

Evaluation of the Special Education Programs

Department of Special Education

Hingham Public Schools

Hingham, Massachusetts

Conducted:
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Table of Contents:

I. Introduction

A. Purpose

B. Reviewer

II. Methodology

III. Commendations

IV. Factors Affecting the Implementation of Programming & Services

V. Findings

VI. Recommendations

VII. Summary

I. Introduction

The Director of Student Services, Dr. Jean Loud, requested that Walker Partnerships conduct an evaluation of the special education programs for the Hingham Public Schools. The overall focus of this review is to gain a greater understanding of the current status of special education programs and services within the district, identify the strengths of the existing programming, and determine what issues need to be addressed to enhance current programming. The administration wants to procure recommendations that will assist them with addressing future program needs, the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes and activities, and the instructional supports that may be required to ensure greater access to the general curriculum for students with special needs.

A. Purpose

The purpose of an independent evaluation of a specific program and service is to provide a school district with an objective report that identifies areas of strengths, needs, and recommendations. An independent evaluation allows for the district to be examined from the perspective that looks at what is working well in the district, but also speaks to areas that need to be strengthened. This evaluation is focused on the specific domain of programming and services that serves students with special needs.

The review process is designed, through a multi-step approach, to assist the school district's leadership team and the school-based special education personnel in having a guided and focused discussion that will enable effective short and long-range planning to occur while recognizing and addressing issues such as:

- Determining the effectiveness and utilization of current special education personnel and their roles and responsibilities with respect to serving students on Individualized Education Programs within the Hingham Public Schools
- Determining if paraeducators are being effectively utilized to implement special education services
- Determining the efficacy of the current models ("pull out" services, inclusion classes, and co-teaching) to maximize access to the general education curriculum
- Determining what strategies and professional development are needed to enhance the current special education model
- Identifying staffing and resources that reflect student needs
- Creating a long-range plan that addresses the agreed upon needs of the student population
- Establishing a comprehensive approach to program and service development that is linked to the budget planning process

This review process brings forth information that will enable the district administration and school-based special and general education personnel to develop an action plan(s) that will lead to more effective approaches for serving the students of the Hingham Public Schools.

It is important to recognize that, in order for the information contained in this report to be beneficial to the school district and special education services, the stakeholders must come together to discuss the findings and the recommendations. Through a deliberative process, the administration and the school-based special education and general education personnel can develop short and long-range action plan(s) that will address the agreed upon issues.

B. Reviewer

Mr. James Shillinglaw, Southeast Region Associate Manager of Walker Partnerships, has thirty-seven years of public school experience. He has been a teacher and building coordinator. He was Administrator of Special Education and Director of Pupil Personnel Services for twenty-nine years for the Provincetown Public Schools, the Provincetown/Truro Public Schools, the Barnstable Public Schools, and the Hanover Public Schools. Mr. Shillinglaw has been an Adjunct Professor for Lesley University and Framingham State College, as well as a presenter at numerous conferences. He was also the president and a member of the executive board of the National Association of Pupil Service Administrators for six years.

II. Methodology

This program evaluation was conducted based on a three-pronged approach:

1. A review of written documentation pertaining to this report included:
 - Data and statistics provided by the Hingham Special Education Department
 - Data and statistics provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
 - Programmatic descriptions and procedures
 - Data related to the student classification
 - Teachers' schedules and caseloads

2. Small group and individual interviews and discussions were conducted of the following positions:
 - Superintendent of Schools
 - Director of Student Services
 - Principals, 6
 - Assistant Elementary Principal
 - Special Education Teachers, 13
 - Speech/Language Therapists, 6
 - Preschool Coordinator
 - General Education Teachers, 17
 - School Psychologists/Team Chairpersons, 6
 - School Adjustment Counselors, 4
 - Guidance Counselors, 2
 - District Director of Guidance
 - Special Education Paraeducators, 7
 - Literacy Tutor (Title 1)

3. Observations of programs and classrooms were conducted of the following:
 - Three life skills programs
 - Twelve academic support classrooms
 - Nine general education classrooms

The interviews/discussions were conducted with sixty-seven (67) individuals in focus groups that were thirty (30) minutes in length. Emphasis was placed on the focus of the services and programs under review. Questions and discussion focused on the following:

- What are the individual's roles and responsibilities to the program being reviewed?
- What are the individual's main concerns?
- What is working well?
- What strengths of the program can be identified?
- What trends are they experiencing in the program?
- What changes do they believe need to occur?

- What topics of professional development need to be addressed?
- What practices need to be in place to enhance current programming?

These questions varied, somewhat, depending on the specific roles of the individuals who were interviewed. Discussion expanded beyond these specific questions based on the individual's experience within his or her respective role, his or her experience in the field of education, the length of time that he or she has been in his/her current position, and any other factors that emerged from the interview process.

III. Commendations

This section of the report is for the purpose of recognizing the efforts put forth by the district and the administration in their plan to meet the needs of the students. Special Education is a complex mandate for public schools to meet. There are competing interests that continue to place a significant pressure and financial burden on the school district. Hingham Public Schools has recognized its responsibility to meet the needs of its students.

