

HINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS



SCHOOL DEPARTMENT RESPONSE TO THE 2012 WALKER REPORT ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

June 2017

I. Background and Introduction

During the 2011-2012 school year, the then Director of Student Services for the Hingham Public Schools, Dr. Jean Curtis Loud, requested that Walker Partnerships conduct an independent evaluation of the district's special education programs.

The overall focus of this evaluation was to: (1) gain a greater understanding of the current status of special education programs and services within the district; (2) identify the strengths of the existing programming; and (3) determine what issues need to be addressed to enhance opportunities for students with disabilities.

The administration sought recommendations that would assist faculty with identifying and implementing resolutions for current and anticipated program needs, greater opportunities for the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes, enhanced participation in school life and social activities, and the identification of additional instructional supports that may be required to ensure greater access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.

A. Purpose of the Independent Evaluation

The purpose of a contracted independent evaluation of a specific program or service is to provide a school district with an objective report that identifies areas of strengths, needs, and recommendations. An independent evaluator typically looks at what is working well in the district, but also comments on areas that need to be strengthened. HPS's evaluation was focused on the specific domain of programming and services that serve students with disabilities.

As well in this case, the district was in the self-assessment phase of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) Coordinated Program Review cycle and this independent evaluation was designed to be part of that self-assessment process. Mr. Shillinglaw's, the individual who conducted the evaluation from Walker Partnerships, final report was thus submitted to the DESE in June 2012 with all other DESE required materials.

Mr. Shillinglaw's review process was designed, using a multi-step approach, to assist the school district's leadership team and the school-based special education personnel in having guided and focused discussions that would foster effective short and long-range planning based upon the district's self-analysis and identification of concerns and addressing issues such as:

- Determining the effectiveness and utilization of the then current special education personnel and their roles and responsibilities with respect to serving students on Individualized Education Plans within Hingham Public Schools
- Determining whether paraeducators were being utilized effectively to support special education services
- Determining the efficacy of the then prevalent service models (direct "pull out" services (found on Grid C), inclusion classes, personalized instruction, and co-teaching) to maximize access to the general education curriculum

- Determining what additional strategies and professional development were needed to enhance the then current special education model
- Identifying areas of need for additional staffing and other resources that more effectively align and enhance instruction with student needs
- Creating a long-range plan that would address the changing needs of the student population, especially in the social-emotional area where such concerns were beginning to be evident in school districts across the country
- Establishing a comprehensive approach to program and service development that could be supported by dedicated revenues and linked to the annual budget planning process

B. Response to the Evaluation Process

Once the Independent Evaluation Report was received in Spring 2012, the Administrative Council (including central office administration and the six principals) reviewed the document and discussed how we should approach our response. Our group reached consensus that we would **concentrate our most immediate efforts on completing the required tasks and submissions for the upcoming DESE Coordinated Program Review that was scheduled for the 2012-2013 school year* and then work on the specific Walker recommendations over time (4 years) and develop a summary review of our work at the end of that period beginning in the late summer/fall of 2016. That review would then become the foundation of a new five-year plan.**

*The 2012-2013 DESE Coordinated Program Review concluded with zero findings against HPS indicating complete compliance.

Last winter, Ms. Elizabeth Kurlan (Director of Student Services) and Ms. Elizabeth O’Neill (Assistant Director of Student Services) presented the “Five Pillars of Continuous Improvement in Special Education” to the Hingham School Committee and shared this plan with parents through SEPAC, School Committee meetings, and two district-wide parent forums. As well, but not anticipated in 2012, there now exists a parent fostered Special Education Task Force that has begun its work on identifying areas for improvement that is chaired by Ms. Kurlan (Director of Student Services), Dr. James LaBillois (Assistant Superintendent of Schools) and Ms. Katherine Gaughen (Parent Co-Chair). Further, the district has begun to more closely examine a multi-tiered model of supports for students’ social and emotional needs. This “HTSS: Social-Emotional Task Force” is chaired by Dr. LaBillois (Assistant Superintendent), Ms. Heather Rodriguez (Director of Counseling), and Ms. Bryna Rogers (Parent Co-Chair).

Since the Walker Report, there have been both building-based and district-wide task force groups of teachers and administrators who have worked to develop new protocols, improve forms, and revise guidelines in areas related to the eight recommendations and to make other improvements to the Special Education Program. More detail is included in the summary below.

In preparation for this report, each of the principals submitted a building update response to the narrative that had been written by Mr. Shillinglaw. In those documents, they also corrected a small number of inaccuracies contained within the published report. As well, the principals gave a narrative response to each of the eight recommendations as they pertained to the specific level of education they represented. Those principals' narratives are at the end of the report.

