

In looking at the District's settings and services and special education programming, areas for improvement include the following:

- The staffing in the middle school learning center needs to be reviewed to ensure that IEP services are being delivered in a manner consistent with student IEPs.
- The use of 1:1 paraprofessionals is not supported by a protocol for assessing the need for additional adult support and currently there is an overreliance on 1:1 paraprofessionals.
- There is variability and confusion around the use of educational assistants. There is room in this domain to increase consistency in terms of how educational assistants are used to support students in inclusion classrooms and across all settings. Staff articulated that they are looking for increased opportunities for co-planning and shared professional development with both general and special educators and teaching assistants.
- Staff articulated a desire for more Professional Development opportunities, especially in the following areas: the DCAP, Social and Emotional Learning, Co Teaching, Inclusive Practices, Supporting Students with Anxiety and ADHD, and Special Ed 101.

In looking at the organizational support within the Student Support Services Department there are a lot of positive things happening. There appears to be a high level of respect and collaboration among and within the Student Support Services central office staff and related to this, staff district-wide appreciate the work that the Director of Student Support Services and the Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support have been doing the past two school years.

Given the breadth of responsibilities that fall under the Director position, having only one other administrator is inadequate to support the special education and other student

service needs in Wilmington. An additional special education administrator will support the Director and make the scope of the work more feasible. The addition of this position will provide necessary support for both special education staff and students with disabilities.

The time allotted for teaming and collaboration within this small group of staff is sufficient, especially given that staff within the Student Support Services department are well connected and make time even when not specifically carved out.

Supervision and consultation of special education staff district wide is inadequate and not sufficient to support the growth of special educators and related service providers in the district. As noted, the current model is that principals evaluate most staff including special education staff. One challenge is that the principals may not be as familiar with the professional standards, best practices, and job requirements for special education staff. Increased collaboration and thoughtful coordination and planning between Student Support Services administrators and principals around supervision and evaluation will likely address this issue.

In looking at student outcomes, the majority of data available was through the data collected and maintained by DESE. This information is summarized in the report. It is important to understand that these measures, available through the State, allow for analyses at the district, school, grade, and categorical levels, but not at the individual student level.

As the district continues to look at student outcomes, the comparisons that should be made are those of the individual student's proficiency at particular points in time, and his/her individual progress, or lack of progress over time. The district can use state measures available but should also identify its own data points and progress monitoring plan to measure individual student outcomes.

In the evaluation report, the detailed findings and specific related recommendations are organized in the report in alignment with the four focus areas. The recommendations are compiled and presented at the end of this report.

Introduction

Purpose of Evaluation

The Superintendent of Schools and the Director of Student Services at Wilmington Public Schools engaged with Walker Consulting to conduct a review of the District's special education programming and services. This was prompted in part after a finding by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education during the District's Coordinated Program Review that Wilmington's special education programs and services are not regularly evaluated. As part of the district's corrective action, Wilmington sought to complete a comprehensive evaluation of all programs and services. The first phase of the corrective action involves defining and clarifying the continuum of services, programs and supports in Wilmington. The need for this type of evaluation was further indicated given the number of changes in central office leadership over the last few years and the challenges in the area of special education noted by Dr. Glenn Brand in his Superintendent Entry Plan (December 12, 2018).

Walker Consulting

The mission of Walker Inc. is to transform the lives of children and youth who are facing complex emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges by partnering with these children and youth, their families, and communities to nurture hope, build strengths, and develop lifelong skills. The Walker Trieschman Institute is committed to improving outcomes for children and adolescents with disabilities by supporting the effectiveness and efficiency of services and settings in schools and other child-serving organizations. Walker Consulting offers a portfolio of services that includes development of organizations, services and settings, leadership and management, and staff capability. Walker Consultants have conducted service and program evaluations in general education and special education school settings, in a wide variety of communities across the country. In the present evaluation, the Consultants planned the content, structure, and process collaboratively with the District, carried out data collection and analysis, and developed the report.

Methodology

The data for analysis in this evaluation includes both quantitative and qualitative data collected through document review and analysis; interviews with staff and administrators; observations of classes and other activities in the schools. Walker Consulting developed and utilized the formats for this evaluation, including data and document requests, interview guides and observation frameworks. The timeframe for the evaluation spanned from March to May 2019. The initial project planning and development took place in mid-late February and consisted of internal planning meetings with Walker Consultants, phone conversations and ongoing email communications with Alice Brown-LeGrand, Wilmington Director of Student Services, to identify the focus areas of the program evaluation. The Walker Consultant spent four days in Wilmington Public Schools over March and April 2019. A Parent Survey was developed and sent out to families in June but no responses were received.

The program evaluation consisted of data collection, review, and analysis, interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations.. Prior to and subsequent to the on-site days, the District provided Walker with the following documents to review:

1. Superintendent Entry Plan, December 12, 2018
2. Program Descriptions (Alternative, Bridge, Early Childhood ABA, Elementary ABA, Secondary ABA, Elementary Language based, Secondary Language Based, Elementary Reach, Integrated Preschool, Secondary Inclusion programs, Transitions, Secondary Life Skills and Post Grad, Stepping Stones)
3. Coordinated Program Review Report of Findings
4. Coordinated Program Review Corrective Action Plan
5. Student Support Services Organization Chart 2018-2019
6. District Curriculum Accommodation Plan
7. Out of District numbers
8. Numbers of eligible students by disability category
9. DESE data on Selected Student Populations
10. SIMS data
11. Professional Development schedules
12. Number students on IEPs and 504s
13. Referral Data

The Walker Consultant spent four days in Wilmington meeting with administrators, staff and observing classrooms. The first day consisted of a meeting with the Special Education team and a visit to the Middle School where a walk-through of the middle school special education programs took place. The second day on site was spent at Wilmington High School where this consultant spent the day observing special education programs and inclusion classrooms, in addition to conducting interviews with special education and general education staff, related service providers, as well as the District's Special Education Curriculum Team Leader and High School Team Chair. The

third day visiting the Wilmington Public Schools consisted of visits to the Middle School, Boutwell Early Childhood Center, and West Intermediate School. Time at the Middle School included observations of the Strides, Transitions and Student Support programs, observations of the inclusion classrooms and interviews with teachers from these classes (programs and inclusion). The time at Boutwell included observations of the integrated full day preschool program, the Stepping Stones program, an Inclusion Kindergarten classroom as well as interviews with these teachers. The final day spent in-district included visits to Shawsheen Elementary and Wildwood Early Childhood and interviews with Team Chairs, school psychologists, social workers and school adjustment counselors, school administrators, Superintendent, Dr. Glen Brand, and Alice Brown-Legrand, Director of Student Services. Throughout the program evaluation, this consultant met with 63 staff in either individual or group interviews.

Quantitative data regarding schools, staff, and students were collected from the District by the Consultant. Document review, observations, and interviews were planned and implemented to address the specific areas of focus for the evaluation. Documents included both local materials and District profile data available on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Structured observations spanned every level pre-K to High School and included small group, general education, inclusion and substantially separate settings. Among the interviewees were central office and school administrators, and general and special education teachers, counselors, and other support professionals.

The results of this program evaluation are organized around the areas of focus. Each substantive section includes the Consultant's perspectives on the current status and recommendations relating to the focus areas and questions. The Consultant also identified issues for further investigation not treated completely in this evaluation that may expand the depth, breadth, clarity, and/or value of the findings contained in this report.

Focus of the Evaluation

The Special Education Administrators in the Wilmington Public Schools, in collaboration with Walker Consulting, identified four areas of focus for the program evaluation. These areas form the specific Focus of the Evaluation:

1. High Rate of Eligibility
2. Special Education Programming - Focus on Continuum of Settings and Array of Services (with a particular focus on the Middle School).
3. Organizational Support
4. Student Outcomes

Findings and Recommendations

For each Focus Area, the Findings and Recommendations are organized as follows:

- Critical Questions
- Current Status
- Consultants' Perspectives
- Recommendations for Improvement

Focus Area #1: High Rate of Eligibility

Critical Question

What are the factors contributing to the district's high rate of eligibility?

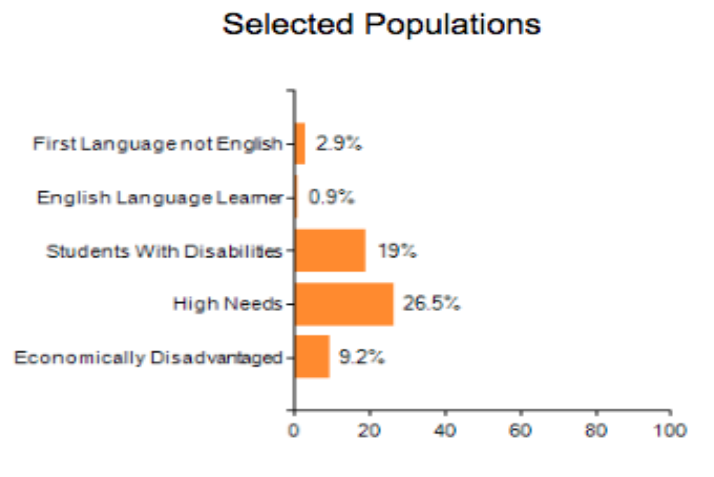
- a. Question of the adequacy of Tier 1 and 2 interventions.
 - i. What is the prevalence of Tier 2 and 3 interventions
- b. Question of the understanding of special education eligibility
 - i. As a related question - what is the district doing in terms of Section 504?
- c. Are there other contributing factors (poverty, high rate of ELs, etc.)

Current Status

Wilmington Public Schools is a PreK-12 school district with 8 schools in total. The district's configuration of schools includes two Early Childhood schools (Boutwell and Wildwood), two elementary schools grades 1st to 3rd (Shawsheen and Woburn), two intermediate schools, grades 4th and 5th (West and North), a middle school, and a high school. There are 3,197 students enrolled in the school district. See School District Profile, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu>.

According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, Wilmington's current percentage of students with disabilities is 19%. This number indicates the percent of students enrolled who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as of October 1st. This is in comparison with the state average, which is 18.1 %.

Wilmington:

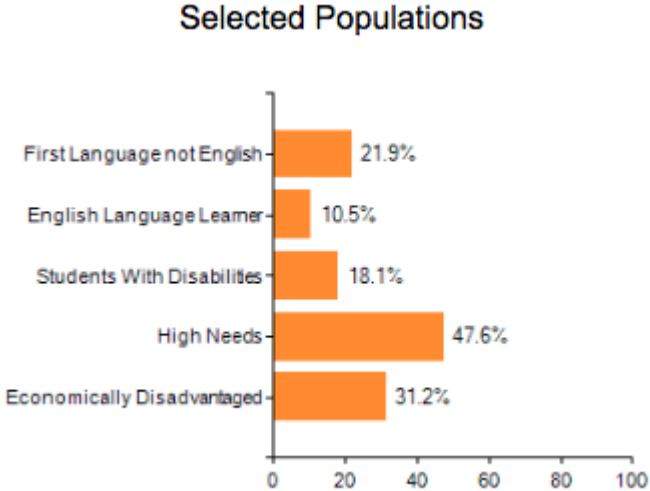


<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=03420000&orgtypecode=5>

This data also shows that in comparison to a relatively high rate of students with disabilities, the district has a low rate of English Language Learners (0.9%) and low rate of students who are economically disadvantaged (9.2%). The state averages for these selected populations are 10.5% and 31.2% respectively (see chart below).

