



A REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES
FOR
WESTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

EDCO Collaborative was contracted by Weston Public Schools to conduct a Special Education Program Evaluation. Dr. Marguerite Connolly, Director of Student Services, and Dr. John Brackett, Interim Superintendent, requested this evaluation aimed at determining the effectiveness of special education programs and services in supporting positive outcomes for students receiving special education services, and to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in department organization, programming, and delivery of services.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection procedures were multifaceted, collaborative and chosen to ensure input from multiple stakeholders. They included: focus groups, observations of programs and classes, interviews, review of student records, satisfaction surveys, and a review of studies completed in the past.

Nineteen focus groups were held and included parents, Case House administrators, school administrators, school cabinets, general education teachers from all levels, special educators from all levels representing both learning center and substantially separate programs, related therapy providers (speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists), and preschool staff. Observations of substantially separate programs at each level, learning centers, and general education classrooms were conducted as part of this evaluation.

Seventy-one parents completed the *Parent Satisfaction Survey*. Of the 71, 69% of respondents were parents of secondary or post-secondary students, 28.2 % were parents of elementary students.

Eighty-one staff members completed the *Staff Satisfaction Survey*. The 81 included general and special educators, learning assistants, administrators, related therapy providers, and support staff.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN WESTON PUBIC SCHOOLS

OVERVIEW

Students with disabilities comprise 17.1% of the K–12 student enrollment; the state rate in Massachusetts is 17.0%. The rate has increased steadily from SY 2012-2013 when students with disabilities comprised 12.6% of the K–12 student enrollment.

Disability Category in Weston compared to Massachusetts:

Disability Category	WPS (Easy IEP data 11.28.15)	Massachusetts (FY2014)
Specific Learning Disability	33.5%	26.4%
Health	24.3%	11.1%
Developmental Delay	10.8%	10.7%
Communication	8.3%	17.2%
Autism	9.0%	9.9%
Emotional	5.4%	8.8%
Neurological	4.7%	5.4%
Intellectual	2.6%	5.7%
Multiple Disabilities	0.7%	2.8%
Sensory	0.7%	1.2%
Physical	0.0%	0.8%

Educational placement in Weston compared to Massachusetts:

Educational Placement	WPS (Easy IEP 11.28.15)	Massachusetts (FY2014)
Full inclusion	69.7%	61.1%
Partial Inclusion	26.5%	17.3%
Substantially separate	6.3%	14.7%
Separate Day School	4.3%	} 6.9%
Residential	1.0%	
Home-Hospital	0.3%	

In SY 2011-2012, 1.0% of Weston students with disabilities were educated in out of district placements, significantly lower than the state average for out of district placements, 6.1%. Currently, 5.6% of special education students are placed in out of district settings.

It is important to note, in the past five years, twenty-five families have unilaterally placed students in private special education schools. Six of these families have sought tuition funding from Weston. The remainder of the families pay privately for the school placement.

HISTORY

It is essential to consider the history of special education in Weston Public Schools as part of this program review. It became clear early in the evaluation process that significant dissatisfaction with special education administration and services endures among families as a result of past experiences. This has led to pervasive distrust of the special education department amongst a large cohort of families. A majority of parents who attended the focus groups are parents whose children now attend private schools at their own expense and who believe the district failed their children. They report their children were not evaluated in a timely fashion, that appropriate evaluation tools were not maintained, a general reluctance to find students eligible for special education existed, and programming for children with language-based learning-disabilities (child first language) was not appropriate and was inconsistent throughout the district. These parents also describe administrators as being neither responsive nor cooperative. Further, they allege learning assistants were and continue to be providing direct services to students with disabilities. These and other examples of alleged non-compliance were reported by a majority of the parents in attendance.

Further, parents reported they believe the priority in the district is the high achieving students and students with disabilities are an after-thought: "there is not the same standard of quality applied to special education as general education." They feel there is a tremendous amount of work done on researching and providing curriculum for general education, but the same attention is not given to curriculum for substantially separate special education programs, there is no consistency in substantially separate programming from school to school and special education teachers are not trained in scientifically based, data driven methodologies. Finally, parents have shared their concerns that general education teachers and learning assistants have not received appropriate training necessary to understand and remediate disabilities.

Parent focus groups revealed a significant degree of emotion accompanying these statements. Parents report being frustrated and angered to the point of removing their children from the district. Examples of statements are, "We were put through the ringer" and "Our children were left scarred." After the focus groups, several parents made follow-up phone calls to report their personal experiences, "in the hope that no other family must go through this." One parent stated, "The town has a lot to make up for, for the harm that was done to students."

Two years ago, the issue was brought to the Weston school committee's attention. Two members, Rosemary Tomaso and Rick Manley, spent many hours during the 2012-2013 school year interviewing parents of children with disabilities who had expressed concerns to the committee. The outcome was positive. Weston's Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) reports, "...their concern for students initiated a series of changes in special education in our district."

At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, a new Director of Student Services and a new Assistant Director began in Weston. At that time, the Bridge Program was launched, a special education department head was hired for Weston High School, and licensed special educators were moved to the Skills Rooms (learning centers) across the district. This was a significant shift in special education service delivery, from provision of direct academic support provided by tutors and learning assistants to such support provided by licensed special educators.

At all levels, the goal was to end the practice of learning assistants providing direct services. In a letter to parents, Susan Strong, then Director of Student Services wrote, "Our learning assistants (formerly called tutors) will be providing support to our students, as needed, under the direct supervision of our learning center teachers. Learning assistants will be assigned to a learning center teacher, and deployed per each student's IEP. Each student will have a designated special education liaison, a learning center teacher, who will provide direct service to students as well as oversee the daily work of the assigned learning assistants."