Specific Commendations:

- The Director of Student Services for commissioning this review in order to gain insight into program/service enhancements and improvements for the district's special education programs
- The fact that district staff exhibit a very good working knowledge of the state and federal regulations
(The district takes great pride in complying with all timelines and procedures. It should be noted that at the last mid-cycle review the district was in complete compliance with all required criteria.)
- The district's commitment to the development and implementation of effective Response to Intervention initiatives at each of the four elementary schools
(The RtI process has been in place in Hingham for over five years.)
- The commitment and professionalism of the district's school psychologists/team chairpersons who were cooperative and efficient in assisting with this program evaluation
- The commitment of the Director of Student Services to meet with the team chairpersons on a monthly basis
- The commitment and support of the district's principals for the special education programs in each of their buildings
- The Director of Student Services for her efforts in recruiting and training highly qualified special education teachers, as well as her commitment to ensuring that a majority of the staff are certified in multisensory reading interventions
- The positive and cooperative culture that has been developed throughout the Hingham Public Schools
- The quality and effectiveness of the district's early childhood programs
(There is a continuum of services, based on the individual needs of the students, that allows students to stay in the least restrictive environment.)
- The quality and effectiveness of the two life skills programs at the high school for developing a continuum of services to prepare students for post-secondary life

- The Strategies for Learning Curriculum, evident at the secondary level (middle and high school), which is a well developed and effective model for the instruction of students who require executive functioning interventions
- The collaboration between the special education program and Title I educators to provide effective interventions, particularly in the area of literacy
- The general education teaching staff for their willingness to provide appropriate accommodations for all students
- The designation of support staff in each building to ensure compliance with all required forms, timeliness, and other regulatory requirements

IV. Factors Affecting the Implementation of Programming and Services

There are numerous factors that impact on the district's ability to deliver instructional and related services to students within the Hingham Public Schools. The most pressing factors are the number of students (census) with special needs, the balance for the level of need, and the impact of providing required services.

Utilization of Paraeducators

As the number of students with disabilities being placed in general education classrooms is increasing, the use of paraeducators has greatly expanded. Recent national figures estimate that over 500,000 paraeducators are employed in public schools, and greater increases are anticipated in the coming years. The proliferation of paraeducators in the public schools often has outpaced the conceptualization of team roles and responsibilities, along with the training and supervision needs of the paraeducators. Nowhere is this more evident than in schools where students with severe or multiple disabilities are included in general education classrooms.

Paraeducators are playing an increasingly prominent role in the education of students with disabilities. With pressure from parents who want to ensure that their children are adequately supported, and general educators who want to make sure that they and their students are adequately supported, the use of special education paraeducators has become a primary mechanism to implement more inclusive school practices.

- Good Inclusion vs. Bad Inclusion
- What is it?

Common Issues to be Aware of for Paraeducators

Interference with Ownership and Responsibility by General Educators

- Many general educators do not think it is their responsibility to educate special needs students.
- The availability of paraeducators creates an opportunity to avoid assuming responsibility and ownership for special needs students in the general education classroom.
- In many cases, the paraeducators, not the professional staff, are making and implementing many of the day-to-day curricular and instructional decisions.
- In many cases, the paraeducators do not receive the supervision to make these decisions. They "wing it."
- Often, the paraeducator is not doing the same thing that the class is.
- In many cases, the education of the most challenging students is given to the paraeducators, and these individuals do not have the training and classroom experience for this role.
- The role of the paraeducator becomes ill-defined and they can become the general education paraeducator relegated to clerical duties.

Separation from Classmates

- Often, special needs students are removed from the general education class and either receive their instruction in another part of the classroom or in the hallway.
- With appropriate modifications and/or accommodations, many of these students can participate in the same classroom activity.

Dependence on Adults

- Students become dependent on the paraeducator for all behaviors in the classroom; e.g., picking up a pencil, using materials, or following along in the book.
- There is little evidence of “fading prompts” to decrease dependence and encourage students to respond to other people.
- The paraeducator stays involved with the student much longer than necessary.
- The long-term relationship of the paraeducator and the student can become counterproductive.
- The relationship of the paraeducator with the student creates boundary issues with parents. The assistant becomes “part of the family.”

Impact on Peer Interactions

- When paraeducators are not in close proximity to the special needs students, peers are more likely to become involved with the student.
- Having a paraeducator assigned to the special needs students can become an additional stigma for the student, especially as the student gets older.
- It is a better utilization of staff to assign paraeducators to the classroom or the program. In this placement, they can work with specific students on the activities that require one-to-one assistance.

Limitations on Receiving Competent Instruction

- Many classroom teachers expect capabilities from paraeducators that are unrealistic.
- Inappropriate help can be given that may include doing the student’s work, providing answers on a test, or giving inappropriate instruction.

Loss of Personal Control

- Dependence on a paraeducator can be a detriment to students wanting to advocate for themselves.
- Often, decisions and choices are made by the paraeducator without input from the student, parent, or team.

A very important factor may be the budgetary impact of maintaining a large number of paraeducators versus the competing needs of other important services and interventions.

Least Restrictive Environment

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 2004, does not require inclusion. Instead, the law requires that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment appropriate" to meet their "unique needs." The IDEA contemplates that the "least restrictive environment" analysis will begin with placement in the general education classroom.

However, IDEA recognizes that it is not appropriate to place all children in the general education classroom. Therefore, the law requires school districts to have a continuum of placements available that extends from the general education classrooms to residential settings so that the appropriate accommodation is provided for the needs of all children with disabilities. Using the continuum concept makes it more likely that each child is appropriately placed in an environment that is specifically suited to meet his/her needs. The law intends that the degree of inclusion for each student be driven by the individual's needs as determined by the IEP team.