<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu>.

Massachusetts:



Referral Data

Another important data point is the number of referrals for special education eligibility determination compared with the number of students who are found not eligible for services (no special needs “NSN”). The numbers available are from the 2017-2018 school year and are as follows:

Initial Evaluations	179
Findings of No Special Needs (NSN)	67
Percentage of students found not eligible	37%

This data is important because it illustrates that more than one third of the students referred for evaluation are determined not to be eligible for special education and/or related services. This is quite significant given the amount of time and resources expended during the initial eligibility determination process.

Prevalence of Students with Disabilities by School

The percentage rates of students with disabilities by school as reported by October 1st (SIMS report) are as follows:

School	Percentage of Students with Disabilities
Boutwell	11.9%
Wildwood	22.2%
Woburn	12.9%
Shawsheen	20.2%
West Intermediate	16.1%
North Intermediate	20.4%
Wilmington Middle	20.4%
Wilmington High	15.4%

This data reflects that half of the schools in the district, Wildwood, Shawsheen, North, and Wilmington Middle School, have prevalence rates higher than 20%. Conversely Boutwell, Woburn, West, and Wilmington High have rates that are below the state average rate of 18.1%.

Other Data Points

Of the overall enrollment in the district of 3,197 students, there are 637 students with disabilities across grades PK-12. There are currently 62 students who are placed out of district. The breakdown of students by disability is included in the Appendix. The most prevalent disability categories are: Specific Learning Disability, Autism, Communication, and Developmental Delay.

What are the factors contributing to the district’s high rate of eligibility?

Throughout the program evaluation, there were many opportunities to talk with staff in varying positions and levels (elementary, middle, high, etc.). Staff recognized areas of deficiency in general education interventions that result in higher rates of eligibility for special education. Topics that came up with staff when asked about the rate of special education eligibility were the DCAP and the lack of common understanding around it,

the IST process and inadequate interventions available, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support. Staff noted the following observations.

District Curriculum Accommodation Plan:

The Wilmington District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) is posted on the district's website at <https://www.wpsk12.com/>. The document is dated 2016-2017 and is 35 pages in length. The DCAP includes the following topics: the DCAP Process and Procedures, Procedures for Developing and Implementing the ISSP, the Instructional Support Team process, Special Education Evaluation Referral, and Staff Development. The DCAP includes a list of available support services broken up by Area (Literacy, Math, Behavior), Intervention and Level (Elementary, Middle, High). During interviews with staff it was noted that there is a lack of commitment to the DCAP and the District is still working to figure out ways to support all students. The DCAP was described as having "a life of its own" with "some commitment to it in pockets." During interviews, Team chairs noted that teachers have increased their familiarity with the DCAP and are providing accommodations in the classroom and also that the DCAP is being discussed more often at IEP team meetings. Staff are beginning to recognize that many accommodations are good teaching practices available to all students and do not need to be included in the accommodation section of an IEP. However, it was also reported during interviews that there is not a general understanding by all staff about what the DCAP is and what implementation in the classroom should look like. There is a lack of consistency across the district in terms of both understanding of the DCAP and implementation of accommodations in classrooms. It was suggested by multiple staff members that more training on the DCAP would be helpful.

Instructional Support Teams, Tiered Interventions and PBIS:

At the high school, staff indicated that they do have an Instructional Support Team (IST) in place. This process was described as beginning with teachers, guidance and building administrators. When concerns arise about a student who does not have an IEP or 504 plan, guidance is usually contacted to start the referral process. Staff indicated that the IST was meeting once per month but staff were not sure whether this was continuing. It was suggested that any teacher who has concerns about a student is "welcome to come and talk about concerns and come up with a plan." It was reported that there is a lot of communication between general education teachers, guidance, and special education liaisons, emailing back and forth and checking in. Staff stated that they first try to put some accommodations in place that are not tied to a 504. When staff were asked about specific IST forms that are used and the data collection process, there were no clear answers provided and it appeared that to the extent IST is happening at the high school, there is no consistency in terms of a meeting schedule or who is required to be in attendance. There was a lack of clarity in terms of guidelines for identifying student needs, making a support plan, and tracking and collecting data on interventions attempted.

Based upon interviews with staff at the middle school there is concern about the fidelity of the IST process. When prompted to explain this further, some staff suggested that paperwork is completed but then the teachers never hear back. IST was described as "a

system that is rarely used” and “nothing ever comes out of it.” When concerns about a student are raised through IST, teachers feel like they are told to use the DCAP or tell the student to come in for extra help. One teacher noted that IST feels more like a check box you have to complete before referring a student to special education.

Both general education and special education staff at the middle school commented on the lack of Tier 2 interventions and the correlation between this and the special education eligibility rate. One staff member stated that more tiered interventions were needed in both math and reading. Another stated, “One thing outside of special education that could help with IEP students is more Tier 2 interventions for math and ELA. This would take a huge load off of referrals and help students come off of IEPs. [There are] students struggling with writing but they do not need specialized instruction.” It was also noted by a middle school teacher that “some students just need remediation in math. They do not have a disability but lack foundational skills.”

It was reported that all students at the middle school are provided with interventions through a math strategies class but a suggestion was made that this could be utilized differently to support only students struggling with math, rather than all students including those who do not require extra help with math. It was mentioned that there is a reading program for struggling readers. In terms of Tier 2 interventions at the middle school, during interviews, staff shared that a previous principal established an intervention room and a WIN (What I Need to Succeed) block for students who needed extra support but were not on an IEP. This is no longer happening and was made more challenging by middle school scheduling and lack of student buy-in. When it did happen, it was supposed to be short-term help but often students who started never left. One middle school staff member directly stated that there are “so many referrals at the middle school because there are no tiered instructions in place.”

At Boutwell Early Childhood Center, staff were able to clearly articulate both their IST process and their school-wide PBIS. In terms of the IST process, concerns about a student would be brought to the school principal. The principal and teacher complete the IST forms, identify what is being tried, what is working and what is not working. There is a data collection period for a few weeks and then the IST reconvenes. Possible interventions that could be tried were described as the following: different types of seating (cubes and bean bags), slant boards, white boards, easels, putty, weighted blankets, writing with sand and shaving cream, token boards, a calming corner, sensory bin, and movement breaks.

Interviews with staff at Boutwell suggested that they are proud of their PBIS. It was described as being school-wide and based upon the school’s core values (Be Safe, Be Kind, Try Even When it is Hard). Students are rewarded when they display core values. Students are given paws and once 3 paws are earned, a student will get a big paw and a bracelet. There is a behavior matrix in place which identifies what student behavior should look like in the classroom, hallways, bathrooms, on the bus, etc. There are school wide lessons to implement PBIS and are rolled out at the beginning of the school year to establish the expectations. There is also a community service project with team

building as a goal. Students are aware of the core values and the behavior matrix and want to display the core values to earn paws. Every month, there is a whole-school meeting where a core value or behavior trait is highlighted, for example perseverance. Parents are explicitly told what is being taught through PBIS.

Conversations with staff at West Intermediate School suggest that the IST process has room for improvement. It was reported that there is a process in place for the IST. One of the special education teachers runs the IST meetings and has outlined the protocol at staff meetings on multiple occasions. It was reported that the IST has not met at all during the 18-19 school year. There was no data provided about what data driven interventions are tried and it was not evident that there is a data monitoring progress to document what has been tried.

With regard to PBIS, staff at West described the school as being in the beginning stages of developing and implementing PBIS. There is a group of staff members who are on the PBIS team and working to develop lessons. They met with a PBIS coach over the summer and are working to transition PBIS up from Shawsheen to the intermediate school. The goal is to complete development of the lesson plans prior to the end of the current school year so that it can be rolled out in the fall (September 2019) in coordination with the Mind Up program. When asked, staff could not identify a specific social-emotional curriculum that is currently being used at West.

Per staff report during interviews, there are some Tier 2 interventions in place at the West Intermediate School. Specifically, there are 2 reading specialists (1 full time and 1 part time) to support students who are struggling with reading. There is no general education math intervention and it was noted that there is a huge need for this type of support. Shawsheen has a math tutor available to provide interventions in the area of math and when students move up to West, parents ask where the math support is. It was felt that the lack of this type of general education math support results in IEP referrals. It was suggested that interventions are needed for students who are struggling but do not have a disability and are thus not eligible for an IEP.

During a group interview with clinical support staff in the district (school psychologists, school adjustment counselors, and social workers) the lack of tiered supports was reported and felt to be concerning. It was noted by these staff members that the amount of students with mental health issues, and at even younger ages, has increased in recent years, along with the number of students hospitalized or in crisis. In terms of tiered interventions generally, it was suggested that by and large they are not happening and where they are “it is totally random and building by building.” According to these staff, some Tier 1 supports currently being used at various buildings include: Choose to Be Nice, Social Thinking, Responsive Classroom, and the MARC anti-bullying curriculum. A few staff members mentioned that they used to use Second Step but no one knows where the kits are located now. There were CBT trainings offered from McLean’s but there was a lot of confusion about who should attend the training. Staff have familiarity with other social emotional curriculum that they learned working in

other districts, two examples given were the Michelle Garcia Winner Social Thinking program and the SOS Signs of Suicide Middle/High School Prevention program.

Interviews with staff at Shawsheen Elementary suggested that there is an Instructional Support Team in place and it is solidly implemented. They have a consistent schedule where they meet every other week and each grade meets on a different day. There are also data team meetings. The referral process is paper-based. Staff complete the form, check areas of concern and attach supporting data of what interventions have been tried. The team consists of the assistant principal, the referring teacher, grade level teachers, the school adjustment counselor, and when available, a BCBA or school psychologist. During the IST meetings, staff talk about what interventions have been tried, review the data and make a plan. They meet every 6-8 weeks. In terms of special education referrals, it was noted that the IST process has reduced the number of referrals to special education made by teachers. However, there are still many parents or outside physicians make referrals for a special education evaluation. It was also noted that the 504 process has improved and teachers have increased their familiarity with the DCAP and providing accommodations in the classroom. Despite all of this, Shawsheen still has a high eligibility rate of 20.2%.

Staff at Shawsheen also appear to be doing well in terms of PBIS and reported that they have a great team that works well together. They developed their PBIS with support from Wediko and are now in the third or fourth year of implementation. They established core values, the behavior matrix and meet twice per month with a coach from Wediko. A parent was recently added to the PBIS team. The core values are Respect, Responsibility and Resilience. The students earn paws for demonstrating core values.

