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EDUCATION CONSULTING
www.empoweredschool.org
SPECIAL EDUCATION &
INTERVENTION
SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW
Cheltenham School District

ABOUT

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01 / SERVICE
Professional Development

02 / SERVICE
Program Reviews

03 / SERVICE
Coaching

04 / SERVICE
Student-specific Supports

PURPOSE

EmpowerED was requested to serve as an outside reviewer to gather data, observe, assess, and provide key findings and recommendations

01 / OBJECTIVE

Gather Data

Comprehensive data collection & review

02 / OBJECTIVE

Observe

Direct classroom & service observation

03 / OBJECTIVE

Assess

Thorough delivery & program evaluation

04 / OBJECTIVE

Recommend

Deliver key findings & action plan

KEY FINDINGS: STRENGTHS

STRENGTHS

01 / EDUCATOR COMMITMENT

Educators demonstrate a strong commitment to support students.

02 / MTSS FOUNDATION

A foundation for interventions and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support is solidly in place.

03 / TARGETED INVESTMENT

The district has made an investment in targeted interventions to support student needs.

04 / COMPLIANCE & INFRASTRUCTURE

There is a strong infrastructure for special education compliance.

KEY FINDINGS: AREAS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION/ IMPROVEMENT

FINDING 1:

Implementation varies across the system.

Although practices and procedures are documented, there is variability in:

Special Education Placement
Inconsistencies observed in special education placement practices across schools.

Instructional High-Quality Indicators
Varying levels of implementation of high quality indicators for instruction.

Perception to Practice Gap
Noticeable disconnect between documented expectations and daily classroom execution.

Family vs. System Experience
Families report positive individual experiences but raise concerns with broader systems.

Grade-Level Engagement Drop
Declining levels of family engagement and awareness as students progress through grades.

Consistency

Practices and procedures are documented, but implementation varies across schools and settings.

Instruction

Inclusive instructional practices vary, particularly in lesson design, scaffolds, and access to learning.

Family experience

Families report positive individual experiences alongside concerns about broader system consistency and engagement.

FINDING 2: Growth occurs, but not at a rate significant enough to close gaps.

FASTBRIDGE DATA

Growth not sufficient enough to increase percentage of students “on target”

- Pattern for all students

PSSA DATA

Gap between students with and without disabilities

PSSA OVERVIEW: ELA PROFICIENCY

43–56%
All students across grades

10–26%
Students with disabilities

31–42%
Economically disadvantaged

Variable
English Learner results*

** ELL results vary between 14-42%, with some percentages unreported due to small sample size.*

PSSA OVERVIEW: MATH PROFICIENCY

34–54%
All students across grades

6–28%
Students with disabilities

19–40%
Economically disadvantaged

Variable
English Learner results*

** ELL results vary between 21-74%, with some percentages unreported due to small sample size.*

FINDING 3: Students with disabilities are not included in general education at expected rates.

Overall Inclusion Targets

Overall targets for inclusive practices are currently not met across key indicators.

Placement Variability

Significant variability and inconsistency in placement practices exist among different schools.

Out-of-District Rates

There is a high rate of out of district placements compared to expected benchmarks.

Intellectual Disabilities Inclusion

Students with intellectual disabilities are educated in inclusive placements at very low rates.

LRE TARGETS

Indicator	Descriptor	State Target Percentage for 2025	Cheltenham Percentage	Target Met?
5A	Students are educated inside the regular class 80% or more of the day	65% or more of students with IEPs are in general education the majority of the day (80% or more)	55.2%	No
5B	Students are educated inside the regular class less than 40% of the day	Fewer than 8% of students with IEPs spend the majority of the day in separate settings (Less than 40%)	9%	No
5C	Students educated in separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements	Fewer than 4% are educated in separate schools, facilities, hospital/homebound placements	6%	No

FINDING 4: Special education support concentrated in separate settings.