- In developing the Individual Education Program (IEP) for a child with disabilities, IDEA requires the IEP team to consider placement in the general education classroom as the starting point in determining the appropriate placement for the child. Should the IEP team determine that the "least restrictive environment" appropriate for a particular child is not the general education classroom for all or part of the IEP, they must include an explanation in the IEP as to why the regular education classroom is not appropriate.

Indicator 5 - School Age Educational Environment (Ages 6 - 21) for Students with IEPs (2011-12)

For 2011-2012, the state target for the % of Students with IEPs served in Full Inclusion is 58.1%, the target for % of Students with IEPs served in Substantially Separate Placements is 15.0%, and the target for % of Students with IEPs served in Separate Schools, Residential Facilities, or Homebound/Hospital Placements is 3.7%.

For more information on state performance in this area, please see the [Massachusetts State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report](#).

Hingham Public Schools

| Table I. Enrollment Comparison by Setting Source: DESE October 2011 Census Report | Enrollment | District Rate | State Rate | State Target |
|---|------------|---------------|------------|--------------|
| Enrolled Students with IEPs | 569 | 13.6% | 17.0% | -- |
| Full Inclusion (inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day) | 492 | 86.5 % | 58.1 % | 56.8% |
| Partial Inclusion (outside the general education classroom 21%-60%) | 59 | 10.3 % | 19.9 % | -- |
| Substantially Separate Placements (inside the general education classroom less than 40% of the day) | 5 | 0.9% | 15.0 % | 14.7% |

| | | | | |
|--|----|-------|-------|------|
| Separate Schools, Residential Facilities, or Homebound/Hospital Placements | 38 | 6.6 % | 3.7 % | 5.9% |
|--|----|-------|-------|------|

Allocation of Personnel

Four years ago, the district opened the East Elementary School. Due to fiscal constraints, additional staff personnel were not hired, and the administration was required to relocate staff from other elementary schools in order to operate the new building. The impact of the operation of this additional building has required the sharing of staff in two buildings. School adjustment counselors, assistant principals, and related service providers are the shared personnel. This has impacted the delivery of service for special education teachers. In most of the elementary schools, special education teachers service students in at least two grade levels. This has impacted their ability to effectively implement and maintain an effective co-teaching model.

V. Findings

Through the review process, it was apparent that the school district administration is very aware of the needs of the district as a whole and the needs of the individual buildings. Although considerable effort has been put forth to develop and implement quality programming for students with disabilities, there are a number of issues that have been identified and will need to be addressed over a reasonable period of time. The following findings are provided to assist the district with the work that needs to be completed. These findings are presented in no particular order of priority.

Specific Findings:

- The district has been committed to developing and successfully implementing a Response to Intervention (RtI) process. This has been ongoing for the past six to seven years. There is not one consistent model that has been adopted by the four elementary schools. Each school has had the autonomy to develop their own process, based on their available resources. All of the elementary schools have part-time tutors who are funded through various district budgets. The tutors are considered a Tier II intervention and usually work in the area of literacy.

Foster Elementary School

- Tutors are utilized in grades first through third as a Tier II intervention. Literacy is the focus for the first half of the year, and math becomes the focus for the second half of the year.
- Kindergarten students are assessed using the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and are placed in groups based on their scores. High-risk students are eligible for an extended day session.
- Tier III interventions involve the special education staff.
- There appears to be an increase of referrals starting at the fourth grade. There are fewer interventions at this level, and a more challenging curriculum is used that has a focus on reading skills.
- Special education students, at one point, were placed in inclusion classes that provided better access for special education teachers. This is no longer the practice, and this change has impacted the special education staff's ability to successfully co-teach.
- Foster Elementary operates on a six day cycle. On day four, there are no services. This allows the staff to conduct testing, make classroom observations, participate in consultations, and schedule IEP meetings.

- Foster Elementary has a very effective ISIT (Instructional Support Intervention Team) process. Their referral form is very comprehensive and includes an extensive checklist, student observations, and recommendations.
- Paraeducators carry a “tool box” with them that contains materials that can be utilized when they are working with individual students.
- The literacy tutors have five-day lesson plan packets that are developed on the basis of the student’s RtI goals.

Plymouth River School

- The RtI model has been very effective as an alternative for special education services. Program monitoring is conducted every three to four weeks with the RtI team meeting on a general basis to review data. Most of the students who have IEPs through the second grade were identified in preschool or were identified in another school district before moving into Hingham. Students are usually identified for services at the end of the second grade or the beginning of the third grade. There have only been six initial evaluations at this point.
- Special education teachers are very involved in the placement of students for transitioning to the next grade. The principal selects the classroom teacher based on the input that is received from the special education staff.
- Co- teaching has been effective, but because of teachers’ caseloads and availability, it is limited.
- The principal encourages professional and collegial opportunities for the staff. He assigns books (e.g., *Teach like a Champion*) and they are discussed at staff meetings.
- There is a full-day kindergarten program.

South Elementary School

- There are five literacy tutors that are utilized for a targeted reading program. The administration is committed to keeping these positions in the budget.
- Tier III reading takes place every morning and utilizes literacy tutors, special education staff, and the reading specialist. All students participate in this intervention. Progress monitoring is conducted every eight weeks. This intervention has had a positive impact on special education referrals.
- RtI groups are established at the beginning of the school year based on DIBELS scores. A majority of the building staff are assigned a group for this daily, thirty minute intervention.