The four Team Chairs have the perspective of being involved with every initial special education eligibility evaluation in the district and therefore have a lens into whether interventions are tried prior to referral and also the rate of students referred that are actually found eligible for special education services. The PreK-5 Team Chairs have a unique insight into tiered interventions available in the district as they work in multiple buildings and can see the different IST processes in place as well as the varied interventions available in the different buildings.

In general, interviews with the four Team Chairs suggested that there is agreement that the lack of tiered interventions available directly correlates to the high eligibility rate in the district. It was stated that the "IST process needs to be more robust" and "can't just be about filling out paperwork but staff need to actually try interventions and collect data." By report of staff, referrals seem to be split fairly evenly between parents and the IST process. It was noted that there are a higher number of referrals made after parent-teacher conferences. Per report of the Team Chairs, even when an IST process is in place, there is no fidelity with regard to data collection and not a wide range of interventions available for staff to try. It was also suggested that at some schools there is a connection between eligibility and math. Specifically, it was suggested that the math curriculum is an issue and students are found eligible as a result of deficits in the curriculum and not due to a student having a math disability. Another concern noted

was the variability and lack of consistency in general education reading interventions across grades K-5. The number of referrals for social/emotional concerns has also risen, with high numbers of referrals coming from both parents and staff. There has been a spike in the numbers of students found eligible under the disability categories Emotional Impairment and Health.

Interviews with staff at the middle school and the high school suggest that the use of a tiered intervention system of support is lacking. At the high school, there is an executive functioning workshop available to help students with missed assignments. Academic support after school is open to all students and is on a voluntary basis.

Question of the understanding of special education eligibility

During interviews with staff, it was mentioned that general education staff, building leaders, parents, advocates and outside organizations in the community may benefit from education and training on understanding disability and special education processes and procedures. There appears to be a mistaken sense that the only option to support a struggling student is through an IEP rather than through a tiered intervention system of supports. In addition, it was noted that outside physicians and therapists often make referrals for evaluations with a lack of understanding of the special education process and the laws and regulations that govern schools. Demands and pressures made by parents and outside providers occasionally have resulted in school staff finding students eligible for special education when in reality the evaluative data and/or the evidence of student progress does not support a finding of eligibility.

What is the district doing in terms of Section 504?

While the focus of this program evaluation was on the district's special education referral and eligibility rates, programming, and organizational structure, Section 504 was noted in a couple of instances. First, it was suggested that a student is rarely referred for a 504 evaluation but rather gets placed on a 504 plan after a finding of no eligibility for special education services. There are approximately 150 students currently on 504 plans district-wide. There is variability in terms of who chairs the 504 Team Meetings. At the Early Childhood Centers the Directors chair the meetings. At Shawsheen Elementary the Assistant Principal chairs 504 meetings and at Woburn Street it is the School Psychologist. At West Intermediate, the School Psychologist chairs 504 meetings and at North Intermediate a guidance counselor runs them. At the middle and high school levels, the guidance counselors chair the 504 meetings except for Initial 504 meetings, which are run by the Guidance Curriculum Team Leader. The data suggests that there is inconsistency in terms of Section 504 across the district. The District is currently in the process of reviewing and updating the 504 Procedures manual.

Are there other contributing factors (poverty, high rate of ELs, etc.)?

The school profile data cited above indicates that the district has very low rates of students who are English learners or who are economically disadvantaged. Staff were consistent in their reporting that the contributing factors to the high rate of eligibility lie not with these other factors but rather with the lack of tiered interventions (available and being utilized) and inadequate instructional support teams.

Consultants' Perspectives

Factors contributing to the high rate of eligibility are as follows:

- Lack of tiered interventions
- Inconsistent use of instructional support teams (IST)
- Perspective and implementation of Section 504
- Underuse and/or Lack of Familiarity by staff of District Curriculum Accommodation Plan
- Parental Pressure and Lack of Confidence by Staff

Related to the lack of tiered interventions is the inconsistency of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) throughout the district. This is significant because staff across all roles and levels reported that more students are presenting with social-emotional and behavioral concerns than ever before.

Possible deficits in the curriculum, parental pressure, lack of available interventions outside of special education, gaps in foundational skills, and a lack of resources were all cited during staff interviews as reasons why students may end up with an IEP, rather than as a result of a strong eligibility determination process.

Recommendations for High Rate of Eligibility

- Wilmington will need to build on the IST processes that are currently in place and proving to be effective. The process should be expanded to all schools. There will need to be consistent expectations on the process and data collection, including norms for paperwork, requirements for staff participation, and the regularity or frequency of the IST meeting times. There will need to be a clear expectation that interventions are attempted and data is collected for a period of 6-8 weeks before moving on to the next step, whether that be additional interventions or a referral for a special education eligibility evaluation.
- In addition to refining and implementing the instructional support team approach, the district will need to first catalog and then expand its offerings of tiered interventions. To support this effort, it is recommended that the District explore professional development opportunities on the Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Additional information is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/>, including information about the 2019-2020 MTSS Academies.
- During the 2019-2020 school year, all staff should participate in professional development about the DCAP, as well as an overview of the special education eligibility process. The DCAP provides interventions and accommodations that are available and important for all students. Remind staff that they have expertise

in their various areas (education, related services) and need to be confident making data-informed decisions even when a parent may not agree. It may be valuable to offer parent training courses so that families can develop a better understanding of special education laws and regulations and the requirements to which school districts must adhere.

- As part of the District's efforts to update the Section 504 Procedures Manual, more consistency will need to be established in terms of who the designated 504 Coordinator is in each building is. In addition, training on Section 504 process and procedures will help ensure that staff are familiar with that process and understand that a Section 504 plan is not a consolation prize for when a student does not qualify for an IEP. Rather, there are many instances where a referral for a 504-eligibility determination is an appropriate starting point.

Focus Area #2: Special Education Programming - Services and Settings

Critical Questions

Looking at the continuum of settings and array of services, what is the effectiveness of the District's special education programming?

- a. What is the adequacy and appropriateness of staffing and professional development within and across the settings?
- b. What is the consistency of academic and social-emotional-behavioral approaches within and across settings?
- c. What is the impact of School Leadership on level of supports available for students?

Current Status

This focus area examines the effectiveness of Wilmington's special education programming, looking at the continuum of settings and the array of services across the district. In addition to related services and inclusion classrooms throughout the district, there are substantially separate programs in every building, each dedicated to supporting students with various disabilities and needs.

Specialized Programming by Disability - District Wide

	Early Childhood	Elementary Grades 1-3	Intermediate Grades 4-5	Middle School	High School
Disability Category					
Autism/ ABA program	Compass	Pathways	Pathways	Strides	Strides
Specific Learning Disability	Language Based	Language Based	Language Based	Language Based	Language Based
Social Emotional Impairment	Stepping Stones	Stepping Stones (Shawsheen) Stages (Woburn)	Stepping Stones (West) Stages (North)	Student Support Transitions	Evolutions

Intellectual, Neurological, Health, Other				Life Skills	Life Skills Post Grad
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In addition to these specialized programs, the district is also providing students with disabilities the opportunity to be educated in the general education environment whenever possible. Classroom observations and interviews provided a good picture of the district’s current inclusive practices. Per report of staff, there was an effort to increase inclusion in Wilmington a few years back under a previous superintendent and an Inclusion Task Force was established. Staff were provided with training in Universal Design for Learning. Some staff suggested that the community at large is still not in favor of inclusion and that parents and staff could increase their understanding LRE (least restrictive environment). Based upon feedback during interviews, it is clear that staff are looking for more clarity about what is expected in terms of inclusion and are very interested in professional development opportunities on topics such as co-teaching, inclusive practices and UDL. It was suggested that ongoing and a collaborative professional development with special education and general education teachers would be valuable. The District will receive support and ongoing professional development on inclusive practices through the RADAR grant/SEEM Collaborative, which includes support from inclusion coaches and mentors.

This section is organized by level and program and is informed by classroom observations, staff interviews, and review of the data provided by the district. The middle school was suggested to be the area of greatest concern and is therefore discussed first in this section.

I. Settings at the Middle School

The middle school has the following programs: Language Based, Life Skills, Strides, Student Support, Transitions, and Learning Centers. The middle school is divided into three houses (Explorer, Discovery, and Challenger) and each house has students in grades 6, 7, and 8. The special education programs are spread out throughout the building and across the houses. The percentage of students with disabilities at the middle school is 20.4% and the rate of students with disabilities in 7th grade is even higher, at a rate of 22%. Program alignment was cited during staff interviews as an area of weakness, along with program descriptions lacking clarity and unclear entry and exit criteria.

Language-Based

The language-based program is a substantially separate program for students with language based learning disabilities. Depending on the needs of the students, there are opportunities to participate in the general education classrooms for content areas and

electives. The language-based program has four classrooms - one 6th grade, two 7th grade, and one 8th grade. The 6th and 7th grade classes are part of Explorer and the 8th grade language-based classroom is in Discovery. There are four special education teachers that are part of the language-based program at the Middle School. Currently the students across the grade levels do not commingle; rather they are grouped by grade level. According to staff interviews, the language-based program was started approximately 20 years ago by staff that are still working at the middle school.

All three language based classrooms at the middle school were observed. The program is well staffed across all grade levels. In terms of specific student/staffing ratios at the time of the observation, the data is as follows: The grade 6 classroom included 2 adults and 3 students. There are 17 students in the two grade 7 language-based classrooms. The first 7th grade language-based classroom consists of 3 staff members - a special education teacher, a educational assistant, and a 1:1 aide. The second 7th grade classroom included 8 students, one special educator and one educational assistant. There were 7 students in this room at the time of observation. The 8th grade language-based classroom included 6 students at the time of the visit, along with a special education teacher and an educational assistant.

Upon observation, the three classrooms were quiet and the students were engaged in different activities (whole group read aloud in one, reading articles for comprehension using Read Naturally in another, and annotating an article on laptops in the third). Technology was present in the three classrooms visited, although not necessarily being used at the time of the observation. Physically, the three classroom environments varied but all were somewhat visually unappealing (disorganized, cluttered, lacking color). The daily agenda, learning objectives, classroom expectations, monthly calendar and homework assignments were not consistently posted in these language-based classrooms.

During interviews with staff from the middle school programs, it was suggested that many of the students in the current language-based program are somewhat misplaced. Staff felt that the students do not all have language-based learning disabilities but rather a variety of disabilities including intellectual impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder. This was suggested to be tied to the merging of language based and life skills students in the grade 4 and 5 programs. A concern was also noted that the current model is not a true middle school model and should be reconfigured so that the students are not spending the school day isolated among same grade level peers.

Learning Centers

There are 9 learning center classrooms at the middle school - one per grade, per house. The total staffing for the learning centers is 6 special educators and 3 educational assistants. Each grade level has 2 special educators and one educational assistant staffing the learning centers. In each house, one of the special education teachers supports students in inclusion. During interviews some staff shared a concern about IEP service delivery as a result of the staffing configuration.