Summary of District Changes Impacting Special Education

- *Restoration of lost personnel (the result of layoffs and insufficient new staffing related to the opening of East School), including 2.5 adjustment counselors in 2014, 2.0 elementary assistant principals in 2013, and several elementary special education teachers*
- *The addition of two new district-wide substantially-separate classrooms, for grades K-2 in 2012 and for grades 3-5 in 2015, for students with global developmental delays*
- *Addition in 2015 of a tuition-based Full-Day Kindergarten program (including several more dually licensed teachers, classroom paraeducators, and 1.5 special education teachers) and changes to the prior Integrated Pre-School model*
- *The institution of Transition Rooms at HHS in 2013 and at HMS in 2017, particularly as a resource for students who have experienced physical or emotional health issues or hospitalizations, to support the transition back into regular classes*
- *Redesign of the HMS Reading Lab model in 2013 and 2014*
- *Added professional development for teachers and paraeducators, especially in the areas of SEL in 2015-2017, behavior management, measurable IEP goal writing, and data collection methods and techniques*
- *Addition of a full-time Board Certified Behavior Analyst in 2014*
- *Designation of an Assistant Director of Student Services in 2016 and an Out of District Coordinator in 2014*
- *Addition of a full-time ELL specialist*
- *Addition of full time nurses (RN and DESE-certified) in 2016 at the middle school and in 2017 at the high school, to a total of two for each school*
- *Addition of a shared psychologist chair at the secondary level (.5 FTE at HHS; .5 FTE at HMS) to a total of 1.5 per school in 2014*
- *Creation of and initial allocation of dollars in 2013 to a special education stabilization fund for unanticipated and unbudgeted tuition and related transportation costs (fund is not at \$350,000)*
- *Special Education Professional Development, Training, and Program Strengtheners*

For students with multiple or global delays, including

- *Development of an Intensive Skills program/ continuum, Preschool, IS-I and IS-II*
- *Piloting the ACE Curriculum (Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia developed by NECC, the New England Center for Children with Autism) including individualized iPad technology for skill development progress monitoring and real time data tracking and graphing*
- *Registered Behavior Technician course (summers 2015, 2016) covering aspects of ABA and DTT training for paraeducators and teachers*
- *IMPACT training for life skills, safety, self-advocacy, anti-bullying*
- *Developed partnerships with Triangle, Inc., Endicott College (ABA/RBT) and Bridgewater State (ICE Program), Bunker Hill Community College (ICE Program) offering and providing Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment for cohort of students*

For secondary Strategies for Learning program, including:

- *Executive Functioning professional training (EF) for MS and HS conducted by consultant Pamela Ely, Ely Center*
- *Pilot Response to Intervention for EF at HS*
- *Developing MS after-school workshops for EF*

○ *Staff development for improved student outcomes, including:*

- *CPI – onsite district trainer and crisis prevention, de-escalation and restraining training provided for key school-based staff*
- *Social Thinking – external consultant, Sarah Ward*
- *Collaborative Problem solving – Ross Greene, Mass General Hospital*
- *Monthly school-based special education department meetings*
- *New special education teachers Boot Camp and mentoring*
- *Ongoing work on Policy and Procedures manual for special education staff*

○ *Senior Administration Retirements – In 2012 Director of Student Services, Dr. Jean Curtis Loud, retired and was replaced by Elizabeth Kurlan. In 2016, Asst. Superintendent Ellen Keane retired and Dr. James LaBillois was hired. In addition, Roger Boddie, the Middle School principal retired in 2013 and Derek Smith replaced him.*

C. Walker Evaluation 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 (DESE)
 - Programmatic descriptions and procedures provided by the District
 - Data related to student disability and service classifications
 - 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, 1
 - 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 Counseling
 - Special Education Paraeducators, 7
 - Literacy Tutor (Title I)

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 had been in his/her current position, and any other factors that emerged from the interview process.

D. Reviewer/Independent Evaluator

At the time of this review, Mr. James Shillinglaw, Southeast Region Associate Manager of Walker Partnerships, had thirty-seven years of public school experience. He had been a teacher and building coordinator. He was Administrator of Special Education and Director of Pupil Personnel Services for twenty-nine years for Provincetown Public Schools, Provincetown/Truro Public Schools, Barnstable Public Schools, and 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. Commendations

This section of the report was included “for the purpose of recognizing the efforts put forth by the district and the administration in their plans to meet the needs of HPS students.” The evaluator (also author of the final report) noted the complexity of implementing the Special Education mandates that public schools are required to meet and the competing interests that result in significant challenges, financial and other, on school districts. In the opinion of the independent evaluator, Hingham Public Schools had recognized its responsibility to meet the needs of its students.

Specific Evaluator Commendations:

- The then Director of Student Services for commissioning the independent review in order to gain insight into potential program/service enhancements and improvements for the district’s special education programs
- The fact that district staff exhibited a very good working knowledge of the state and federal regulations (the district takes pride in complying with timelines and procedures. He noted that at the prior DESE mid-cycle CPR 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 had been in place in Hingham for more than five years)
- The commitment and professionalism of the district’s school psychologists/team chairpersons who were cooperative and efficient in assisting with the independent 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 then district principals for the special education programs in each of their buildings
- The then Director of Student Services for her efforts in recruiting and training highly qualified special education teachers, as well as her focus on ensuring that a majority of the building reading staff were trained and certified in multisensory reading interventions
- The positive and cooperative culture that was apparent throughout the Hingham Public Schools
- The quality and effectiveness of the district’s early childhood programs that provide a continuum of services, based on the individual needs of the students, and classroom supports for younger elementary students, allowing them to remain in the least restrictive environment (LRE)

- The quality and effectiveness of the two life skills programs that existed at the high school for developing and implementing 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 the evaluator perceived to be a well-developed and effective model for the instruction and support of a number of students who require executive functioning interventions
- The collaboration that was evident between the special education program and Title I educators in providing effective interventions, particularly in the area of literacy
- The general education teaching staff for their willingness to provide appropriate accommodations and differentiation for students in regular education classrooms
- The designation of clerical support staff in each building to support the IEP and Team processes and foster compliance with required forms, timelines, and meeting scheduling

III. Specific Recommendations

This section of the Report identified eight areas of concern with background information provided by the independent evaluator offering a rationale for the recommended action(s) for each. HPS summary response for each is below. The first three recommendations, all related to looking at the effective use of paraeducators, especially those assigned to individual students, generated the most discussion and even debate. While we can articulate a number of specific actions that have been taken around the process of allocating paraeducator time, we believe that the process of changing a culture and coming to consensus on the best way to balance both support for students to remain in the most inclusive environment and also to foster student independence will only evolve over time. The paraeducator topic was one that we had asked the independent evaluator to look most closely at; he did and offered three recommendations. We have responded to those recommendations, but our work will continue.