- The principal determines the placements of paraeducators depending on the needs of the grade levels.
- Special education services are provided predominantly as a “pull-out.” If the special education teacher is utilized in the classroom, the role is primarily for the purpose of providing student support.
- The special education personnel incorporate specialized reading disciplines such as Orton-Gillingham and Wilson to work on IEP goals.
- Several of the classrooms have FM systems.
- There is a full-day kindergarten program.

East Elementary School

- A majority of the early childhood programs are housed at East Elementary School. They have been focused on developing a continuum of service options to meet the diverse needs of the district’s students. Program options range from half-day to full-day and, in some cases, an extended day is provided for students who require home Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services. Currently, the district contracts with outside agencies to provide ABA services. The goal is for the district to develop their own capacity to provide these services with the early childhood staff.
- At the pre-school level, the district has been piloting intensive services twice a week (Tuesdays and Thursdays) for the last three years. There will be a sub separate pre-school class next year at East Elementary (2012-2013) offering a full-day program four days a week that will incrementally increase inclusion in the more moderate pre-school classroom. Two moderate pre-school classes with one sub separate class will be provided for next year. The development of these cohorts at the pre-school and kindergarten levels will continue, as expected, when the students reach first grade. As students transition from one grade to the next, these cohorts will follow them throughout the elementary levels of first through fifth grade.
- During the current school year (2011-2012), East Elementary piloted an intensive full-day kindergarten program. The cohort has been very successful, and the team will continue to develop appropriate program options to ensure that students make effective progress.
- East School has one full-day kindergarten for children with moderate special needs. During the 2011-2012 year, the Hingham Public Schools piloted a successful full-day kindergarten program for children with intensive special education needs. This pilot program will continue in the school year 2012-2013. The team will continue to integrate students into kindergarten and first grade classrooms with staff support. A big concern is what will happen to these students once they “age out” of the early childhood programs. In the past, many of these students have required placement in out-of-district programs.

- With regards to the RtI process at East Elementary, all students in kindergarten through third grade are benchmarked at the beginning of the year with DIBELS. Subsequently, all students in each grade are then grouped homogeneously. The groups are:
 1. intensive (very small groups, below grade level, may be using Orton-Gillingham or Wilson methods as part of the instruction, most often are also in special education)
 2. strategic (slightly below benchmark, "at-risk" on DIBELS)
 3. below grade level, at grade level, above grade level (groups get bigger as skills get closer to grade level)
- Monday through Thursday, each grade level has thirty minutes of RtI instruction in these groups. This is in addition to the large group literacy instruction based on the MacMillan/McGraw Hill curriculum. Throughout the year, the groups are “progress monitored” (particularly lower groups), and changes are made if student performance changes. Also, students who require additional support are typically asked to come in early a few days a week, or they have an additional block of instruction provided first thing in the morning a few days a week. These are the Tier II and III interventions. Tier III usually means there is an increase in the frequency of the interventions, and it may also include a home component.
- The overall RtI process at East Elementary is effective for the students who are not at grade level. They use research-based interventions and monitor students closely.
- The home-school connection piece is also crucial. A wealth of information is generated from the interventions and monitoring that can be used to determine if additional evaluations are needed, and if additional supports need to be put in place to help the student make effective progress.
- There is concern about the amount of time and resources dedicated to students who are at or above grade level. They do not require a level of instruction beyond the grade level McMillan/McGraw Hill (MMH) curriculum. At this point, it should be up to the classroom teacher to differentiate instruction to students who are at or above grade level. The resources could be better used in one of two ways: expand RtI to 4th and 5th grades (4th currently has it only for writing; 5th does not have it at all), or develop the same type of program for math instruction.

Hingham Middle School

- Special education teachers are typically scheduled to be in general education classes for two periods (ELA and math), and provide two periods of “pull out” for students (Strategies for Learning) each day. A majority of special education students receive both in-class and “pull out” services. They can be seen by their liaison two to three times a day.
- Sixth grade general education classes have special education coverage for all subject areas. It is felt that this extensive support prepares students for a more rigorous curriculum in the seventh and eighth grades.

- The three levels for grouping students at the seventh and eighth grades are Levels II, III, and IV. Level IV (standard) is predominantly for students on IEPs.
- Paraeducators are scheduled into classes all day. There is limited time for them to meet with liaisons.
- There is a consensus that many of the students on IEPs have increased services on their IEPs when they transition from the fifth grade to middle school.
- There are several reasons for the increased percentage of students receiving special education services at the middle school (16%).
 - There are usually ten to fifteen initial evaluations conducted throughout the year. Many are the result of parents' requests.
 - There has been an increase in the number of students moving into the district who were not previously identified.
 - Students terminated from services at the elementary level who are struggling at the middle school require services. Their primary area of need is in specialized reading.
- There are two general education academic intervention programs at the seventh and eighth grades. Math prep is required for all students who score below 230 on the MCAS. There is also a reading class. Eligibility is based on a formal assessment such as the California Achievement Test (CAT). Special education students are eligible for both programs. In some cases, students may receive special and general education interventions. Because of their schedule, they will not be able to take a foreign language at the middle school.
- The team makes an effort to incorporate Strategies for Learning because there will be minimal opportunities for in-class support at the middle school. The strategy classes are well-organized and structured as a classroom presentation, and the strategies that will benefit students are included.
- There are more opportunities for co-teaching at the seventh and eighth grade levels because general education teachers are designated as inclusion classroom teachers. This gives both the general and special education teachers an opportunity to develop a long-term relationship. Inclusion teachers at the sixth grade are rotated on a yearly basis.
- The Instructional Support Intervention Team (ISIT) process is weak. Personnel are limited in their ability to develop a continuum of adaptations and modifications. There is not an RtI process at the middle school.
- There is a sub separate program at the middle school for students with intellectual and developmental impairments. This program services students in all three grade levels. There are several challenges to provide the appropriate curriculum and materials to meet