Life Skills

During an observation in the Life Skills classroom, there were 5 adults and 5 students in the room. The adults included the special education teacher, a nurse, a speech and language pathologist, and two 1:1 aides. One student was missing on the day observed. The students in the program have a variety of disabilities and needs and many of them are medically involved. The classroom space was clean and had nice dividers and work carrels to carve out different work areas. There were two teacher desks and one large table with 5 chairs where 3 of the students were working with the teacher. There were a lot of visuals posted on the walls including a daily calendar and the schedule for all of the students. The Picture Exchange Communication system was being used and there was evidence of the Zones of Regulation curriculum also being used in the classroom. There was also evidence of technology in the classroom including an iPad and desktop computers (although these were not in use).

Strides

The Strides program is a substantially separate setting for students on the autism spectrum. At the middle school, the program spans the three grades with one teacher and two educational assistants. There is also a 1:1 aide. There are currently 6 students assigned to the program but based upon various circumstances there are 4 students regularly in attendance in the program. The students spend the majority of the day in the substantially separate setting but are integrated into art classes and other general education and elective classes as appropriate for each individual student. There was little evidence of ABA methodology or any other specific curriculum being used in the classroom. Similarly, data collection was not observed.

Student Support

Student Support Services is a substantially separate specialized program for students with social/emotional and behavioral challenges. There is one lead special education teacher and an educational tutor. The middle school psychologist and social worker both support students in this program. Per report of staff, there are 11 students attached to the program and they spend the majority of their time in the general education classrooms (inclusion) with push in support as needed. The classroom space includes a chill out space for students, as well as a small office attached to the classroom. The current model is more of a learning center model so that students who are able to spend the day in an inclusion setting do so and come into the Student Support Services room for a period of learning center time. Other students may spend up to the full school day in the room if they are dysregulated or having other social/emotional challenges. All of the students in the program receive counseling from either the social worker or school psychologist who are both building based at the middle school.

When asked about the program, staff described a need for a clear social emotional curriculum to be used across both the middle and high schools. It was suggested that this would help with transitions from one program into the next. It was also felt that the program is still somewhat undefined and requires some ironing out of roles and responsibilities. There is a lack of clarity around the provision of direct instruction to students who end up needing to spend the majority of their time in the program. The

expectation is that students who are spending a lot of their time in the Student Support Services classroom are able to receive direct instruction in the program; although it appears that program staff feel challenged to do so. Providing direct instruction is more in line with what the high school does. Staff indicated that PBIS is not in place at the middle school but would likely result in decreased behaviors if it were happening.

Transitions

The Transitions program is another program for students presenting with social/emotional impairments. Per teacher report, the goal of the program is to focus on emotional regulation and help the students develop coping strategies. There are currently 8 students across grades 6 -8 with one lead teacher and two educational assistants. The students were described as students with anxiety or high functioning autism. These students typically are on grade level with average or above average academic abilities but struggle with transitioning. In contrast to the students in the Student Support Services program, students in Transitions were described to have more internalizing behaviors (fearfulness, social withdrawal, somatic complaints). The students are included in the general education environment for their academics and come into the Transitions room similar to a learning center model. If they are struggling, students may spend longer periods of time in the Transitions classroom. When the students are in the general education environment, they are supported by either the teacher (grade 6 students) or the educational assistants (grades 7 and 8). Students in this program receive individual counseling and/or participate in a social skills group with the school psychologist.

Inclusion at the Middle School

As described above, students in every specialized program have the opportunity to participate in content area courses and electives in inclusion classrooms. Educational assistants or special education teachers when in inclusion classrooms typically support students from the programs. The first inclusion classroom visited was a social studies class. 1 general education teacher and 1 special education teacher staffed this classroom. There were 20 students, one of whom had an IEP. The classroom was large with the agenda on the board and homework assignments and upcoming tests also listed on the board. There were colorful posters and student work exhibited around the room. The students were studying religions of the world and they were quiet and engaged, listening to a recording of a man's voice reading information. The students read along with the worksheet on their desks. One teacher was sitting at a table with students and the special educator was walking around checking in with students. In the second social studies inclusion classroom observed, there were 2 adults (1 general educator and 1 inclusion support educational assistant). There were 22 students in the class and 5 of the students had IEPs. In a third inclusion classroom, there were three staff (general education teacher, special education teacher and an educational assistant) with 21 students. Ten of the students in the classroom have IEPs but not necessarily all of them have goals that would be worked on in that particular class. This was a great lesson where the students were engaged and the goal of the lesson was clear and all of the students knew what they were to be working on. The three staff members circulated the room and supported the students.

Interviews with staff suggested that although special educators and special education educational assistants support students with IEPs in inclusion ELA, Math, Social Studies and Science, it is inconsistent in terms of what this looks like. The inclusion classes are often the largest with high numbers (up to 50%) of students with IEPs. Staff report that there is no time for co-planning. Teachers' talk informally, during lunch or between classes but there is no formal time carved out to plan lessons or discuss the content or curriculum. According to staff, inclusion is occurring and students with IEPs are included in general education classes; however, some staff indicated that there is not a lot of differentiated instruction happening. Staff suggested that it worked better previously when there were no inclusion science or social studies classes.

Through information obtained during interviews with staff, one challenge to co-planning is the teacher's schedule. Currently, teachers and students start their work/school day at the same time. As a result, there is no time built into the school day for additional prep, planning and consultation time.

II. Settings at the High School

The high school has the following programs: Evolutions, Language Based, Strides, Life Skills, and Post Grad. There are also Learning Centers and Inclusion classes.

Evolutions:

The Evolutions program is a substantially separate program for students with emotional impairments who have difficulty accessing academics because of their social/emotional challenges. The program staffing consists of 2 special education teachers, 2 educational assistants, and a social worker. The program has been growing in numbers recently and currently has 16 students. Staff indicated that the Evolutions program at the High School merges the Student Support and Transitions program from the Middle School.

Despite being considered a substantially separate program, none of the students actually spend the entire school day in that setting. All students go out to the general education environment for their electives and for science, with support from Evolutions staff. The students have access to the program at any time and can bring their work into the Evolutions classrooms whenever they need to.

During interviews, it was reported by staff that there is no specific social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum used in the program but rather social emotional supports are provided based upon the needs of the students. The focus is on problem solving, self-esteem development, and inventory checks. The students can also receive academic support in the program. The Evolutions social worker is full time and this was reported by many staff to be a very positive aspect of the program. The social worker supports the program by providing individual counseling, family work, crisis intervention, skill-building and working with outside agencies. Distinct from the program, the high school also has a school psychologist, social worker, and a team of guidance counselors. Staff

in the program reported that it is working well currently although there can be gaps in staffing when students are in crisis.

Language Based:

During observations at the high school, one language-based classroom was observed, as well as an inclusion class with students from the language-based program. The language-based classroom setting was substantially separate and the space was very small with no visuals on the walls. There were no learning or lesson objectives stated, no daily schedule posted, and no homework or assignments posted on the board. The staff were friendly and welcoming to the students and it was evident that there was a nice rapport between the students and teachers. The door to the classroom was open and the noise from the hallway was distracting. The subject was math inequalities and the two teachers were working together teaching the class. Students were provided with a worksheet to follow along. The majority of students appear to be paying attention and engaged in the lesson but one student was playing a video game on his cell phone. The lesson was somewhat disorganized and at one point the wrong answer was provided to students, causing some confusion. It was not evident that there had been co-planning for the lesson although the teachers attempted to support each other and explain the concept in different ways.

Students from the language-based program were also observed in an inclusion class. There were 2 staff members in the classroom (general educator and special educator) and 13 students. The classroom teacher was circulating the room to check in with students and provide help when needed. The special educator had to leave at one point to accompany a student who left the room.

Life Skills:

The Life Skills program is a substantially separate program for medically involved students and students with a high level of need, such as students with hearing impairments, physical impairments, and intellectual impairments. This year, the program has 2 cohorts of students. The program works closely with the Strides program and some of the Life Skills students move between the Life Skills and the Strides program. This is the first year with this model, which was adopted to address the differing level of need of the students in Life Skills.

The highlights of this model were cited to be that the higher functioning students in the Life Skills program switch back and forth between the two programs and two different teachers and therefore have more of a typical high school experience moving around the building. The ability to flexibly group students based upon level of need was also considered a benefit of this combined approach. A lack of consistency between the two programs and two classroom settings was noted. Staff reported that the two different physical spaces can also create logistical challenges. It was noted that there is no common planning time between the staff in these programs.

During an observation of the Life Skills program during the ELA block, the program special education teacher and 4 additional adults were observed in the room, supporting

a total of 4 students. Three of the adults were 1:1 aides, designated to support specific students. The students in the room during the observation had severe disabilities and medically involved. There were wheelchairs, walkers and crutches in the room to support student movement. The classroom is a large room with groupings of tables and desktop computers along the back walls although none were in use and they appeared outdated. There was no daily schedule or objectives posted and there was no calendar. There were very limited visuals around the room. The 1:1 aides were observed communicating with the students using sign language and picture cards and one was scribing for a student.

Strides:

The Strides program is a substantially separate ABA program at the high school. The students in this program have a primary disability category of Autism. A special education teacher and an educational assistant staff the ABA program. There are currently 2 students in the program. The teacher uses ABA across her class as a methodology and the program receives support from a district wide BCBA on a regular basis. The program uses the ACE curriculum. One challenge to this program that was noted by staff is the high level of turnover in the educational assistants.

Post Grad

This program is for students 18-22 years old who are juniors and seniors at the high school. The focus of the program is for students to acquire life skills, participate in the community, and to keep up with academics with the goal of passing MCAS. The staffing for the post-grad program is one teacher and 2 educational assistants. The program teacher spends time connecting with area businesses and developing internships for the students. The juniors in the program go out into the community once per week and the seniors are in the community working twice per week. There are also monthly field trips to places such as the supermarket, the library and the bank. As described by staff, this program typically serves students from the Life Skills program and is more frequently recommended as an option for students from other programs who are looking for a 5th year of high school. It was suggested during interviews with staff at the high school that this program might need to expand work opportunities for students with other profiles such as students from the language-based program.

A topic that was raised and tangentially related to the post grad program, is the lack of a designated transition specialist in the district. This position was reportedly tried out for one year but then cut from the budget.

Learning Centers

Two of the High School Learning Centers were observed. In the first, there was one teacher and two students. It was a small room with visuals and posters displayed and the schedule for the day posted on the whiteboard. The assignments for all teachers were neatly listed and student work was hung up around the room. The learning center model is such that the students can get help in areas where needed or make up missed quizzes or assignments. The second Learning Center observed included one teacher and 6 students in grades 9, 10 and 11 at the time of the visit. It was a small classroom

with desks set up around the room. There was no schedule or assignments posted. There was a small calendar in the room but it was very hard to see. The room was quiet and all of the students were working on different things while the teacher was supporting one student with an essay revision.