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.

This recommendation generated a great deal of discussion, as it was not entirely clear which ratios were being referred to by the evaluator. Certainly we do agree that more special education teachers could be justified and have worked at that in the years since the report. We were concerned about the notion of “phasing out” paras as a way of funding additional teachers. As reinforced below, the district does believe that there always will be children who need individual para support.

Since the time of the independent evaluation, the district budget has funded both additional special education teachers and paraeducators. At the same time, the principals have worked to schedule both general and special education paraeducator hours as efficiently as possible. Beginning in 2013, principals reviewed building data and discussed practices then in place. In 15-16, a working group developed a paraeducator needs analysis form and protocols and criteria for assigning paraeducators to individuals and small groups of students; and we have at least annually discussed how we can reduce the seemingly never ending requests for additional paraeducator hours. Such requests come from both regular education and special education teachers as well as parents. We do believe that some students require individual paraeducator support to access the curriculum, but we agree that such support should fade over time for all but the most disabled of our students. A statement that we are incorporating into IEPs establishes that as a district goal. As well, we believe in adding both special education teachers and paraeducators to meet new student and program needs, but we have rejected the suggestion that we should trade one for the other.

However, change in net special education personnel will only occur by ongoing monitoring of the new paraeducator guidelines and reinforcing among educators and parents a common understanding of the typical role of an individual paraeducator as one of supporting student access to the general curriculum. Available budgets continue to be a factor in achieving preferred staffing levels. The recently declining overall elementary enrollment would suggest that some future personnel savings in special education may be possible, and in fact we have four fewer K-5 classrooms in 16-17 than existed in 15-16.

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

A review of the numbers of individual paraeducators by building suggested variation relative to the criteria used to assign paraeducators so a working group was formed during the 2015-2016 school year to review the consistency of the process for determining the addition of paraeducator support to a student's IEP. The working group consisted of the Director of Student Services, an elementary school principal, an elementary assistant principal, a special education teacher, and TEAM chairpersons from the elementary and secondary level. The product of the working group's effort was development of a paraeducator needs analysis form and guidelines for the addition of paraeducator support to an IEP. As well, the group developed a common paragraph to be added to all such IEPs that describes the role of the paraeducator and that affirms that the intent is to fade the individual support over time consistent with the IDEA. The working group also created district-wide forms that IEP teams are expected to use to document the rationale to add, increase or decrease paraeducator support.

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

Additional licensed Special Education resources, including teachers, have been added since the Walker Report (see page 3 and 4). The 2014 initiation of the full-day kindergarten program in HPS brought with it the addition of 1.5 FTE special education teachers across the elementary level and 1.0 FTE classroom general support paraeducators for each of the kindergarten classrooms. As well, more than half of the new kindergarten teachers that were added to implement the full day option are dually certified (in both elementary education and special education). Other new roles over the past five years include a full-time ELL teacher, a district Board Certified Behavior Analyst, and an out-of-district coordinator (who also serves as the Assistant Director of Student Services). Further added to meet a variety of student needs and enhance program comprehensiveness were 4.5 FTE other

special education teachers (including staffing for two new substantially separate programs for grades K-2 and 3-5 students), a second dually licensed nurse at each secondary building, and a shared (MS/HS) psychologist/ chair. Contractual special education related services were also added in the areas of OT and Speech and Language to meet the increasing needs of students requiring specialized services.

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

The elementary principals do meet together to review their RtI (or TRI) practices, literacy goals, and model efficacy. Changes have been made over time as resources and staffing levels have varied. The goal has been to standardize assessments used to measure student progress and define groupings to ensure more consistent time on task. At all levels, students participate in a differentiated general education instructional model. DIBELS assessment takes place three times per year in grades K-3 and DIBELS scores and classroom assessments contribute to the configuration of the instructional groups in building-based staff data meetings. Grouping designations may change over time, based upon analysis of new assessment data and student performance feedback. Instructional sessions across the district meet no less than four times (for 30 minutes) in a six-day cycle at K-3 and no less than two times a cycle at grades 4 and 5, where student needs are identified based upon teacher input and as-needed testing. Lexia software, a computer-based reading intervention program, is available in each of the four schools and allows for more personalized instruction, based on individual student needs.

Professional staff allocations (classroom teachers, special education teachers, and reading specialists) are similar across the four buildings. However, tutor and paraeducator support resources vary somewhat among the four schools. That is largely because two of the schools (East and Foster) are eligible for and benefit from additional Title I funded tutors and paraeducators. The other two schools rely on district funded tutors and paraeducators. Federal grant awards are guided by a well enforced “supplement but not supplant” requirement.