KEY METRIC

16%

Special educator time analysis reveals an aggregate of only 16% of the school day is spent supporting students inclusively.

01 Resource Funneling

Human resources are heavily funneled into special education classrooms.

- Low of 3.6% supporting in gen ed to
- High of 30% supporting in gen ed

02 Instructional Impact

Adult presence and proximity does not reliably translate into instructional adaptation or specially designed instruction.

FINDING 5: Strong MTSS written framework requires consistent implementation in practice.

CLARITY NEEDED IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

Intervention Selection

Defining explicit guidelines for choosing targeted student interventions.

Tier Movement

Establishing clear criteria for moving students in and out of tiers.

Digital Platforms

Standardizing the operational use of supporting digital platforms.

Cut Scores

Setting consistent cut scores and benchmarks across grade levels.

FINDING 6: Stakeholder concerns over behavioral events and training

Staff Preparation Gap

Classroom Management vs. Mental Health

Staff feel prepared for basic classroom management, but largely unprepared for complex behavioral and SEL needs.

- **Basic Management:** High confidence reported in standard classroom management techniques.
- **Mental Health Needs:** Feel largely unprepared to support students experiencing mental health challenges.
- **SEL Delivery:** Limited preparation reported in delivering targeted social-emotional learning interventions.

FINDING 6: Stakeholder concerns over behavioral events and training

Perception & Environmental Impact

Despite snapshot observations overwhelmingly reporting strong classroom environments, parents and staff report significant behavioral concerns.

Disproportionate Impact

Concerns may reflect the high visual and emotional impact of significant, recurring events.

"It is possible to have overall positive school and classroom environments while also recognizing that recurring or high-profile behavioral incidents can undermine safety and belonging."

FINDING 7: Inconsistency in disability identification and placement across buildings.

> “Widespread differences in identification of certain disability categories and placement practices that cannot be explained by program locations alone.”

Identification Variance

Substantial differences exist across specific disability categories depending on the building.

Placement Practices

Educational placement decisions show significant variation between school sites.

FINDING 7: Inconsistency in disability identification and placement across buildings.

"Widespread differences in identification of certain disability categories and placement practices that cannot be explained by program locations alone."

37%–76%

Students spending 80% or more of the day in general education

4%–17%

Students spending less than 40% of the day in general education

FINDING 8: Specialized programs largely support students who reside in that sending area.

PERCEPTION



Stakeholder Belief

Parent and staff perceive that certain programs serve students primarily from buildings other than the one in which the program is housed.

This perception is not supported by the data.

KEY MECHANISM



“Proximity Effect”

District-wide programs clustered in certain buildings are comprised overwhelmingly by students who would attend those buildings regardless.

SPECIALIZED PROGRAM PLACEMENT PATTERNS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

When comparing specialized-program enrollment to each school's IEP population, the rates fall within a narrow range of **20.8% to 23.6%** .