Inclusion

According to high school staff, inclusion started a few years ago when students from special education programs were put into mainstream classes. Students are supported in the general education classroom with the support of a special education teacher or educational assistant (EA). There is no consistency or clarity around when the student is supported by one staff member versus another (teacher or EA). Staff did report that having the additional adult support in the room is very helpful and makes it easier to check in with students who need it. Content area teachers indicated that they struggle with differentiation of instruction. Teachers suggested that although the special educator or EA helps, it really depends on the staff members' mastery of the content area. It was reported that sometimes, the special education teacher defaults to acting as an educational assistant because there is confusion about roles, responsibilities and what co-teaching should look like. Staff indicated that there is currently no common planning time and that educational assistants are regularly pulled to cover other areas (based upon staff absences, student need, etc.). Teachers felt that over time, the classroom dynamic between the two adults becomes more effective, however, staff were unified in their feeling that the lack of time for co-planning and inconsistency in staffing are barriers. To the limited extent communication and planning happens, it is during lunch, and other times that teachers create such opportunities. One person reported that they found out who their educational assistant was the same day that they met the students on the first day of school and had no time to discuss in advance the units of study, classroom management style, and how they want to structure their co-teaching relationship. In this regard, staff expressed wanting professional development around co-teaching, inclusive practices, and what the relationship between the general educator and the special educator/educational assistant should look like. Along with providing staff with common planning time and planning inclusion staffing thoughtfully, teachers felt it would be very helpful to have professional development with the educational assistants so that everyone receives the same information at the same time.

Finally, during interviews at the high school, staff mentioned that the educational assistants are not provided with any school device (laptop, iPad) by the district. Although they are given Google email accounts and Aspen accounts, they are not able to access grading information or Google classroom because they do not have devices. This was stated as a concern because all of the students use Google Classroom and because it also makes it difficult for email communication between EAs and teachers or special education liaisons.

III. PreK and Elementary Programs

Not all of the special education programs at the PreK and elementary level were observed, but the breakdown of programs is outlined below along with a general overview of the programs and information as provided by staff during interviews:

School	Specialized Program
Boutwell Early Childhood	Stepping Stones Early Childhood Integrated
Wildwood Early Childhood	Compass Early Childhood Integrated
Shawsheen Elementary	Pathways Stepping Stones Language Based
Woburn Street Elementary	Stages Language Based
West Intermediate	Pathways Stepping Stones Language Based
North Intermediate	Stages Language Based

General Overview

Steppingstones

Stepping Stones is a substantially separate program for students with social/emotional disabilities and behavioral challenges. At the early childhood level, this program is in its third year and is housed at Boutwell. There is one special educator and two students assigned to the program. Last year there were more students and an educational assistant but the program is smaller this year. The staff from the program feel that it is well supported. A district-wide BCBA provides consultation to Steppingstones on a weekly basis. In the classroom, the students work on social skills and a social thinking curriculum is in place. This curriculum has been shared with all of the pre-K and kindergarten classes in the building. Home/School communication sheets and token boards are also in place to support the students.

At the Elementary level this program moves up to Shawsheen Elementary. The program at Shawsheen has also been in place for three years and includes students in grades 1st through 3rd. There are currently 6 students in the program, and one lead special

educator and 3 educational assistants. All of the students in the program receive counseling and participate in social thinking groups. Per program staff report there is no specific social emotional learning curriculum in place. Staff indicated that they follow the same curriculum that is being done in the general education classrooms, including Reader's and Writer's Workshop and the Envisions math curriculum. The goal is for students to spend the majority of their time in an inclusion setting where they are supported by staff from Stepping Stones. The students are all in the Stepping Stones classroom together for the morning meeting afternoon check-in.

The program moves up to West Intermediate School for grades 4 and 5. At this level a special educator and an educational assistant staff the program. There are 6 students tied to the program this year. Staff reported that there is no set social-emotional curriculum established by the district of which they are aware.. Students in the program at West also receive counseling and social skills from the school psychologist and the district wide BCBA provides consultation twice per month.

In general, staff from the program in all three buildings shared that they are not sure of the vision of the program and have not seen a program description. Entry and exit criteria were not known. The program has grown quickly in the short time and staff across the buildings have not had the opportunity to collaborate in terms of curriculum and programming.

Compass/Pathways

The district has programming for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at every level. The early childhood program is called Compass and is located at the Wildwood Early Childhood Center. The elementary programs are called Pathways and are located at Shawsheen and West.

At West, the ABA program in its current form is new this year. This year 3 adults - one lead special education teacher, an educational assistant and a 1:1 aide, staff the program. There are three students in the program currently. They leave the substantially separate setting for lunch, recess and specials (art, music, etc.). The district's BCBA supports the program through monthly consultation. The program is using the ACE curriculum, which is new this year. Staff really like it and would like continued training on it. The Pathways space at West consists of a large classroom and another connected room used for related services.

Language-Based

Although the language-based program at Woburn was not observed, the program at West was observed during one of the on-site visits. The classroom had West had 7 students full time and one more who comes down for reading support. In addition to the lead special educator, there is one educational assistant. The classroom space was visually appealing with a lot of visuals on the wall, including a word wall, classroom expectations, and positive quotes. Classroom staff articulated the need for support and guidance around expectations for the program and wanted input from other language-based teachers in the District.

Early Childhood Integrated

This the full day integrated preschool classroom was comprised of 4 adults (two teachers, two educational assistants) and 11 students. Of these students, 3 of them have IEPs. Upon arrival into the room, the students were engaged in centers (shape blocks, kitchen, doll house/family, manipulatives) and then transitioned to read a book on the rug. The students appeared engaged in the activities, familiar with the classroom routines, and happy in their learning environment. The curriculum was described as rigorous and Foundations and OWL were both mentioned as curriculum currently being used. The Ed Assistants are with the students all day as well as lunch, recess, and specials. One of the adults in the room was from the Stepping Stones program. Students do not attend school on Fridays, so staff at the Early Childhood Center have more opportunities for planning and teaming that other buildings.

Stages

The Stages program is in partnership with McLean Hospital. McLean organizes workshops and trainings, including on Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and review of case studies. Staff indicated that Stages is not working very well this year. This may be in part due to the fact there are new staff in the classroom this year. There is one teacher, one educational assistant and 3 students currently making up the Stages program. The profile of the student in the Stages program is the highly anxious student who in some cases may have experienced hospitalization. This is not a substantially separate program but rather a program to support students with check ins and skill training and the support of educational assistants in the general education setting.

Consultants' Perspectives

In recent years, Wilmington has expanded its special education programming capacity based on the needs of the students. In addition to creating new programs to address the changing needs of its student population, Wilmington has started to provide more inclusion opportunities for students. Significant changes in leadership over the last five years - at the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Student Services, and building principal level – has likely impacted the District's efforts with program development.

What is the consistency of academic and social-emotional-behavioral approaches within and across settings?

Consistency in terms of academic and social-emotional-behavioral approaches is lacking both within school buildings and across settings. This was evident from data obtained during observations and interviews. In many ways the different settings feel like they are operating in silos and there is no clear K-12 alignment in terms of special education programming, (refer to the chart on page 17). The language-based program is the exception as it does run from Elementary through Middle and High School and is consistently referred to as the language based program. The autism program exists in grades Pre-K through High School but there are three different names for the program

as it moves up through the levels (Compass, Pathways, and Strides). The substantially separate settings for students with social/emotional disabilities is disjointed in terms of district alignment. Stepping Stones is the program in place Pre-K through grade 5. The second social/emotional program at North Intermediate, Stages, does not have a designated program that feeds into it from elementary grades 1-3. Although there is a Life Skills program at the Middle and High Schools, there is no similar program at the Elementary level. There used to be a Reach program but this was closed due to under-enrollment.

The programming in Wilmington has a solid foundation, particularly because there are programs available for students who present with language based learning disabilities, autism, and social/emotional impairments. The data suggests that these disability areas are where there is the greatest need for strong programming options. In addition to these specialized programs, the Life Skills and Post Grad programs provide further supports and services for students based upon their disabilities and level of need. Data provided by Wilmington indicates that the number of students who are placed out of district has decreased over between 2015-2019. This may be attributable in part to the expansion in programming over the last few years.

A highlight in Wilmington is that many students with disabilities have the opportunity to spend part of the school day in inclusive settings. However, the district has not yet clearly articulated what best inclusionary practices look like. It is evident that although the district is moving toward inclusion, there is not yet a district-wide commitment or clear vision to support this move. Staff are seeking professional development about co-teaching and inclusive practices and would like more opportunities for collaboration and co-planning between general educators and special educators/educational assistants.

There are a lot of programming strengths in Wilmington as well as areas for continued growth, both in the specialized substantially separate programs and in the inclusion settings. The specific recommendations outlined below will support such growth.

What is the adequacy and appropriateness of staffing and professional development within and across the settings?

In terms of the adequacy and appropriateness of staffing, there is wide variability. Highlights in this area include the addition of a full time clinician to the Evolutions program at the high school. This was cited by multiple staff to be a very positive and necessary addition to the program.

The current staffing in the middle school Learning Center may present a compliance issue. This should be examined in terms of ensuring that all IEP services are being delivered consistent with student IEPs. One idea to address this would be to reconfigure scheduling and staffing so that staff are providing services, in compliance with each student's IEP. Another possible solution would be to hire additional staff to ensure that all students have access to a special educator while in the learning center.

There were also concerns raised about the district's use of 1:1 paraprofessionals. Based upon interviews with staff, it would seem that the use of 1:1 paras is not efficient or appropriate. Multiple staff suggested that there is an overuse of 1:1 paraprofessionals and no accountability for the process to determine whether a student requires additional adult support. In addition, concerns were noted about the absence of protocols for developing a fading plan so that the 1:1 adult support is appropriately faded as the student no longer requires that high level of support, and to foster student independence and decrease reliance on adult support. Shared adult support through educational assistants were noted by staff to be a more appropriate way to support students across settings.

The variability in the use of educational assistants is an area of confusion and there is room in this domain to increase consistency in terms of how educational assistants are used to support students in inclusion classrooms and across all settings. Increased opportunities for co-planning and shared professional development will support the adequacy and appropriateness of the use of the educational assistants across the district.

When asked about the adequacy and appropriateness of professional development, staff had a lot to say, including many positives. Some staff noted that professional development has really improved in recent years and there are more PD opportunities than before, including opportunities for educational assistants to receive quality professional development. The professional development provided by Allan Blume was highlighted by staff as a valuable PD opportunity and helpful to the work. As will be discussed more in Focus Area 3, the Team Chairs currently provide professional development opportunities for staff through Wilmington University. The district BCBA's provide Safety Care training, although challenges were cited such as scheduling and a lack of engagement by staff.

Scheduling and lack of engagement by staff were consistently mentioned as challenges to professional development in Wilmington. There are currently 4 half days scheduled for professional development over the entire school year. There are staggered start times in the district and therefore scheduling district wide professional development is difficult. In addition, staff start and end the school day at the same time as the students so there are no opportunities for mandatory before or after school professional development. This is not true at the Early Childhood Centers where the staff have time in their day where the students are not in the building. Special education staff mentioned that they are looking for the next level of professional learning opportunities. These staff cited wanted tangible interventions and the ability to leave professional development with something to bring back to the school and share with colleagues.