the diverse needs of the three grade levels. There are also concerns about eligibility and the placement of students who have stronger academic skills.

- The guidance department counselors are involved with special education students and participate in IEP meetings. They are also responsible for 504 plans. The caseload for 504 plans appears to be approximately fifteen per counselor. The adjustment counselor is a .75 FTE position.
- There are two part-time tutors (20 hours each) who provide specialized reading services. It is difficult to schedule them to meet the needs of the middle school schedule because of their limited time.
- Special education teachers are given two prep periods a day so that they can attend meetings, consult, and complete other administrative tasks. Other teachers have one prep period.
- The budget for FY 2013 will include an additional half-time school psychologist for the middle school.

Hingham High School

- The high school has two life skills programs for students with cognitive and developmental disabilities. The students are grouped according to age. The younger students receive academics based on their abilities. Efforts are made to provide access to the curriculum in the hopes that some of the students can pass the MCAS. Other skill development focuses on functional skills such as filling out time sheets, completing job applications, writing resumes, and understanding work schedules. The students participate in in-school job opportunities. The focus of the older program (primarily for students aged 18-22) is to transition to post secondary/adult living. A comprehensive assessment is done to evaluate each student's transition skills. A transition binder is developed for these students that can be useful in the 688 process. The teacher has been very effective in developing a diversity of community job sites. While students have multiple experiences with different jobs, the program has limited access to a facility that includes a kitchen or contains a washer and a dryer.
- The six special education teachers' caseloads contain between thirty and forty students. On a daily basis, they teach four Strategies for Learning "pull out" classes and one co-teaching Level IV class.
- A reading teacher, funded by special education and supervised by the English Department, provides specialized reading services. She provides liaison services to a small number of learning disabled students.
- The Strategies for Learning is a well devised curriculum that focuses on developing study skills, preparing for tests, and using executive functioning. This program assists students

in achieving the goals on their IEPs. They can earn either 2.5 or 5 credits, depending on how many days they take the course.

- The school psychologist at Hingham High School indicated that he conducts between ten to fifteen initial evaluations on a yearly basis. These are predominantly the result of parental requests for the primary purpose of receiving accommodations for college testing, or testing that has been requested by the college. The district should consider terminating this process. Please refer to DESE Administrative Advisory 2004-3, College Testing Information, January 28, 2004, for further information.

If a request for an evaluation is made for the purpose of demonstrating a need for accommodations on College Board tests, and the school district has no reason to believe the student has a disability or needs special education services, then the district can deny the request for an eligibility evaluation. The district must notify the parent or student of its denial using notice form N2. The district's decision not to conduct the evaluation is subject to the due process requirements of state and federal law.

- The guidance department is involved with the special education students in their caseloads. They begin a career planning and transition process in the tenth grade, and assist the IEP team with transitional planning in the eleventh grade. There used to be a career planning position, but it was eliminated because of budgetary constraints.
- There was a consensus from all of the staff interviewed at the high school that there are not enough general education interventions.
- The head of the foreign language department expressed concern regarding the number of special education students that receive waivers for foreign language at the middle school. This potentially impacts the students' schedule at the high school and limits them in being able to take a foreign language before the eleventh grade. There is a two year language requirement at the high school.
- Several staff members expressed concerns about the Level IV classes which appear to be predominantly special education classes.
- The school adjustment counselor is full-time at the high school. There was a great deal of concern expressed about having counseling services written into IEPs and the ability of the adjustment counselor to meet the time requirements. This concern was expressed by all of the school adjustment counselors. As school adjustment positions have been decreased, the need for more services, particularly in the area of social skills, has increased.
- A committee has worked on the exploration of a regular education "Transition" program to address significant emotional student needs, but the budget is not yet available for this option.

Findings in General

- The percentage of students who require special education services at the elementary level is low. The successful and long-term implementation of the RtI model could be considered a major factor for this percentage.