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

Even before the Walker Report, change has been ongoing in protocols related to the accessing of and exiting from specialized reading services. When students are not making effective progress in reading, even with the support of our “Response to Literacy Intervention,” teachers request the Instructional Support Intervention Team (ISIT) meet to discuss student progress and to discuss interventions for individual student needs. Prior to the ISIT meeting, data is gathered, the student is observed, and possible other screening assessments take place. Recommendations and a plan are developed at this meeting and if achievement does not improve, students are reviewed again at a second ISIT meeting. At that time, additional plans are made and/or a special education evaluation is recommended. Parents are actively involved throughout this process. When a special education evaluation occurs, there is a common set of evaluation tools to consider across the district. Depending on the student’s response to the core assessment and additional information gathered prior to the initial team meeting, additional district assessments might be administered. At times, additional assessments may be requested at a team meeting, before eligibility is established.

There are consistent standards established for eligibility for specialized reading instruction. Once specialized reading is provided as a service, students are monitored throughout the goal process, with a variety of informal and formal assessments. Changes in program delivery and/or program are based on individual progress toward the personalized specialized reading goal(s). Having special education teachers trained in a variety of programs (i.e., Orton

Gillingham, Wilson, Foundations, Lindamood Bell, Reading Milestones, Lips, Project Read), including the District Journeys reading program, strengthens the ability for students to make effective progress. When students meet the targeted specialized reading goals (i.e. fluency, decoding, and comprehension) and can access the grade level curriculum without these interventions, students are recommended to be exited from specialized reading services. The classroom teacher and special education teacher consult regularly to identify classroom accommodations to enable students to meet state standards, and plan for the eventual exiting of programs. Students may exit from Orton Gillingham or Wilson, but need additional comprehension strategies and/or fluency to access and meet grade level state standards. The Lexia program has been an effective instructional program for special education and at-risk students in reading. It is personalized and enables students to practice skills taught during their specialized reading instruction. The classroom and special education teachers vary specialized reading services based on individual needs. Programs may specify an amount of time weekly, in a specific group size. That could vary based on student performance and success in the general classroom or in specialized reading.

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.

When East School was opened in 2009, the approved and funded operating budget required staff reductions and the sharing of certain roles, including some specialist teachers, elementary assistant principals, and adjustment counselors. The Walker Report reflects that reality and was written at a time when only two elementary adjustment counselors were assigned half time to each to the four elementary schools. As well, the middle school adjustment counselor was reduced to .5 status and the high school role remained full time. In the intervening five years, full-time adjustment counselor (AC) roles have been restored to all six schools. Despite that good news, however, there has been a growing population of students with social-emotional needs at all levels and also the challenge of finding time for the adjustment counselors to meet both their regular education responsibilities (proactive teaching, small group lessons and interventions) and their growing responsibility for IEP-defined services for students with complex social-emotional needs. The move to a multi-tiered model for social-emotional interventions, the existence of strong PBIS models in all four elementary schools, the addition of Transition Rooms at the high school and middle school levels, and the adoption of Social Learning protocols all help to supplement the adjustment counselor resources for certain student needs, but concerns about finding the appropriate balance in the allocation of adjustment counselor time is the subject of ongoing discussion and some debate about expectations for school-based therapies. We are hopeful that the work of the newly formed Social-Emotional Task Force will result in a stronger model for the proposed Hingham Tiered Systems of Support (HTSS) and will define needed resources. As well, discussions of community and school-based stakeholders will help to add clarity of the AC role and better understanding of the nature of student needs to inform mitigation of that 'balance of time' dilemma for the ACs.

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

A number of options exist at HMS that are intended to enhance inclusiveness and foster student access to the curriculum in the least restrictive environment. Student supports in general classrooms may include individual or small group paraeducators and special education teachers. Leveled courses at grades 7 and 8 provide for a range of student achievement levels. Supported general education math classes exist at all three grade levels and a specialized ELA program exists for children who struggle with the general program. Most children are able to achieve their IEP goals within the general education classroom; however, some students receive pullout services to meet their unique

needs and may be assigned to a Strategies for Learning class at grades 6-8. Special educators are assigned for both general education classroom support and Strategies instruction. As well, a Life Skills class is available for students whose needs are multiple or more complex. A two-period Reading Lab elective is available at all three grades. Over the past five years, the MS has made changes to enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of its Instructional Support Intervention Team processes and functioning and the forms used to collect data and document interventions. Staff and parent comments suggest that the staff's greater awareness of interventions and additional training in developing, implementing, documenting, and reporting progress would be welcomed and benefit students. As well, the increased number of students with social, behavioral, and organizational difficulties adds a whole new dimension of student need to support planning ongoing staff training (i.e., recent training on executive functioning and organization for special education faculty). Some efforts already have been made in that area. The recent addition of a HMS Transition Room provides another avenue for short-term support for some students with medical or emotional health issues.