Staff reported wanting additional professional development on the following topics: the DCAP, Social and Emotional Learning, Co Teaching, Inclusive Practices, Supporting Students with Anxiety and ADHD, Prompting, Special Ed 101 (compliance timelines, Dos/Don'ts at a Team Meeting, understanding fiscal implication of decision-making,

etc.), and working with students who have experienced trauma. This last one was specifically noted as important for general education teachers and administrators.

What is the impact of School Leadership on level of supports available for students?

In their interviews, many school staff shared a common perspective that Principals and Assistant Principals are not providing leadership for special education and student services in the schools. The staff described this as not taking ownership or not making the necessary investments of time and energy in the special education services and settings in their buildings. Some staff reported feeling that the building leaders have not supported them, and this was especially true of staff that are new to the district in a special education program. It appears there may be an over-reliance by school administrators on the Director of Student Support Services to be on call to address special education and student services challenges and respond to student emergencies.

This circumstance often develops when school administrators have not had sufficient education and/or experience in delivering services and managing settings for students with disabilities. This can also occur when Principals, Assistant Principals, Department Heads, and Deans are not provided access to appropriate expert consultant/advisors in such specialized areas as special education, student services, Tiered Systems of Support, and Universal Design for Learning.

These program management and service delivery shortcomings can be exacerbated by a lack of organizational support, specifically a lack of adequate and appropriate structures and processes to support the complex work of special education and student services

Recommendations for Focus Area #2: Special Education Programming - Services and Settings

- Update program descriptions across the district:
 - Ideally this will be a collaborative process with efforts led by the Student Support Services and input from program staff.
 - For each program, have staff from each school where the program is located, come together for planning and consultation. This will further K-12 alignment across the various special education substantially separate programs.
 - It will be important once the program descriptions are in place to make sure all staff in the buildings, including building administrators, are familiar with the programs and understand entry and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum, and supports available to students in each program.

- Build on the PBIS structures currently in place in the district and use with fidelity. Expand the District's capacity in terms of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Identify a district wide SEL curriculum that can support all students. One great resource is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) <https://casel.org/>, as well as the MA DESE information page on Social and Emotional Learning in Massachusetts <http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/SEL/>. Identifying a consistent SEL curriculum will also be very important for the social/emotional and behavioral programs in the District.
- The language-based program at the middle school has a solid foundation but the program needs to be updated to meet the specific needs of students with language-based learning disabilities. The classroom environments should be thoughtfully arranged, with more evidence of the learning objectives and daily/weekly schedules posted to support students with executive functioning and planning issues. It is important to use multi-sensory approaches used throughout the school day, along with evidence-based reading and writing instruction. Lessons should be highly structured with tasks broken down into smaller parts, with a lot of repetition and review of concepts. It would be beneficial to explore whether it would work to have class configurations that are not simply grade based but arranged to match a middle school model as this was noted by staff in the program.
- Review Learning Center staffing to ensure that services are being delivered consistent with student IEPs.
- The ABA programs (Compass/Pathways/Strides) have a solid foundation but will be improved upon through the consistent use of an established evidence-based curriculum, ABA methodology used throughout the school day by ABA trained staff, as well as consistent and ongoing consultation by a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst. Continued use of ACE curriculum with fidelity is recommended. Students exhibiting behaviors should continue to have Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) in place, along with program books for each student to maintain data on student behaviors and progress toward goals. The ABA programs should continue to maintain consistent data collection practices to monitor student progress.
- Review data and gather staff input from the High School Life Skills/Strides programs to determine whether the arrangement in place during the 2018-2019 school year should continue. From this consultant's perspective, the current model appears to have some strengths as well as some challenges. The primary concern to continuing this model is that the staff involved do not have the opportunity for co-planning and there is no consistent collaboration happening between the two programs.

- Develop three levels of organizational support for special education and student services – direct services, school leadership/management, and district policy/leadership.
- Provide programs of informational and transformational professional development for school administrators in matters relating to students with disabilities and students with significant school-related challenges, and the research-based approaches to meeting these challenges.
- Provide expert consultation/advisories for school administrators in specific areas of work, for example:
 - Academic curricula, instruction and supports in specialized settings
 - Social-emotional learning curricula and instruction
 - Social-emotional-behavioral interventions, supports, and services
 - Integration of students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers
 - Trauma sensitive practices
 - Positive school climate
 - Positive professional development, support, and supervision
- Related to Focus Area #1, provide school administrators with support in implementing Tiered Systems of Support and Universal Design for Learning so that the needs of all students can be met, without an over reliance on special education.
- Review DESE Technical Assistance Advisory SPED 2014-3, Identifying the Need for Paraprofessional Support (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/advisories/2014-3ta.html>) and develop a district protocol and procedures for identifying the need for additional adult support and for creating and monitoring fading plans.

Focus Area # 3: Organizational Support

Critical Question

1. How adequate and appropriate are the following:
 - a. District level and school level support for special education settings and services.
 - i. Capacity of Department of Student Support Services given the areas of responsibility and current staffing
 - b. Teaming and Time
 - c. Supervision and Expert Consultation (is it happening?)
 - d. Communication and Collaboration

Current Status

I. District Level Support - Capacity of Department of Student Support Services

The Student Support Services Department in Wilmington is composed of the following positions at the district-wide level:

- Director of Student Support Services
- Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support
- 4 IEP Team Chairs
- 3 District School Psychologists
- 2 Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs)
- Special Education Curriculum Team Leader (CTL) - Grades 6-12 (.5 position)

In addition to these central office staff, there are special education teachers, school psychologists, related service providers, social workers and school adjustment counselors who work in the school buildings across the district. Of significance, it was shared that the district approved and budgeted for another administrator position to join the Student Support Services department. The position is currently projected to be a full time Special Education Coordinator. It is anticipated that this role will support all the work that the Director is currently responsible for. Another change for the 2019-2020 school year is the elimination of the .5 Special Education Curriculum Team Leader (grades 6-12).

Director of Student Support Services

The Director of Student Support Services is a position that has grown in the last few years. Previously, the position was called Director of Special Education. In addition to overseeing all special education programming and services in the district, the Director of Student Support Services is also responsible for Guidance/Counseling, Behavioral Health, Section 504, Early Childhood, Bullying/Harassment, Civil Rights (including Title IX), Medicaid Facilitation, Home and Hospital Tutoring, and CPR/Tiered Focus Monitoring for the District. The current Director is the third person in this role in the last

five years. The Director position and the Coordinator of Behavioral Health are the only two administrator positions within the Student Support Services Department. The Team Chairs, School Psychologists, BCBAs, and the Special Education CTL are part of Unit A (teacher's contract). One implication of this is that there are limited Student Support Services staff who are responsible for supervision and evaluation of special education and related services staff. Currently, building based principals and assistant principals are the primary evaluators of the special education staff in their buildings.

During interviews, some staff directly stated that they feel the Director another administrator to support the role given how vast it is. During this program evaluation, the Director of Student Support Services was observed to be pulled in many different directions and regularly responding to crisis situations. The current configuration of the Student Support Services department and the responsibilities that fall under the Director position, result in the Director having to spend a lot of time reacting to situations, rather than being able to be proactive with planning and program development.

Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support

This position has been in the district for three years. The current Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support has been in this role for two years. The position focuses on the social/emotional and behavioral needs of students and includes supporting clinical staff, leading SEL initiatives, PBIS and a tiered system of supports. The Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support ("Coordinator") also provides support to the social/emotional programs in the district at all levels, with a particular emphasis on new programming. The Coordinator also focuses on family engagement and works to help families connect with resources. Building-based leaders evaluate clinical staff, with some support from the Coordinator. The Coordinator leads monthly clinical meetings and coordinates professional development for these staff. The Coordinator also attends team meetings as needed.

Through a brief interview with the Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support, this consultant learned that there is an awareness that the district has room to grow in terms of Behavioral and SEL and this is part of the strategic plan for next year. The district recently applied for and was awarded a grant to develop a BRYT program in the district. The first phase will involve data collection and establishing a program at the high school, which will support students returning to school following a hospitalization with the goal to eventually have this program at the middle school as well.

Team Chairs

The four Team Chairs work across the 8 school buildings. The high school has one Team Chair, the middle school has its own Team Chair and the remaining two Team Chairs share the early childhood and elementary schools. Specifically, one Team Chair supports Boutwell, Shawsheen and West Intermediate Schools and the other supports Wildwood, Woburn and North. Ideally Team Chairs will facilitate all initial team meetings and re-evaluation meetings, however it is school dependent in terms of who chairs which types of meetings, and varies based on caseloads and scheduling challenges.

Team Chairs will also facilitate meetings in various other circumstances (review of outside evaluations, manifestation determinations, rejected IEPs, progress meetings, move-in meetings, etc.) and as needed. Each Team Chair also has a caseload of out of district students and they are responsible for chairing all out of district meetings, addressing transportation concerns, and attending emergency meetings for students placed out of district. Special Education Liaisons (special education teachers, school psychologists, and SLPs) chair Annuals and Reevaluation meetings for all students who are not in programs.

During the group interview, the Team Chairs appeared to work collaboratively. They reported that they communicate regularly and help each other cover meetings as needed. In their role facilitating Team meetings, the Team Chairs manage all of their own paperwork, sending out consents and mailing home IEP documentation. They also occasionally review the IEPs developed by Liaisons. The Team Chairs also organize professional development for staff in the district - this is called Wilmington University. Staff attendance is voluntary and per report of the Team Chairs, these sessions are not well attended by staff. Some topics covered in the Fall 2018 Wilmington University included the following: WIAT-Assessment, IEP 101, Mental Health First Aid, eSped 101, Using and Implementing the DCAP, Exploring Mindfulness at the Elementary Level, and Why We Need Trauma Sensitive Schools.

A few challenges with the Team Chair role in its current form were mentioned during staff interviews. One challenge is the confusion around the role by school staff. The team chairs are not administrators but often act in quasi-administrative roles, facilitating difficult meetings and acting as the team member authorized with fiscal responsibility decision-making. The team chairs do not have supervision or evaluation responsibilities but can find themselves in the middle of an issue with school based staff and building administrators. Another such concern cited was managing the in district responsibilities along with the out of district responsibilities. This role requires a lot of travel time and paperwork.

Special Education Curriculum Team Leader (CTL)

There is currently one curriculum team leader for Special Education. The role in its current form is specifically allocated to grades 6-12. There is nothing similar in place for PreK and Elementary. Throughout the program evaluation, this consultant had the opportunity to spend a lot of time visiting the middle and high schools, accompanied by the Special Ed CTL. This person appeared to provide a lot of support for the Director of Student Support Services and was very familiar with the special education programming at the middle and high school.

The Special Ed CTL position also provides support to the Middle and High School principals with the evaluations of special education staff in those buildings. Per report of administration, this position was eliminated at the same time the new special education administrator position was added.