Table II. % of Sped Enrollment by School Compared to District, State

| School | School % | District % | State % |
|-------------------|----------|------------|---------|
| Foster Elementary | 12.0 | 13.6 | 17.0 |
| Plymouth River | 9.9 | 13.6 | 17.0 |
| Hingham HS | 12.4 | 13.6 | 17.0 |
| South Elementary | 8.3 | 13.6 | 17.0 |
| East Elementary | 12.9 | 13.6 | 17.0 |
| Hingham MS | 16.1 | 13.6 | 17.0 |

- The overall effectiveness of the paraeducators in the district is good, although this varies from school to school. There are several highly trained professionals with Master's Degrees.
- Each elementary school has at least three literacy tutors who are funded by a combination of Title I and special and general education appropriations.
- A majority of the special education staff members are certified in one or more research-based multisensory reading methods such as Orton-Gillingham, Wilson, and Project Read.
- Special education staff personnel use the Woodcock Johnson Reading Mastery, CTOP, WADE, curriculum benchmarks, and other formal and informal assessments to determine eligibility for specialized reading. There are no formal exit criteria for specialized reading services.
- Special education teachers, throughout the district, service at least two grade levels and sometimes three. In some situations, the building schedules impact the efficiency to develop better groupings. In one school, ten students who required the same level of Wilson reading received instruction in three different groups.
- There is very little common planning time for general and special education staff members to consult or develop co-teaching models.
- Individual paraeducators often work on the same, or similar, concepts with students in isolation.
- There is very good use of technology throughout the district. There is a SMART Board in every classroom. There are FM systems in many of the classrooms.

- “Pull out” programs are structured, rigorous, focused on learning strategies, and incorporate IEP goals into the curriculum. The “pull out” programs are a major strength of the special education department.
- Due to carrying large caseloads and being itinerant, related service providers primarily provide “pull out” services.
- General education teachers, throughout the district, are well informed about IEPs for students in their classrooms. They have access to IEP information through the X2 program.
- The quality and efficacy of co-teaching models varies greatly throughout the district. In general, there is very little co-teaching done on a consistent basis.
- Extensive professional development trainings, conferences, and workshops were provided across the district during the 2011-2012 year that professionals could choose to access. The district funded these through the federal 274 grant and additional LEA funds. After one year of teaching service, teachers may access the district course reimbursement allocation for graduate courses (\$850 per year, per teacher). The district has offered a great deal of professional development in autism, co-teaching, social skills, and specialized reading and math. There are also monthly opportunities for professional learning communities.

VI. Recommendations

The following recommendations are a direct outcome of the review process that was recently completed of the Hingham Public Schools. The findings listed in the previous section are the foundation for the following recommendations. Each recommendation is followed by an explanation that is intended to further expand on the rationale for the recommendation. These recommendations are intended to provide insight and direction for the administration and school personnel in making decisions regarding the direction they determine to follow with respect to the existing programs and services. These recommendations should be viewed as a point of departure for involved personnel to engage in discussions that will lead to the development of programs and services that truly meet the needs of the student population.

There will be a need for the stakeholders to come together and develop an action plan that is comprised of short and long-term steps. Budget implications, as well as structural and organizational issues, need to be well understood so that appropriate program development can be instituted. Through an inclusive process of discussion, a plan will emerge that is comprehensive, meaningful, and purposeful.

1. Because the district exceeds the DESE expectations for teacher and paraeducator ratios, the district needs to study the staffing pattern for providing paraeducators. There is an inequity in the number of paraeducators compared to special education teachers. Consideration should be given to reorganization for the purpose of increasing the number of special education teachers across the district. Consideration should also be given to phasing out paraeducators and restructuring the budget to increase the number of special education teachers.

Table III. Special Education Staffing by School--Proposed for 2013

| School | SPED Teachers | Speech | OT | Tutors Regular/ SPED** | Para-educators Inclusion | Para-educators Individual |
|---------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| HHS | 7 (2 sub sep.) | Part-time | Part-time | 3 | 2 | 17 |
| FTE | | | | | 1.7 | 14.6 |
| HMS | 7 (1 sub sep.) | Part-time | Part-time | 3 | 8 | 11 |
| FTE | | | | | 8 | 10.4 |
| PRS | 4 (1 sub sep.) | Part-time | Part-time | 3 | 11 | 9 |
| FTE | | | | | 4.6 | 8.3 |
| East | 5 K 4 Preschool | 2 | Part-time | 5 | 11-7 Pre/K 18 Total | 12 |
| FTE | | | | 3.2 | 10.3 | 8.3 |
| Foster | 4 | 1.0 | Part-time | 4 | 9 | 3 |
| FTE | | | | | 3.3 | 2.3 |
| South | 4 (1 Kind.) | 1.0 | Part-time | 4 | 5 -1 Extended K | 10 |
| FTE | | | | | 4.6 | 7.3 |

*FTE was based on 32.5 hours for a full-time position. Source: Hingham Public Schools

**Tutors are funded with regular and special education funds. They are utilized primarily for reading literacy.

Explanation:

- There are currently 109 full and part-time paraeducators in the district. It appears that a common practice is to include paraeducator services as part of the IEP. In many cases, the IEP team makes this decision to ensure that there is adequate support in the general education classroom. This practice poses potential long-term financial commitments. It is well-established that once these services are written into an IEP, it is difficult to convince parents to decrease or eliminate them.
- Although the quality of paraeducators in general was good, there is no substitute for highly qualified special education teachers to ensure compliance and implementation of students' IEPs.
- The number of special education teachers in each building limits the district's ability to implement an effective co-teaching model. In many cases, special education teachers are poorly utilized within the general education classroom. In some schools, special education teachers are responsible for working in multiple grade levels. Additional special education teachers will ensure better access to curriculum in the least restrictive environment.

2. The equity across the district for assigning *individual* paraeducators to students should be reviewed to ensure consistency and appropriate utilization of staff resources.