8. The middle and high schools should reconsider the current placement of students in the Level 4 (standard) courses.

The number of level 4 classes at the HS and MS has decreased in the years since the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks have been developed and refined and become the content basis for state-wide testing, at least for those students who are able to access the general curriculum that leads to a graduation determination. In certain grades 7-12 academic disciplines, levels 3 and 4 classes have been combined successfully, allowing students greater access to the curriculum standards and level of rigor that are expected for successful MCAS testing. This is accomplished with differentiation of instruction and content and modification of performance expectations and assessments. Examples would be in math and biology at levels 3 and 4; science in grades 9 and 10; and science and social studies at grades 7 and 8. In some courses such as Senior English and the several social studies electives, Levels 3 and 4 students are combined in the same class as a way of reducing the number of Level 4 courses that previously existed. Teachers are recommending that current level 4 classes are needed to meet the needs of the students in the particular grade level cohort. Annually each May, the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Middle School and High School Principals and Directors meet to determine where level 4 classes are needed to meet the needs of the particular students in each grade cohort. Thus, the decision of whether or not to offer a level 4 class in a particular subject may vary from one year to the next, again based on staffing and the department's perception of the needs of the students in that year. There is a parental scheduling "override" process to allow parents or students to elect a course different from the one recommended by teachers and school counselors however, it is important for all to understand that simply enrolling a student in a more challenging advanced level course does not guarantee a successful experience. The district believes that there still is the need for skills level course options for some students and personalized learning goals for more challenged learners. This dilemma of taking students from where their prior achievement leaves them to the next level of achievement, versus selecting specific English, biology, and mathematics courses that have a greater alignment with the standards is a serious one both for parents and the educators trying to guide them. In the end, not all parents have the same priorities for their children; nor will they all make the same decisions, thus reiterating the need for the provision of a continuum of service options available to our students with disabilities.

All of the Walker report recommendations were given due consideration over the past five years. In addition, district changes such as in enrollment, student demographics, general curriculum standards and resources, and ongoing self-analysis and parent feedback have also motivated improvements in special education services and programming. The need for change is ever present in education and

regular internal self-analysis and periodic external evaluation can combine to guide a culture of ongoing improvement.

APPENDIX
PRINCIPALS' 2016- 2017 UPDATE REPORTS FROM SIX SCHOOLS

PLYMOUTH RIVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Paraeducators

Our paraeducator population has shown a gradual increase over the past seven years with a more recent downward trend as we implement new guideline and needs assessments to determine whether a student requires an individual paraeducator. The current grade three population has a disproportionate number of students with significant disabilities. Within this grade, seven students (four of whom are focusing on life skills and functional academics) require paraeducator support in their classrooms in order to access the curriculum. During the 2010-2011 academic year, 210 hours of individual paraeducator support was needed, versus 285 hours of individual paraeducator support to educators being provided this current year. We are projecting 210 paraeducator educator hours to educators for the 2017-2018 academic year, a significant decrease.

PRS has made significant progress in refining its procedure for decision-making relative to identifying those students who require paraeducator support on IEPs. For students who require paraeducator support in the classroom, job descriptions for paraeducators are available yet roles will vary according to the needs of students and specific IEP goals. Overall the special education and general education teachers work collaboratively to implement an IEP; however, most of the leadership rests with the special education teacher.

Special Educators

There has been an increase in special education teachers from 3.0 to 4.5 FTEs. Currently, our special education teachers and paraeducator are assigned to one grade level team for consistency in the implementation of curriculum from year to year. However, one special education teacher does serve students in grades kindergarten (consulting) and two and others may have multiple grades if the caseload of another grade level is low. General education and special education teachers work collaboratively to address the needs of all students, which includes the introduction of new intervention strategies prior to a student being recommended for the ISIT process. Functional behavioral assessments are being used as a new data point to support student success in the classroom.

Our teaching faculty is well trained in a variety of best practices and specialized reading programs (particularly at primary grade levels). For example, all first-grade teachers have taken the Orton-Gillingham one-week course (non-certification IMSE). Further, all special education teachers are Orton-Gillingham or Wilson certified.

Response to Intervention & Specialized Reading

RtI is well established at PRS and utilizes paraeducators, special education and general education teachers, specialists, reading tutors, and the reading specialist to deliver instruction in small groups. The model is implemented at all grade levels. We also insist that students are grouped across the grade

level allowing us to pinpoint instruction. Frequency and type of implementation varies according to staff. The ISIT process and RtI are connected. Specifically, data gathered during RtI is used to inform instruction in the general education program. Special education students are typically with a special education teacher during RtI. Progress monitoring is conducted every 6-8 weeks and followed by a grade level team data meeting to discuss student progress, analyze data, plan instruction, and form new instructional groups. Students with disabilities are progress monitored every month. DIBELS, *Journeys* assessments, decoding assessments, and MCAS results are used to pinpoint areas of strengths and weaknesses and guide teachers in determining when students should exit our intervention groups.

Eligibility for specialized reading has tightened considerably since the 2012-2013 school year. Those students demonstrating below average performance on standardized measures may qualify for specialized reading. Likewise, exiting from specialized reading is determined when students meet their individual goals. The specialized reading program is a general education model and is available to students with and without disabilities.

Adjustment Counselors

The school regained a full time adjustment counselor. The Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) model has helped to incorporate all students in a social-emotional RtI model. Our school adjustment counselor is active in determining the role that social and emotional issues play in the special education eligibility process and the determination of progress towards IEP goals. Data meetings are held on alternate weeks to discuss students with emotional and social issues and families in need of services. PRS has an active school-wide PBIS model. This model is not effective, however, in addressing the needs of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities.

Additional Changes

An *Effective Progress Worksheet* is completed after the first ISIT meeting that includes data points for DIBELS, unit and end of year tests for EDM, and a behavior checklist and teacher response, *Journeys* benchmarks and adequate progress checklist, literacy portfolio, formative assessments, and health (attendance, tardiness, dismissals, visits to nurse). A Demonstrable Growth Worksheet for kindergarten is also used. There is some concern about the level of challenge of the new DIBELS benchmarks.

EAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Paraeducators

A working group was formed during the 2015-2016 school year to review the process for assigning paraeducator support to a student's IEP. The working group consisted of the Director of Student Services, an elementary school principal, an elementary school assistant principal, a special education teacher, and TEAM chairpersons from the elementary and secondary levels. The product of the working group's effort was guidelines for the addition of paraeducator support to an IEP and language to be added to IEPs that describes the role of the recommended paraeducator and indicates that the goal is to fade the support over time. The working group also created district-wide forms that are

expected to be used by IEP teams to document the rationale to add, increase or decrease paraeducator support.