II. School level support for special education settings and services

One area that was highlighted during this program evaluation was the lack of consistency of “social/emotional support staff” (school psychologists, school adjustment counselors, social workers, and guidance counselors) across the district. Upon report from the group of staff interviewed, the breakdown of these staff by school is as follows:

- Boutwell and Wildwood Early Childhood - share one adjustment counselor and one school psychologist
- Woburn - one school psychologist
- Shawsheen - a full time school adjustment counselor that supports the programs
- North - a school guidance counselor
- West - one full time school psychologist
- Middle - 3 school adjustment counselors (one per grade level), a part time social worker shared with the high school, one full time school psychologist (does all the testing)
- High School - 5 school guidance counselors, 2 full time social workers, and a school psychologist
- The 2 district school psychologists support the buildings with testing and counseling for students with IEPs.

This lack of consistency was described as confusing and frustrating by the group of clinical staff. It was mentioned that there is not always clarity about which type of clinical staff works with students on IEPs. As a group they felt that it was confusing for staff, parents and students as they move through the school system to try to understand the different models and range of supports available.

Clinical staff also indicated that they are not aware of current job descriptions for their positions. Although job descriptions do exist per report of Administration, this perception may help explain the confusion and lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of clinical staff. Some of the inconsistency is likely related to the fact that the hiring for these positions is building-based and not done with K-12 alignment in mind. During the interview with these staff, it was evident that as a group, these individuals are not clear on the different social/emotional programs in each building and are not familiar with the staffing and supports available in each program.

The two BCBA's in the district support students in special education programs. There is no designated BCBA to support general education students and provide Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions.

Teaming and Time

The Student Support Services staff meet on a weekly basis. This meeting is organized through a rolling agenda and focuses on hot topics going on in the department, reminders for upcoming events or activities, and reviewing files for compliance. In addition to this weekly meeting, the Director meets individually with the Team Chairs weekly, and with the BCBA's every few weeks. In addition to these scheduled meetings,

additional check ins and consultations occur on a regular basis as needed. The Director and the Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support consult one another on a daily basis and work closely together.

Communication and Collaboration

There were very few complaints about communication and collaboration at the district-wide level (Student Support Services with school-based staff). Additionally, and as mentioned previously in this report, staff in the various special education settings would like the opportunity for more communication and collaboration with colleagues from similar programs across the district.

Among the central office staff in the Student Support Services, there was a strong level of collaboration and support for one another. It was noted that due to the extensive responsibilities of the Director, other central office staff did not always have a lot of time to talk with the Director, but managed to keep her apprised of issues, seek her consultation when needed, and address issues with the group during the weekly Student Support Services meeting.

Consultants' Perspectives on Focus Area #3 - Organizational Support

In looking at the organizational support within the Student Support Services Department a few things are evident. First, there is a high level of respect and collaboration among and within the Student Support Services central office staff and related to this, staff district wide shared appreciation for the work that the Director of Student Support Services and the Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support have been doing the past two school years.

Second, through the course of this program evaluation it appears that the Director position in its current manifestation and with the current support structure in place is not sustainable. Given the breadth of responsibilities that fall under the Director position, having only one other administrator is inadequate to support the special education and other student service needs in Wilmington. An additional special education administrator will support the Director and make the scope of the work more feasible. The addition of this position will provide necessary support for both special education staff and students with disabilities.

The time allotted for teaming and collaboration within this small group of staff is sufficient, especially given that staff within the Student Support Services department are well connected and make time to meet and collaborate outside of designated meeting times.

Supervision and consultation is seemingly inadequate and not appropriate to support the growth of special educators and related service providers in the district. As noted, the current model is that principals evaluate most staff including special education staff. This is necessary as there are only a few administrators from Student Support Services that can perform supervision and evaluation of school staff. The challenge is that the

principals may not be as familiar with the professional standards or job requirements for special education staff.

Recommendations for Focus Area #3: Organizational Support

- A primary recommendation in terms of organizational support is already underway and will be in place for the upcoming 2019-2020 school year – this is the addition of another administrator in the Student Support Services department. It will be important to create a job description for the position and clearly outline the responsibilities of the new Special Education Coordinator.
- Examine the current configuration of the team chair role. Depending on the impact of the added Special Education Coordinator, consider whether the team chair position should also be administrative. The team chair position is made somewhat more challenging by the responsibility for out of district students. Consider whether the creation of a fifth team chair position would support the work more effectively. This position could be designated to support Out of District/Transition and/or Early Childhood.
- Build upon the capacity of building based principals to supervise and evaluate special education staff and identify how special education/student service administrators can help support supervision and evaluation. One idea would be to have an administrator from Student Support Services be a secondary evaluator for all new special education staff and for any special educators/related service providers who have received a needs improvement in one or more standard areas.

Focus Area #4: Student Outcomes

Critical Questions

- a. What is the proficiency and progress of students with disabilities in the areas of academics and social-emotional-behavioral skills?
- b. To understand the effectiveness of Special Education Services in the district, do students exit successfully?

Current Status

Unlike the other focus areas of this program evaluation, there is not an abundance of data to consider for Focus Area #4, Student Outcomes. Anecdotally, staff report that students with learning disabilities and social emotional behavioral challenges are progressing nicely and spending more and more time in inclusion settings by the time they reach graduation. The opportunities for students to spend time in inclusive classrooms has increased which is viewed as a positive by staff. By the end of four years of high school, many students are fully included. Additionally, staff reported that by the end of high school, fewer students are determined eligible for special education. It was mentioned on a few occasions that while staff view students no longer qualifying as a success and a positive, this is not always true for parents. Many times parents are upset with a finding of no eligibility at a three-year reevaluation.

There is limited data to evaluate the proficiency and progress of students with disabilities in the areas of academics and social-emotional-behavioral skills. These areas may be easier to monitor and collect data when some of the programming (program descriptions, entry and exit criteria, etc.) and organizational structure issues are addressed. As mentioned previously, data collection is an area where there is room for improvement in Wilmington.

Other Data Points

Other data points to help assess student outcomes include graduation and dropout rates, student discipline and MCAS scores for students with disabilities. This information was obtained from the MA DESE website. Charts are included below along with a brief summary of the data.

Graduation Data (2018) and Drop out Data (2017-2018)

The data reflected on the chart below illustrates that 96.7% of all of Wilmington's students graduate within 4 years. In the 2018 cohort, there were 39 students with disabilities and 82.1% of these students graduated. Of note is that 5% of students with disabilities in the 2018 cohort dropped out. According to the second chart below, of all of the students in the Wilmington 2017-2018 class, 7 of the students dropped out and 5 of these students were students with disabilities.

Cohort 2018 Graduation Rates

4-Year Graduation Rate (2018)

4-Year Graduation Rate (2018)							
Student Group	# in Cohort	% Graduated	% Still in School	% Non-Grad Completers	% H.S. Equiv.	% Dropped Out	% Permanently Excluded
All Students	242	96.7	1.2	0.8	0.0	1.2	0.0
Male	110	97.3	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0
Female	132	96.2	0.8	1.5	0.0	1.5	0.0
EL	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Students w/ disabilities	39	82.1	7.7	5.1	0.0	5.1	0.0
Low income	40	92.5	2.5	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0
High needs	72	90.3	4.2	2.8	0.0	2.8	0.0
Afr. Amer./Black	8	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Asian	15	93.3	0.0	6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hispanic/Latino	7	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Amer. ind. or Alaska Nat.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White	204	97.1	1.0	0.5	0.0	1.5	0.0
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	7	85.7	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

2017-18 Student Dropout Rate Report

This report provides the percentage of Massachusetts public high school students who drop out of high school. [More about the data.](#)

Dropout rates are not reported for any student group where the number of students is less than 6.

* Click any column header to sort ascending (first click) or descending (second click).

Student Group	# Enrolled Grades 09 through 12	# Dropout All Grades	% Dropout All Grades	% Dropout Grade 09	% Dropout Grade 10	% Dropout Grade 11	% Dropout Grade 12
All Students	861	7	0.8	0.5	0.9	0.5	1.3
High Needs	173	5	2.9	2.3	3.8	2.7	2.4
Economically Disadvantaged	76	3	3.9	4.8	10.0	0.0	0.0
LEP English language learner	4						
Students with disabilities	115	5	4.3	3.3	5.4	4.5	3.8
African American/Black	20	0	0.0				0.0
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1						
Asian	51	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hispanic or Latino	28	1	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	20	0	0.0	0.0			0.0
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1						
White	740	6	0.8	0.6	1.1	0.5	1.0
Female	440	1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Male	421	6	1.4	1.1	1.8	0.9	1.9

2017-2018 Discipline Data

The district's discipline data for the 2017-2018 school year indicates that out of the 3,399 student body population, 86 students were disciplined. The number of students with disabilities in the district at that time was 665 and 37 of these students were disciplined during the 2017-2018 school year. This suggests that the rate of discipline for students with disabilities is slightly higher (0.055) than the rate of all students in the district (0.025). In addition, the chart reflects that students with disabilities had a higher rate of in-school suspensions (3.6) and out-of school suspensions (3.6) than any other population of students.

2017-18 Student Discipline Data Report

All Offenses



Offense:

The Student Discipline Data Report reports the disciplines that public school students in Massachusetts received for the offenses committed, as reported by school districts in the School Safety Discipline Report (SSDR). For more detailed information on the SSDR collection, see the documents at the [School Safety Discipline Report \(SSDR\)](#) page on the ESE website. [More about the data.](#)

Student Group	Students	Students Disciplined	% In-School Suspension	% Out-of-School Suspension	% Expulsion	% Alternate Setting	% Emergency Removal
All Students	3,399	86	1.7	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
English Learner	41	2					
Economically disadvantaged	417	20	3.4	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Students w/disabilities	665	37	3.6	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
High needs	977	49	3.3	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Female	1,672	14	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Male	1,727	72	3.0	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.	4						
Asian	168	0					
Afr. Amer./Black	65	4					
Hispanic/Latino	146	6	2.7	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	108	1					
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	2						
White	2,906	75	1.8	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0

2018 MCAS Data: All Students -Comparison with other districts

For purposes of seeing how Wilmington compares to similar districts (in terms of grades span, total enrollment, and special populations), please refer to the chart below. This illustrates that Wilmington has one of the lowest percentage rates of students either meeting or exceeding expectations on the 2018 Next Gen MCAS (Grades 3-8). Similarly, the percentage of students who were proficient on the 2018 MCAS in the 10th grade is lower than any of the other comparable districts.