Explanation:

- Of the 109 paraeducators in the district, 63 are designated as working individually with students. Aside from the paraeducators assigned to the life skills and early childhood special education programs, it does not appear that the criteria established by the district is being utilized to make decisions for this level of service.
- The criteria should include adaptations and modifications that have been tried, the lack of student progress, the determination of safety issues, behavioral interventions, and a plan to increase student independence.
- Job descriptions that delineate responsibilities for an individual paraeducator should be developed that are specific to each student's individual needs.
- Specific criteria need to be developed prior to the team recommending a paraeducator for a student or program. The criteria should not be based solely on a diagnosis (ASD, behavior disorder), and it should include documentation of what has been tried, based on the data collection, behavior plans, and other team observations.

- School teams need to explicitly clarify the role and responsibility of the classroom teacher as the instructional leader in the classroom and the teacher for students with disabilities.
- Classroom teachers, paraeducators, and other staff need training in basic instructional strategies that will allow special needs students to access the general education curriculum. Additionally, training should specifically include strategies to decrease dependence and include “fading prompts” that are often associated with excessive and prolonged proximity.

3. Additional special education teachers will improve the district’s ability to develop a more comprehensive continuum of services.

Explanation:

- At this point, the only sub-separate/more intensive programs are in the early childhood program (preschool and kindergarten), and in the life skills programs at the middle and high schools. A critical concern for staff at East Elementary School is what program options will be available for students after they transition out of the intensive kindergarten program.
- It would appear that the lack of program options for in-district sub separate programs has led to an increase in out-of-district placements (OOD).
- The increase of OOD placements seems to have occurred around FY 2004. This coincides with the reauthorization of IDEA which focused on more inclusive practices to ensure equal access to the general education curriculum.

| Table IV. SPED Expenditure | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| Fiscal Year | Teaching | Other Instructional | Collaboratives | Private | Combined SPED Ex. | School Budget | SPED % of Budget | State Average |
| 2001 | 2,246,001 | 461,070 | 567,714 | 616,285 | 3,891,070 | 24,036,071 | 16.2 | 17.2 |
| 2002 | 2,529,254 | 445,199 | 753,269 | 641,935 | 4,369,657 | 25,449,866 | 17.2 | 17.4 |
| 2003 | 2,326,521 | 449,719 | 704,733 | 772,126 | 4,253,099 | 26,737,257 | 15.9 | 17.7 |
| 2004 | 2,422,619 | 457,443 | 1,019,684 | 932,444 | 4,832,190 | 28,144,142 | 17.2 | 18.6 |
| 2005 | 2,637,414 | 481,469 | 1,110,491 | 897,062 | 5,126,436 | 29,919,262 | 17.1 | 18.9 |
| 2006 | 2,967,522 | 520,424 | 1,224,934 | 1,059,266 | 5,772,146 | 32,016,109 | 18.0 | 19.1 |
| 2007 | 3,332,611 | 567,525 | 1,245,863 | 1,138,322 | 6,284,321 | 33,990,043 | 18.5 | 19.4 |
| 2008 | 3,822,503 | 623,712 | 1,643,066 | 1,200,263 | 7,289,544 | 36,006,318 | 20.2 | 19.8 |
| 2009 | 4,018,131 | 686,656 | 1,334,226 | 1,357,381 | 7,397,262 | 36,871,422 | 20.1 | 20.1 |
| 2010 | 4,568,131 | 733,215 | 1,458,980 | 1,546,780 | 8,307,106 | 38,732,312 | 21.4 | 20.0 |

Source: DESE, Fiscal and Census End of the Year Report

- In FY 2010, Hingham spent 36.18% of their special education budget on OOD tuitions (state average, 33%). When you consider the transportation costs, a substantial amount of funds are spent for OOD placements.
- As the district develops a continuum of services, the need for OOD placements will decrease. As these programs establish credibility, it will allow the district the ability to return students to lesser restrictive environments.
- Sixty-nine percent of the OOD placements fall into three distinct categories:
 - Autism-24%
 - Multiple Disabilities-29%
 - Emotional-16%

4. A task force of stakeholders should be established at the elementary level to develop a uniform model for the Response to Intervention process.

Explanation:

- The district should be commended for their foresight to establish RtI at the elementary level. This process has been in place for over five years. When you consider the relatively low percentage of students receiving special education services at this level, it is obvious that the model has been effective.
- Each school has had the autonomy to develop their own RtI process. The task force should establish the components of the RtI process that have been most successful for their school. Sharing this information will be helpful in establishing a consistently uniform process that should be adopted by all four schools. Discussion points should include the following:
 - Frequency of progress monitoring--How is the data utilized for intervention?
 - A comparison of pre-intervention data to post-intervention
 - When is the Instructional Support Intervention Team used versus the RtI process?
 - The development of one consistent referral form
 - What grade levels should be involved with the RtI process?
 - Discussions should include the middle school. There are twenty to twenty-five initial evaluations that occur on a yearly basis. The percentage of special needs students increases to 16% at the middle school level. Students who had been terminated from special education services at the elementary level are often reevaluated at the middle school because of their lack of effective progress.

5. The district should establish district-wide specific guidelines for accessing and exiting specialized reading services.

Explanation:

- Again, the district should be commended for the commitment they have made to ensure that special education teachers are trained in research-based interventions such as Orton-

Gillingham, Project Read, and Wilson Reading. In fact, a majority of the staff are trained in one or more interventions. Does this training increase the number of students who receive the service based on the availability? Is it determined that... “We have the service. Why not provide it?”