Special Educators

The administration and relevant staff at East School review the caseloads of each special education teacher annually to determine equity. When necessary, special education teachers may service students from multiple grades in order to distribute students with IEPs appropriately.

Response to Intervention & Specialized Reading

The RtI process as described in the report has remained fundamentally intact with some additions. The East School Literacy team continues to progress monitor students as they move into grades 4 and 5 if they have demonstrated a continual need for remedial instruction. The East School Literacy staff and classroom teachers continue to refine the Response to Intervention model. Relevant staff meet throughout the year to review assessment data, adjust student groupings and assign staff as needed. The principals meet annually to ensure that RtI models provide for equitable service across the elementary schools.

Adjustment Counselors

With the return of full time adjustment counselors at the elementary level, their role has been the focus of frequent discussion. There has been a concerted effort to add adjustment counselors to IEPs only when appropriate, such as when the primary disability is social-emotional or if other unique emotional needs are impacting a student's ability to access learning. The adjustment counselor at East has played a key role in implementing the Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) model, the bullying intervention programs and Social-Emotional Thinking lessons. The adjustment counselor acts as a resource for staff when dealing with situations when a student's behavior is interfering with learning. Counselors are especially adept at connecting with parents/guardians to address stressors that may be impacting a student's ability to access learning.

Additional Changes

ABA Home Services: There has been a significant decrease in the number of students requiring ABA Home services due to the restructuring of the Integrated Preschool program and the addition of the Integrated Preschool Intensive Classroom and the K-2 Intensive Classroom. The Integrated Preschool can now offer full-day programming for 4.5 days for those students requiring services beyond the established schedule.

Intensive Preschool Services: The service delivery model for the Integrated Preschool program is reviewed annually in order to best meet the needs of the then student cohort. The 16-17 model has a classroom during the AM session that is dedicated to those students needing intensive services. All three classrooms follow an integrated model during the PM session. With the implementation of a full day K program for all option, the intensive full-day kindergarten classroom has evolved into a K-2 intensive skills program. In 2017-2018, there will be an additional component for intensive

instruction, as well.

East School has been using the Indicators for Effective Progress as a part of the *Instructional Support Intervention Team (ISIT)* process. The school psychologist/TEAM chairperson and the assistant principal at East Elementary School reviewed the indicators and consulted relevant staff to review and update the indicators. Furthermore, they restructured the ISIT team and created a structured schedule to allow teachers to bring their concerns forth about specific students. The expectation is that teachers will complete the necessary forms with relevant evidence before the ISIT meetings. The school psychologist/TEAM chairperson maintains a record for each student brought to the ISIT meetings.

SOUTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Paraeducators

The principal, assistant principal, school psychologist, literacy specialist, and special education staff determine the placement of the paraeducators depending on the needs of the grade levels/students.

Special Educators

Special Education services are provided in a variety of ways: Special Education teachers and paraeducators provide special education to students in the general education classroom including co-teaching and individualized support (B Grids). Some students need instruction in a separate setting as indicated on their C Grids of the IEPs. This instruction is typically a pull-out model.

Response to Intervention & Specialized Reading

RtI/TRI (Response to Intervention, Targeted Reading Intervention) groups are established at the beginning of the year based on DIBELS scores. DIBELS is given to all students in grades K-3 in September, January, and June. Grade 4 and 5 students are tested as needed. Assessments from the reading program are also taken into account. A majority of the building staff are assigned a group for this thirty minute almost daily intervention. All students participate in this differentiated intervention. Students whose scores demonstrate that they need greater intervention are placed in smaller groups with specifically specialized staff. The Reading Specialist oversees this program and provides training as needed for staff. The administration, school psychologist, and both classroom and special education teachers meet with the reading specialist twice a year to determine and review group placements. Preliminary groups for September are put together each June.

There are two literacy tutors who are utilized for a Targeted Reading Program (RtI/TRI). Beyond the RtI/TRI intervention, Tier 3 Reading takes place every morning and utilizes literacy tutors, special education staff, and the reading specialist. The students who participate in this are students who require further specialized instruction in decoding beyond the regular classroom instruction and the RtI/TRI Program at each grade level. Progress monitoring using DIBELS is conducted every eight weeks. This intervention has a positive impact on Special Education referrals.

Lexia, which is a computer based reading intervention program (personalized instruction), is available

in all schools based on student needs. Special Education personnel use specialized reading disciplines such as Orton Gillingham and Wilson to work on IEP goals.

Adjustment Counselors

With the return of full time adjustment counselors at the elementary level, their role has been the focus of frequent discussion. There has been a concerted effort to add adjustment counselors to IEPs only when appropriate, such as when the primary disability is social-emotional or if other unique needs are impacting a student's ability to access learning.

Additional Changes

All of the classrooms have FM systems. These systems amplify the speaker's voice some, but more importantly are effective in blocking out background sounds such as those from HV/AC systems that are common in newer or remodeled buildings. All classrooms have Smartboards.

We now offer full day kindergarten for all students. Most students participate in it. We do, however, continue to offer a half-day option. We currently have one student who has that option.