CHELTENHAM

20.8%

PLACEMENT RATE

21

Students Placed in Specialized Programs

101

Students in Sending Area with IEPs

MYERS

22.0%

PLACEMENT RATE

18

Students Placed in Specialized Programs

82

Students in Sending Area with IEPs

GLENSIDE

23.5%

PLACEMENT RATE

20

Students Placed in Specialized Programs

85

Students in Sending Area with IEPs

WYNCOTE

23.6%

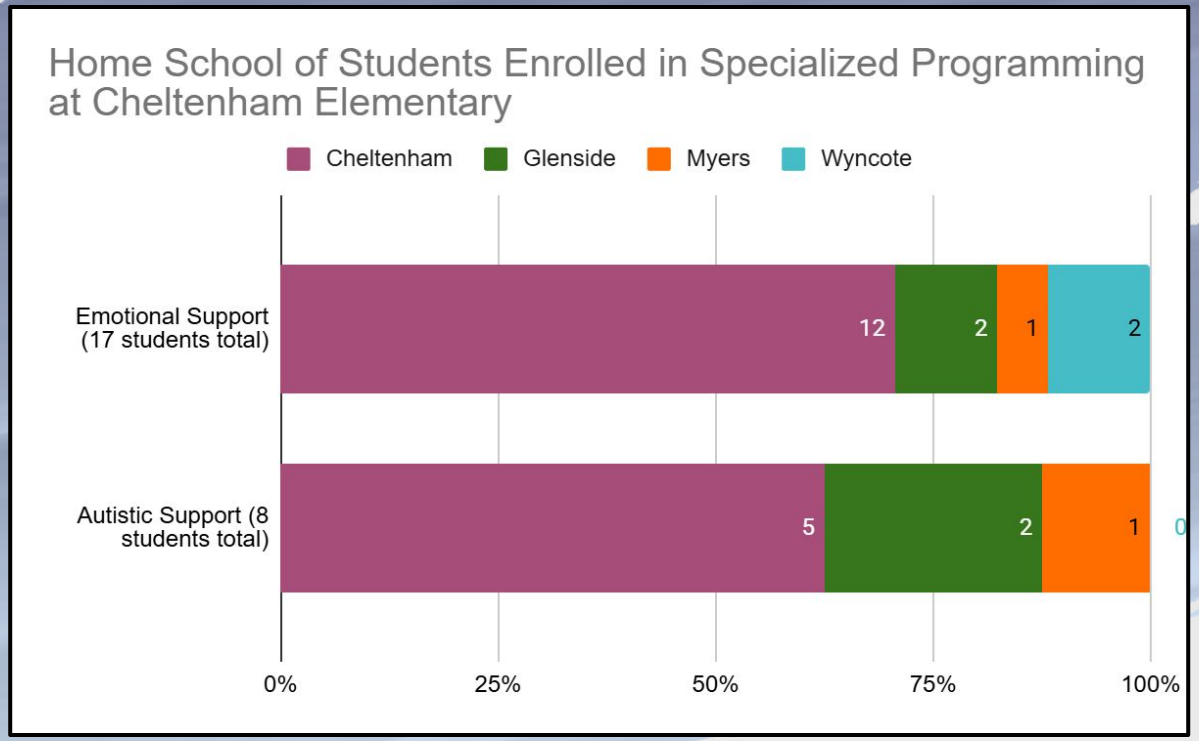
PLACEMENT RATE

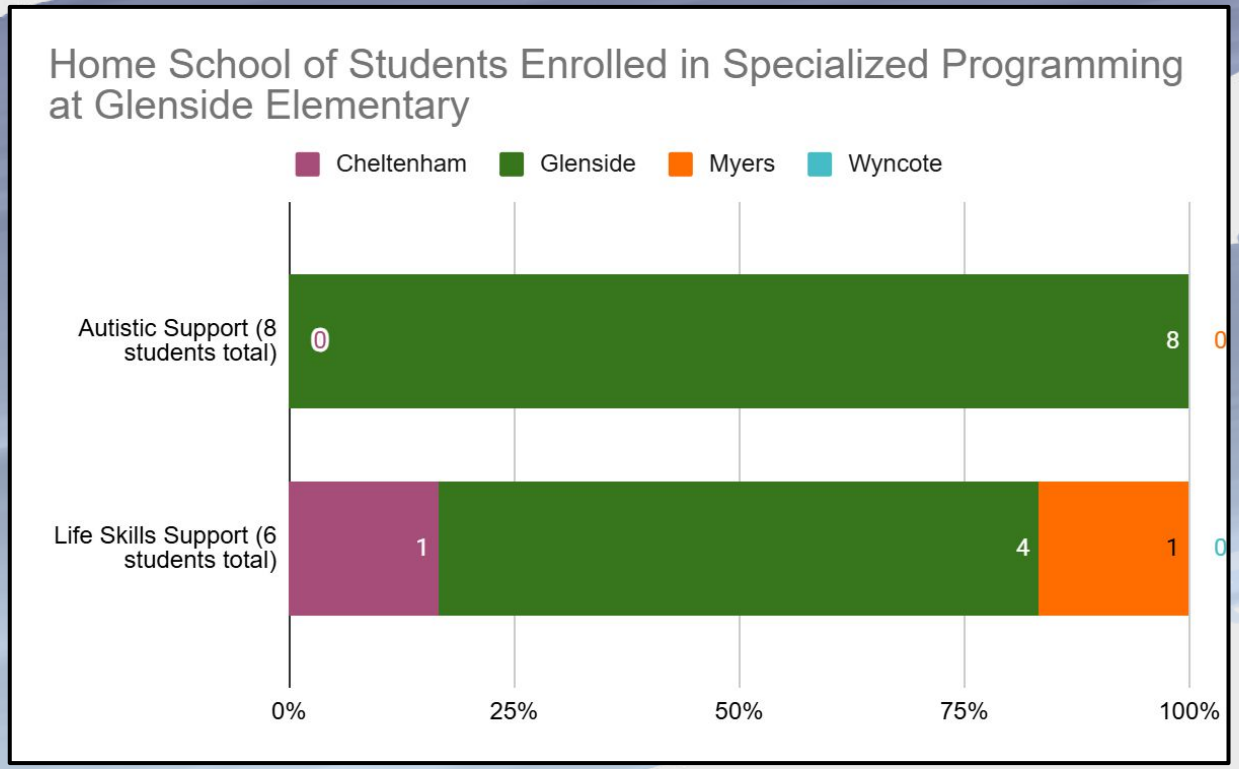
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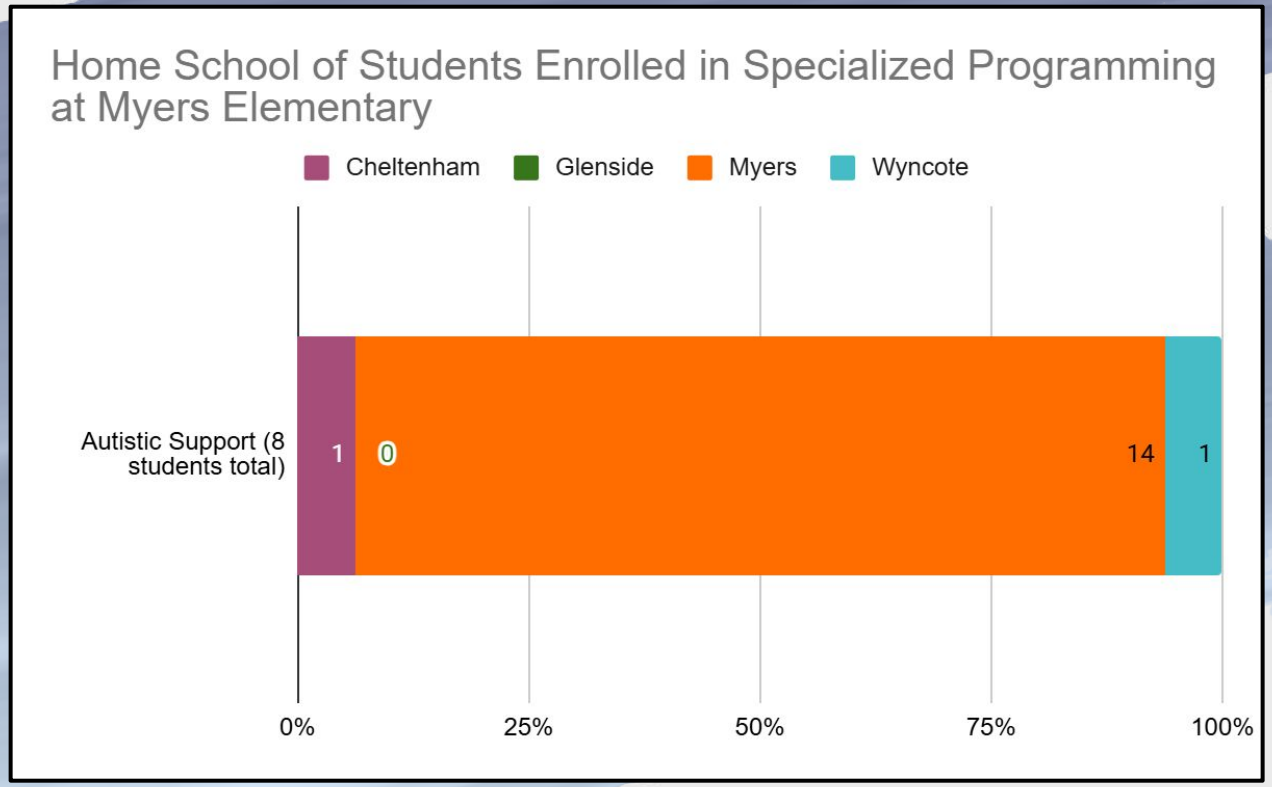
Students Placed in Specialized Programs