- It appears that an unusually high number of students receive specialized reading. Although students are evaluated using varied assessments before this service is provided, eligibility criteria seem inconsistent across the district.
- As part of the eligibility process, documentation and data should be provided that indicate what interventions have been tried prior to a student being considered for specialized reading.
- The RtI process would be very useful as part of the eligibility process. Specialized reading could be a Tier III intervention, or it could be provided after this level has been exhausted.
- There does not appear to be established criteria for exiting this service. Because this service is available throughout the district, there could be a tendency for students to continue in this program indefinitely.

6. The current roles and responsibilities of the district’s school adjustment counselors should be examined to ensure that the positions are effectively utilized for providing essential and required services.

Explanation:

- Due to previous budget cuts, the positions of the school adjustment counselors were impacted. Most of the counselors share a school or are part-time. At the elementary level, there are limited resources to provide support to students who are experiencing social/emotional difficulties. A common concern shared by all of the school adjustment counselors was balancing their general education responsibilities with servicing the increasing number of students who have services written into their IEPs (primarily for social skill development).
- Incorporating behavioral/social/emotional student issues into the existing RtI models may be an effective approach to determine the level of need, as well as define staff responsibility.
- Social emotional learning has become a much discussed process that many school districts are actively pursuing. The more the school takes responsibility, the less the IEP will need to address. Ultimately, the IEP should only address issues of access and understanding caused by the disability.

7. A continuum of service options should be established at the middle school, based on the existing resources and the level of students' needs.

Explanation:

- Special education teachers are scheduled in general education classrooms (ELA and math) for two periods a day, and they instruct strategy classes for three periods a day. Special education students may potentially receive services both in-class and in a “pull out” for up to three periods a day. At the seventh and eighth grades, there is a general education intervention for math prep (students who receive 230 or less on their MCAS) and a reading program. Special education students are eligible for both programs, in addition to the provision of services indicated in their IEPs. In some cases, a student may not be able to participate in a foreign language elective. This can potentially impact their ability to successfully fulfill the high school’s requirement of completing two years of a foreign language.
- Special education services should be based on the individual needs of each student. What does the student need to make effective progress in the least restrictive environment? It would be helpful for staff to develop a continuum of services that would be useful in determining the level of service. Please refer to the chart in **Appendix 1** as an example.
- The staff at Hingham Middle School would benefit from training that would enhance the Instructional Support Intervention Team. They have difficulty developing plans that provide strategies, modifications, and methods to differentiate instruction. Having an effective ISIT is the cornerstone of establishing an effective special education program. Meetings need to be held on a consistent basis, designated staff should know their roles and responsibilities, and intervention plans need to be developed, implemented, and monitored with regards to quantified classroom performance. Data needs to be taken to measure progress.

8. The middle and high schools should reconsider the current placement of students in the Level IV standard courses.

Explanation:

- In both schools, a majority of the students in Level IV courses are on IEPs. Although there are certain advantages in providing special education support to these classes, there is also a fear of stigmatizing students.
- Many districts have considered eliminating the standard level of courses, or they have already done so. There is the tendency to have lower expectations and modified access to the general education curriculum in preparation for MCAS.
- Including students in a more rigorous curriculum can provide better peer models and create higher expectations.

VII. Summary

The Director of Special Education requested that Walker Partnerships conduct an extensive onsite review of the district's special education programs. The purpose of the review was to assist the administration and the school district in determining the effectiveness of current programs. The review process identified several needs to be considered and recommendations for strategies to improve programs.

Through this review of documentation, onsite visits, and one-on-one interviews, data was collected to formulate the Findings and Recommendations sections for this report.

The specific findings and recommendations have been presented and supported with explanations to assist the administration and school-based personnel in formulating an action plan(s) that will lead to more effective programming for special needs students.

APPENIDX 1

| Service Delivery | Mild Learning Disability | Mild-Moderate Learning Disability | Moderate Learning Disability | Moderate to Severe Learning Disability |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Characteristics: Evidence to be based upon curriculum-based assessments, Response to Intervention process, standardized assessments, and consideration of other evaluations</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Students can access the general education curriculum with modifications and support. *Some degree of independence in accessing the general ed. curriculum. *Has a diagnosed disability *Is not making effective progress *Needs specially designed instruction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Students can access the general education curriculum with modifications and support. *Some degree of independence in accessing the general ed. curriculum *Has a diagnosed disability *Is not making effective progress *Needs specially designed instruction *Needs more repetition and accommodations to access the general curriculum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Students can access the general education curriculum with modifications and support. *Some degree of independence in accessing the general ed. curriculum *Has a diagnosed disability *Is not making effective progress *Needs specially designed instruction *Needs more repetition and accommodations to access the general curriculum *Needs small group instruction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Identified as unable to make effective progress in general education setting. *Student demonstrates significant performance below peers in language arts and/or math *Has received prior intervention in a less restrictive setting and not making effective progress *Testing indicates a significant learning disability *Has relatively age-appropriate adaptive functioning skills and can socialize and interact appropriately with others *Requires small group step-by-step instruction and individual support to access substantially modified grade level curriculum |
| IEP Grid | B | B | B or some C | C |
| Frequency | 2-3 x per week | 3-5 x per week | 1-2 “pull out” 3-4 inclusion | 5 x per week |
| Current Provider | Inclusion Teacher | Inclusion Teacher | Inclusion Teacher | Intensive ELA and/or math |