Please note that this data is for all students and not separated out by special populations of students. The data separated by subgroups can be found at: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/subgroups2.aspx?linkid=25&orgcode=03420000&fycode=2018&orgtypecode=5&>

Comparable Districts Overview

*Districts most similar to your district in terms of grades span, total enrollment, and special populations.
 Orange-Shaded row: Your district

District Name	2018-19 October Enrollment				2018 Next Gen MCAS				2018 MCAS				
	Total Enrollment #	Eco. Dis. %	SWD %	ELL %	% Meeting or Exceeding Expectations Grades 3-8		Growth average SGP Grades 3-8		% Proficient or higher Grades 5-8-10	% Proficient or higher Grade 10		Growth average SGP Grade 10	
					ELA	Math	ELA	Math		ELA	Math	ELA	Math
Easton*	3,632	12.9	18.3	1.8	63%	66%	55.0	55.0	67%	97%	90%	49.5	42.3
Franklin*	5,198	9.7	18.9	1.6	66%	63%	52.8	50.2	65%	98%	89%	56.8	47.0
Grafton*	3,173	11.8	18.9	1.5	64%	60%	50.4	53.2	68%	94%	84%	50.8	50.1
Hanover*	2,645	8.4	17.8	0.9	61%	58%	50.2	52.5	67%	95%	85%	44.7	44.6
Longmeadow*	2,874	7.0	18.5	0.8	71%	69%	54.7	51.2	71%	98%	92%	48.9	58.1
Marblehead*	3,051	9.4	19.3	4.0	69%	64%	54.4	56.4	74%	98%	91%	46.2	51.0
Marshfield*	4,060	11.8	17.0	1.1	69%	65%	52.9	51.2	65%	97%	87%	54.7	46.8
North Reading*	2,398	7.8	19.4	0.5	69%	68%	55.0	56.9	77%	98%	87%	47.5	42.5
Pentucket*	2,437	12.0	20.5	0.3	49%	38%	45.8	43.3	55%	96%	85%	54.5	53.3
Reading*	4,210	8.3	17.2	1.0	68%	63%	56.5	57.4	68%	96%	87%	33.5	40.2
Wilmington*	3,197	9.2	19.0	0.9	58%	63%	47.2	55.6	50%	92%	86%	53.2	58.1

Consultants' Perspectives

It is important to understand that these measures, available through the State, allow for analyses at the district, school, grade, and categorical levels, but not at the individual student level. Comparisons of MCAS scores are the most common of these.

The comparisons that should be made are those of the individual student's proficiency at particular points in time, and his/her individual progress, or lack of progress over time. We should be reporting on the trajectories of individual students with disabilities and strive to link these individual outcomes to specific inputs (interventions, supports, service) and outputs (amounts and rates of services).

It is also critical to note that some common measures of academic and social-emotional-behavioral change in students actually track the actions of adults rather than the learning of students. Examples of such measures include promotion rates, graduation rates, and dropout rates, and numbers of office discipline referrals, detentions, suspensions, and expulsions. These approaches measure what the adults do and not what the students have accomplished.

Recommendations for Focus Area #4: Student Outcomes

- Establish the criteria for the selection of approaches to measure progress and proficiency in academic and social-emotional learning. Suggested criteria include:
 - Research-based
 - Measures individual student progress and proficiency over time
 - Links to adopted academic and social-emotional curricula
 - Links to the Massachusetts Frameworks and the CASEL Framework core competencies
 - Measures important concrete learning

- Analyze the various measurement approaches and adopt those that meet the criteria that have been established
- Provide professional development, on-going support, and professional supervision in the adopted approaches
- Collect, analyze, utilize, and evaluate the adopted progress and proficiency data in multi-disciplinary teams supported by trained facilitators, with guidance provided by expert consultants

Issues for Further Investigation

In the process of collecting and analyzing data for this report, the Consultants have identified a few issues that exceed the scope of this evaluation, but are closely related to the areas of focus and the recommendations for improvement.

- Academic rigor across special education programming
- Ways to better support students with disabilities as they progress through the district and experience multiple transitions
- Consider the length of the workday for staff and determine how to provide for additional time for co-planning, consultation, and professional development. Adding 15 minutes to each school day for staff to be in the building, either before or after students, may address deficits in these areas.
- Review the district's professional development schedule to determine if it is adequate given district priorities.
- Parent and community understanding and acceptance of disability

Compilation of Recommendations

Recommendations for High Rate of Eligibility

- Wilmington will need to build on the IST processes that are currently in place and proving to be effective. The process should be expanded to all schools. There will need to be consistent expectations on the process and data collection, including norms for paperwork, requirements for staff participation, and the regularity or frequency of the IST meeting times. There will need to be a clear expectation that interventions are attempted and data is collected for a period of 6-8 weeks before moving on to the next step, whether that be additional interventions or a referral for a special education eligibility evaluation.
- In addition to refining and implementing the instructional support team approach, the district will need to first catalog and then expand its offerings of tiered interventions. To support this effort, it is recommended that the District explore professional development opportunities on the Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Additional information is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/>, including information about the 2019-2020 MTSS Academies.
- During the 2019-2020 school year, all staff should participate in professional development about the DCAP, as well as an overview of the special education eligibility process. The DCAP provides interventions and accommodations that are available and important for all students. Remind staff that they have expertise in their various areas (education, related services) and need to be confident making data-informed decisions even when a parent may not agree. It may be valuable to offer parent training courses so that families can develop a better understanding of special education laws and regulations and the requirements to which school districts must adhere.
- As part of the District's efforts to update the Section 504 Procedures Manual, more consistency will need to be established in terms of who the designated 504 Coordinator is in each building is. In addition, training on Section 504 process and procedures will help ensure that staff are familiar with that process and understand that a Section 504 plan is not a consolation prize for when a student does not qualify for an IEP. Rather, there are many instances where a referral for a 504-eligibility determination is an appropriate starting point.

Recommendations for Special Education Programming - Services and Settings

- Update program descriptions across the district:
 - Ideally this will be a collaborative process with efforts led by the Student Support Services and input from program staff.
 - For each program, have staff from each school where the program is located, come together for planning and consultation. This will further K-12

alignment across the various special education substantially separate programs.

- It will be important once the program descriptions are in place to make sure all staff in the buildings, including building administrators, are familiar with the programs and understand entry and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum, and supports available to students in each program.
- Build on the PBIS structures currently in place in the District and use with fidelity. Expand the District's capacity in terms of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Identify a district wide SEL curriculum that can support all students. One great resource is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) <https://casel.org/>, as well as the MA DESE information page on Social and Emotional Learning in Massachusetts <http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/SEL/>. Identifying a consistent SEL curriculum will also be very important for the social/emotional and behavioral programs in the District.
- The language-based program at the middle school has a solid foundation but the program needs to be updated to meet the specific needs of students with language-based learning disabilities. The classroom environments should be thoughtfully arranged, with more evidence of the learning objectives and daily/weekly schedules posted to support students with executive functioning and planning issues. It is important to use multi-sensory approaches used throughout the school day, along with evidence-based reading and writing instruction. Lessons should be highly structured with tasks broken down into smaller parts, with a lot of repetition and review of concepts. It would be beneficial to explore whether it would work to have class configurations that are not simply grade based but arranged to match a middle school model as this was noted by staff in the program.
- Review Learning Center staffing to ensure that services are being delivered consistent with student IEPs.
- The ABA programs (Compass/Pathways/Strides) have a solid foundation but will be improved upon through the consistent use of an established evidence-based curriculum, ABA methodology used throughout the school day by ABA trained staff, as well as consistent and ongoing consultation by a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst. Continued use of ACE curriculum with fidelity is recommended. Students exhibiting behaviors should continue to have Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) in place, along with program books for each student to maintain data on student behaviors and progress toward goals. The ABA programs should continue to maintain consistent data collection practices to monitor student progress.
- Review data and gather staff input from the High School Life Skills/Strides programs to determine whether the arrangement in place during the 2018-2019 school year should continue. From this consultant's perspective, the current

model appears to have some strengths as well as some challenges. The primary concern to continuing this model is that the staff involved do not have the opportunity for co-planning and there is no consistent collaboration happening between the two programs.

- Develop three levels of organizational support for special education and student services – direct services, school leadership/management, and district policy/leadership.
- Provide programs of informational and transformational professional development for school administrators in matters relating to students with disabilities and students with significant school-related challenges, and the research-based approaches to meeting these challenges.
- Provide expert consultation/advisories for school administrators in specific areas of work, for example:
 - Academic curricula, instruction and supports in specialized settings
 - Social-emotional learning curricula and instruction
 - Social-emotional-behavioral interventions, supports, and services
 - Integration of students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers
 - Trauma sensitive practices
 - Positive school climate
 - Positive professional development, support, and supervision
- Related to Focus Area #1, provide school administrators with support in implementing Tiered Systems of Support and Universal Design for Learning so that the needs of all students can be met, without an over reliance on special education.
- Review DESE Technical Assistance Advisory SPED 2014-3, Identifying the Need for Paraprofessional Support (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/advisories/2014-3ta.html>) and develop a district protocol/procedures for identifying the need for additional adult support and for creating and monitoring fading plans.

Recommendations for Organizational Support

- A primary recommendation in terms of organizational support is already underway and will be in place for the upcoming 2019-2020 school year - namely the addition of another administrator in the Student Support Services department. It will be important to create a job description for the position and clearly outline the responsibilities of the new Special Education Coordinator.
- Examine the current configuration of the team chair role. Depending on the impact of the added Special Education Coordinator, consider whether the team chair position should also be administrative. The team chair position is made

somewhat more challenging by the responsibility for out of district students. If the district's budget would allow for it, consider creating a fifth team chair position and have this person oversee either Out of District and Transition or Out of District and Early Childhood.

- Build upon the capacity of building based principals to supervise and evaluate special education staff and identify how special education/student service administrators can help support supervision and evaluation. One idea would be to have an administrator from Student Support Services be a secondary evaluator for all new special education staff and for any special education staff who have received a needs improvement in one or more standard areas.

Recommendations for Student Outcomes

- Establish the criteria for the selection of approaches to measure progress and proficiency in academic and social-emotional learning. Suggested criteria include:
 - Research-based
 - Measures individual student progress and proficiency over time
 - Links to adopted academic and social-emotional curricula
 - Links to the Massachusetts Frameworks and the CASEL Framework core competencies
 - Measures important concrete learning
- Analyze the various measurement approaches and adopt those that meet the criteria that have been established
- Provide professional development, on-going support, and professional supervision in the adopted approaches
- Collect, analyze, utilize, and evaluate the adopted progress and proficiency data in multi-disciplinary teams supported by trained facilitators, with guidance provided by expert consultants

APPENDICES

Disability by Category Ages 3-5 (as of March 1, 2019)

Communication	35
Developmental Delay	12
Autism	7
Health	4
Neurological	3
Emotional	1

Disability by Category Ages 6-22 (as of March 1, 2019)

Specific Learning Disabilities	190
Communication	80
Autism	74
Health	71
Developmental Delay	48
Emotional	47
Neurological	28
Intellectual	13
Multiple Disabilities	10
Physical	9
Sensory/Hearing	2
Sensory/Vision	2
Sensory/Deaf Blindness	1

Out of District Placement History (as of 3/19)

School Year	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Total	93	93	90	66
Residential	10	12	14	11
Private Day	33	33	31	18
Collaborative	50	48	45	37