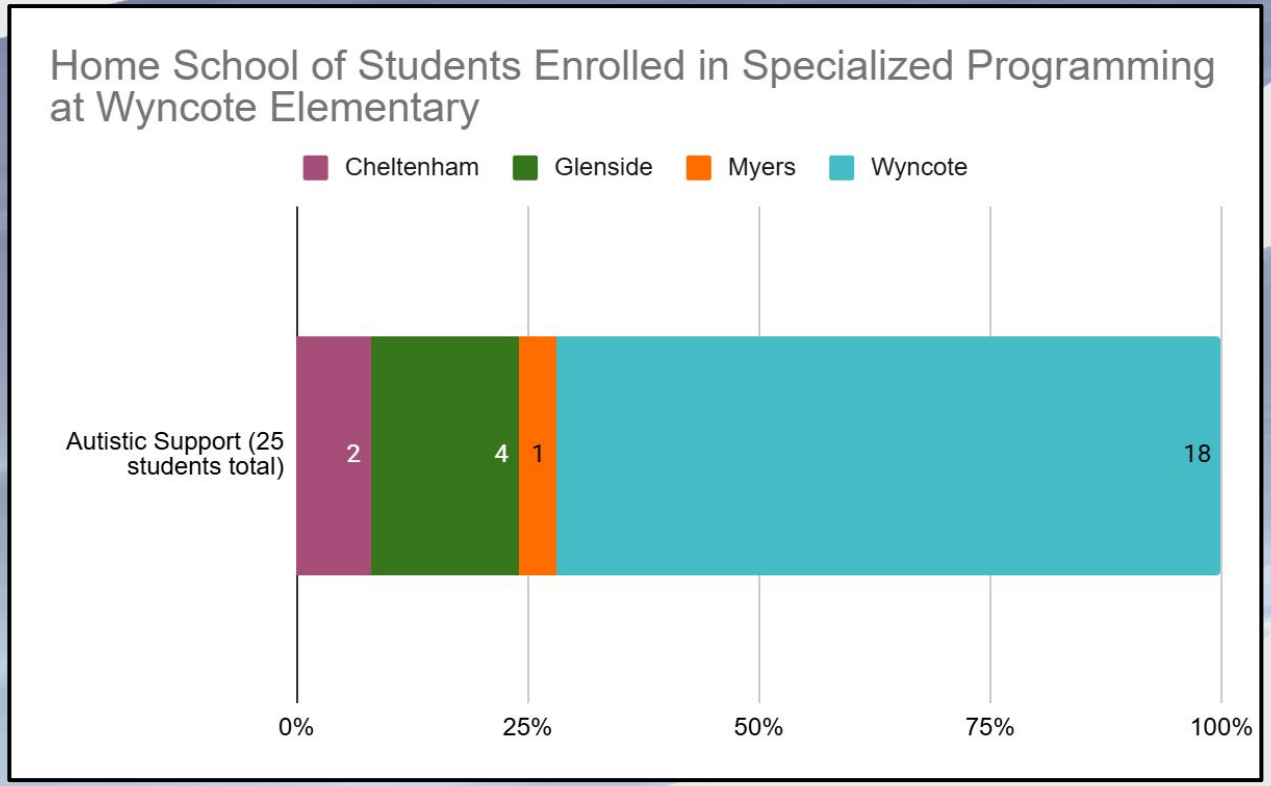
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Students in Sending Area with IEPs