FOSTER SCHOOL

Paraeducators

We have transitioned to a specific number of paraeducator hours per elementary school to meet general special education/RtI needs. In the IEP, it is noted a paraeducator, special educator, or classroom teacher can provide services in the B grid. Foster School has not utilized a co-teaching model since 2004 or 2005. Foster School purposely assigned multiple grades, based on students in special education, and the possibility of multi-grade specialized services in reading. Special Educators supporting students in the general classroom plan for the students they service, and those groups periodically include other students who could benefit from the small group instruction. Foster School identifies very specifically the roles of the paraeducator, special education teacher, and classroom teacher to effectively support identified students

In 2015- 2016, specific guidelines were established by a working group for individual paraeducator support. The form must be completed and data attached. The form is reviewed by the IEP team. There are specific paraeducator positions identified along with responsibilities. Foster School staff continuously maintains discussions relative to each educator's role in the IEP or 504 designed and implemented. Ongoing staff development to enhance overall learning, as well as services identified in the 504 and IEP, is encouraged. Colleagues share strategies specifically during common planning time with classroom teachers and Day 6 with special educators. Paraeducators are provided a rolling "toolbox" containing materials and plans to be utilized when instructing, monitoring, and collecting data with individual or small groups of students.

Special Educators

Special Educators have common planning periods/lunch available daily with grade level(s) serviced, as well as Day 6 to work collaboratively among special educators. Paraeducator schedules are designed around identified student needs, through Title I, RtI, special education, and general education.

Four of the five special education teachers are Wilson and/or Orton Gillingham certified, along with additional programmatic trainings (i.e. Collaborative Problem Solving, LIPS, Foundations, Linda Mood Bell, Visualizing and Verbalizing, Anxiety in the Classroom, Social Thinking, Zones of Regulation, PBIS). Special educators also attend the classroom teacher programmatic professional development.

Special educators are essential team members in the classroom placement of students.

Special educators have been awarded grants from the PTO and HEF to extend sensory opportunities, technology applications, and effective strategies to enhance learning.

Response to Intervention & Specialized Reading

RtI models are shared regularly among the four elementary schools to foster equitable access to students across the district. The ISIT process is used in collaboration with the RtI programs.

Foster School continues to have a comprehensive ISIT (Instructional Support Intervention Team) process. The referral forms and process include checklists, screenings, observations, and recommendations. Tutors, special education teachers, and paraeducators are utilized in grades K through 5 Tier II interventions (RtI). The focus is literacy and math throughout the year. Further, our full day kindergarten program enables the classroom teacher, full time classroom paraeducator and .5 special education teacher to provide comprehensive differentiated instruction that includes RtI.

Our RtI program cycle of lesson planning is based on student RtI goals. Instruction is provided daily in kindergarten, four out of five days in grades 1-3, and three out of five days in grades 4-5. This allows for planning, observation, consultation, and additional small group work on days RtI groups are not in session.

Foster School has a specific exit plan in specialized reading. Students in Wilson are assessed by the Wade three times each year. Alternative programs are implemented for students not making effective progress in the Wilson program.

Adjustment Counselors

Each elementary school has a full-time adjustment counselor. There are specific Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III delivery of services. Foster School continues to fine tune adjustment counselor responsibilities to balance support services to special education students and general education students. Morning Check-In Groups, Social Thinking, and MARC updates are examples of general education, special education, and adjustment counselor collaboration.

Effective inclusion of our students with social-emotional delays is evidenced by special educators completing Functional Behavior Assessments as well as the establishment of “Morning Check-In Groups” and collaboration with classroom teachers in the most effective approaches for students socially and emotionally (i.e., Zones of Regulation, Collaborative Problem Solving, Social Thinking, Social Skills Improvement System). The school psychologist and our full-time adjustment counselor are effective team members as well.

Additional Changes

Two additional sub separate classrooms have been added to our district continuum of services, at South School and East School. Related service providers “push in” classrooms whenever it is appropriate. OT and Speech provide “motor centers” in every K class once per six-day cycle. Speech monitors K articulation in October and January, providing “home sounds” for K families, when needed.

FM systems are portable, district provided, and placed in classrooms based on student needs.

HINGHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL

Paraeducators

We continue to have a significant number of paraeducators at the middle school. We have two to three paraeducators providing inclusion support at each grade level, when a special education teacher is unable to be assigned. This is most often the case in science and social studies classes. The bulk of our paraeducators are assigned to provide one-on-one support to students with the most significant levels of need. Adding special education teachers would be beneficial, but it would not meet the needs of these students in the way that paraeducators do. Additionally, a fair number of our paraeducators are certified teachers.

We have also created schedules for our paraeducators that provide them with direct contact time with the liaison for their students. This is a benefit to the liaison, the paraeducator, and the student in that all parties can be on the same page every day. At the middle school level, we make every attempt to reduce the level of individual paraeducator support before students move on to high school. However, there are some students who have needs that emerge during these years, and adding an individual paraeducator becomes necessary in order for the student to achieve success.

Special Educators

With two special education teachers dedicated to each grade, we feel that we are sufficiently staffed in that area. A growing population of students in our life-skills program would indicate a need for an additional teacher for that population, but at the time it is being well managed by the teacher assigned to that role and the highly skilled paraeducators that she has to work with the students.

Response to Intervention & Specialized Reading

While RtI is difficult to implement within the framework of the middle school schedule, we have revamped and implemented the tools used by teachers to track interventions and their effectiveness. This is the initial step used in addressing academic concerns related to our students. If these interventions do not produce the desired results, then students are referred to the building ISIT team for further consideration. The middle school is in the process of analyzing and updating our ISIT program in order to make it more meaningful and impactful. Currently, when a student has been referred to the ISIT team, teachers have tried all the tools and interventions at their disposal.

The entrance criteria for reading services are much more well-defined than the exit criteria. Services tend to continue due to a lack of clearly delineated and articulated benchmarks that would indicate that services were no longer required.

Adjustment Counselors

The school adjustment counselor has been restored to a full-time position. However, the caseload at this time is more than one person can effectively manage. Currently, there are a total of 80 students being seen regularly by our adjustment counselor, 34 of which have services included in their IEPs. We have requested additional support in this area in order to meet student needs before they become elements of IEPs. Additionally, some faculty members have recently attended an overview of the Calm Classroom program, which is being introduced at HMS as a pilot. This would integrate and embed social-emotional learning into the general education classrooms on a regular basis.

Leveled Classrooms

We have made good progress on this point and have developed a continuation of services for students based on their level of need. We have supported general education math classes at every grade level, as well as a more specialized program at each grade level. In grade six we have a specialized ELA program for students who cannot access the general education curriculum, and general education classes that are supported by a special education teacher. In grades seven and eight we offer leveled classes that have similar supports for students on IEPs and 504 plans.

We have reduced the number of level 4 classes at the middle school by integrating these students into level 3 classes in the areas of science and social studies in grades seven and eight. Support services are provided by paraeducators in these classes, and for the most part, these same paraeducators have time in their schedules working with the student special education liaisons, which keeps them well informed as to what is being taught. We still feel that it is necessary to run level 4 classes in the areas of English and mathematics in order to target support to students.

HINGHAM HIGH SCHOOL

Paraeducators

Hingham High School utilizes 17 1:1 paraeducators and 6 inclusion paraeducators. This level of staffing effectively meets the needs of the student population. There is a protocol for adding new paraeducators. This protocol is used, if needed.

Special Educators

Hingham High School employs six full-time special educators. Of the six, two are responsible for the life skills program. Three teach five sections of Strategies for Learning, and the fourth teaches four sections of Strategies and co-teaches a sophomore English class. The case load for those not involved in the life skills program ranges from 27 to 41.

Response to Intervention & Specialized Reading

A goal in the 2016-2017 HHS School Improvement Plan is to “Develop and implement a comprehensive response to intervention system.” To provide general education interventions, we are piloting a supported study focusing on the development of organization and executive function skills to complement students' learning styles.

Reading is seldom, if ever, added at this level. Eliminating that service is a team decision. Exit criteria include current academic performance, QRI results and any other formal testing done as part of a reevaluation. The reading teacher no longer maintains a caseload of students with disabilities and we are exploring ways to more effectively utilize the role at this level.

Adjustment Counselors

Hingham High School employs one full-time adjustment counselor. Twenty-three of twenty-six primary caseload students for the HHS school adjustment counselor are on an IEP (89%). Of those 23, 16 have adjustment counseling on the service grid; that is 70% or 62% of all high school primary cases. Eight of those 16 (50%) have a social skills sort of goal, or 31% of the primary cases. In addition to primary cases, the adjustment counselor averages 6 to 10 other students who need to be seen from the secondary list or students he knows well (40 students) or new/short term cases per week.

There is a continued need for more services in the social-emotional area. As the number of students who have the adjustment counselor on the grid grows, the amount of flexibility the counselor has to work with regular education students and/or any student on an “as needed” basis (based on pressing needs) decreases.

Leveled Classes

In many cases the HS has combined level 3 and level 4 classes with differentiation to provide a rich curriculum experience and peer role models. In math, there are no level 4 classes. In biology levels 3 and 4 are combined since all students must pass the same MCAS. Senior English and social studies classes combine levels 2, 3 and 4 to prepare students for the transition to the adult world. Level four classes, when separate entities, are often predominately special education students. However, in many cases we have combined level 3 and level 4 classes with differentiation to provide a rich curriculum experience and peer role models.

Additional Changes

Hingham High School has a life skills program for students with cognitive and developmental disabilities. The students are grouped according to age. All students work on academics based on their individual abilities and participate in appropriate general education courses. These students are provided access to the curriculum through entry points and access skills as documented by the MCAS Alternative Assessment. Other skill development focuses individual IEP goals that may include the following: English language arts, mathematics, real world reading and writing skills, functional math skills, community-based learning, activities of daily living, social pragmatic skills, and pre-vocational and vocational skills. As students progress, they participate in pre-vocational opportunities within the high school. When they are ready to generalize these skills, students are assigned various vocational assignments in the community with a job coach. Upon completing their senior year of high school, transition into the post-secondary training begins. The focus of the post-secondary training is to develop individual skills related to transition, independent living, and vocational training. A transition assessment and report is completed as part of a three-year evaluation in order to assist in a smooth transition into adulthood.

We added “promoting self-advocacy” to the list of curriculum topics.

The position of post-secondary planning coordinator has been added to the HS counseling department (called career planning position in report).

The middle school does not grant waivers as foreign language is not a requirement at that level. Some students do come to the high school without having taken a foreign language at the middle school. They typically begin language study in grade 9. However, a small group of students may not begin until grade 11 because of the number of support classes they take such as Strategies for Learning, Reading, Core Literary Strategies, or Secondary Literary Strategies. Waivers for the graduation language requirement are rarely granted though may be if a team decides that is appropriate.

A Transition Room has been added. Overall, 69 students used the Transition Room in 2015-16; 52 students used it in 2014-15.