Home School of Students Enrolled in Specialized Programming at Cheltenham Elementary
Cheltenham
Glenside
Myers
Wyncote
Emotional Support (17 students total)
12
2
1
2
Autistic Support (8 students total)
5
2
1
0
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%


Home School of Students Enrolled in Specialized Programming at Glenside Elementary
Cheltenham
Glenside
Myers
Wyncote
Autistic Support (8 students total)
0
8
0
Life Skills Support (6 students total)
1
4
1
0
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%


Home School of Students Enrolled in Specialized Programming at Myers Elementary
Cheltenham
Glenside
Myers
Wyncote
Autistic Support (8 students total)
1
0
14
1
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%


Home School of Students Enrolled in Specialized Programming at Wyncote Elementary
Cheltenham
Glenside
Myers
Wyncote
Autistic Support (25 students total)
2
4
1
18
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 01

Clarify & Operationalize District MTSS

Clarify and streamline the district's MTSS process, including the intervention continuum and social/emotional/behavioral supports, and operationalize it into practice.

Process Streamlining

Clarify and standardize MTSS frameworks, tier structures, and decision-making criteria across all district schools.

Support Continuum

Unify academic intervention pathways with comprehensive social, emotional, and behavioral support systems.

Operational Practice

Translate policy guidelines into concrete daily classroom workflows, routines, and ongoing progress tracking.

RECOMMENDATION 02

Districtwide Professional Learning & Coaching

Establish a districtwide professional learning and coaching model focused on a small number of high-leverage instructional practices.

Coaching Model

Build a unified, districtwide coaching framework to ensure consistent implementation and support across all schools.

High-Leverage Focus

Target a core set of evidence-based instructional strategies to maximize professional growth and student success.

Sustained Practice

Embed ongoing professional development into daily teaching routines through continuous coaching and feedback.

RECOMMENDATIONS
03 and 04

Refine Inclusive Staffing & Support

Increase the presence of special education teachers and paraprofessionals in general education classrooms alongside the increasing presence of students with disabilities while reviewing the design, location, and referral pathways of specialized elementary programs.

Staff Distribution

Analyze staff resource allocation and redistribute staffing to increase support in general education.

Collaborative Models

Explore collaborative instructional partnerships to support students with disabilities in general education settings.

RECOMMENDATION 05

Expand Inclusive Opportunities

Consider greater inclusive opportunities for students in substantially separate classrooms and out of district placements by conducting thorough discussions of supplementary aids and services at student IEP meetings.

IEP Meeting Discussions

Systematically evaluate and review supplementary aids, accommodations, and specialized services during every IEP meeting to support inclusion.

Placement & Classroom Review

Create clear pathways for students in separate classrooms or out-of-district placements to safely access general education environments.

RECOMMENDATION 06

Strengthen Organizational Trust

Strengthen organizational trust through greater clarity, transparency, consistency, and communication across Cheltenham School District's special education system.



Clarity

Establish explicit expectations, roles, and procedures to eliminate ambiguity across all special education processes.



Transparency

Provide open, accessible information regarding decisions, resource allocations, and program offerings.



Consistency

Ensure uniform implementation of IEP practices and equitable service delivery across every school.



Communication

Foster proactive, ongoing, and respectful two-way dialogue between families, educators, and leaders.

QUESTIONS?