In addition, in August 2012 a consultant was brought in to train staff in Response to Intervention. She continued throughout the year, working with faculty on writing measurable goals and benchmarks, monitoring progress, using data driven problem solving, and transition planning.

Although positive changes occurred over the next three years, many challenges remain and unfortunately, numerous families continue to feel that the district failed them. With the departure of both the Director of Student Services and Assistant Director at the end of SY14-15, a new Student Services Director and Interim Assistant Director of Student Services are leading the department.

ADMINISTRATION / STAFFING

Dr. Marguerite (Midge) Connolly, is Weston's new Director of Student Services. Currently an interim is in place as Assistant Director of Student Services, Gerald Kupperschmidt. Weston's administrative model includes an out of district coordinator, team chairpersons at the primary, elementary, and high school levels, and a department head for the middle and high school levels. The absence of a team chairperson at the middle school was an administrative choice.

Special education teams including teachers, learning assistants, and related therapists work in each school. Staffing is as follows:

Weston Windows at Country School: 2 special education teachers, 2 instructional aides, 2 learning assistants, 1 SLP, shared OT and shared PT

Weston Windows at Woodland School: 2 special education teachers, 1 instructional aide, 2 learning assistants, 1 SLP, shared OT and shared PT

Country School: 3 special education teachers, 12 learning assistants, counselor, shared school psychologist, shared SLP, shared BCBA, shared OT and shared PT

Woodland School: 2 special education teachers, 6 learning assistants, counselor, school psychologist, shared SLP, shared BCBA, shared OT and shared PT

Field School: 5 special education teachers, 10 learning assistants, counselor, 2 shared school psychologists, 1 SLP, shared BCBA, 2 shared SLPs, 1 OT, shared PT

Weston Middle School: 9 special education teachers, 15 learning assistants, 3 counselors, 1 school adjustment counselor, 1 school psychologist, shared school psychologist, BCBA, 2 shared SLPs, shared OT and shared PT

Weston High School: 9 special education teachers (one is also the special education department head for MS and HS), 10 learning assistants, 6 counselors, 1 SLP, shared OT and shared PT

A board certified behavior analyst (BCBA) supports students and staff throughout the district. Support services are also provided in the areas of Assistive Technology and Vision/Mobility by consultants. Instructional Support Teams exist at each school. The models vary and have been developed by building administration.

GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT SUPPORTS/CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

A District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) has been drafted to assist principals in ensuring that all efforts have been made to meet students' needs in regular education. The DCAP has not yet been finalized.

Weston's pre-referral process consists of Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) at each school. Building administrators report the term "pre-referral" is not used because that could be perceived as "a means to an end." Each school has developed a methodology that works for the school although teams and processes differ significantly from school to school. Generally, principals report teachers bring challenges to the team, supports are brainstormed, and feedback is provided. When general education supports are unsuccessful, students are referred for evaluation.

At **Country School** the instructional support process takes place at grade level meetings and involves regular and special educators. The principal indicated that the meetings are child-centered and offer a collaborative problem solving process for teacher referrals. The IST process is monitored and documented support team personnel.

At **Woodland School**, the IST consists of two general education teachers, the adjustment counselor, and a related therapist. The team hears concerns and offers strategies to support teachers. Monitoring and documentation are part of the process.

The **Field School** uses a process where the team, including general and special education teachers, hears the concern, then defines data to be gathered. Information is documented and shared with general education teachers, related therapists and learning assistants.

The *House Model* at **Weston Middle School** offers the first line of communication for students who are struggling. House Teams meet weekly. Students who are perceived as struggling are discussed, information is documented, and observations occur. Strategies are developed, implemented and the results of the interventions are discussed at a subsequent meeting. Information is documented in Google Docs.

At **Weston High School**, instructional support is a work in progress. The assistant principal chairs instructional Support Meetings. The team is working on a consistent monitoring and follow-up process. Professional development is often based on needs that are raised in IST.

Although there is a specific process for documentation of IST information in four of the five schools, there is no specific method for transferring information from level to level. Progress monitoring varies from school to school.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

A wide range of services is in place for students with disabilities. Over the last several years the Weston Student Services Department has focused on building capacity within the district for students requiring significant amounts of specialized instruction. As a result, programs for students with language-based learning disabilities, students on the autism spectrum, and students with social-emotional challenges have been developed. In addition, learning center support is offered at each school.

All five schools offer language-based programming, although the programs differ from school to school and *ACCESS*, a substantially separate program for students on the autism spectrum, exists at the primary, elementary and middle schools.

Weston Windows integrated preschool program is located at both Country and Woodland Schools. Each classroom serves students with disabilities as well as typical peer models. As a rule, students diagnosed on the severe end of the autism spectrum attend the program at Country to ensure a smooth transition to the **ACCESS** program there. Staffing levels are similar with the exception of one additional instructional aide at the Country School.

Preschool teachers demonstrate a strong investment in the program. For the past several summers they have met to develop curriculum. They have become familiar with curriculum at the kindergarten level so that they are able to focus on appropriate readiness skills.

Lively Letters, a multi-sensory approach to teaching phonemic awareness, speech production, and phonics is used at the preschool level. A consultative model is utilized where the speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist, and physical

therapist work in the classroom and meet with teachers regularly to ensure consistency of remediation and generalization of skills.

Preschool classrooms are bright and large. The typical adult:student ratio is 1:3. Classrooms appear to be organized and structured; visuals can be seen throughout and children demonstrate familiarity with routines. Communication and social skills are woven throughout the curriculum.

The **Country and Woodland Schools** serve students in grades PK to 3. Country has two learning center teachers as well as teachers for the language-based program and ACCESS program. There are twelve learning assistants supporting special education programs at Country. At Woodland, there is one learning center teacher, a Language-based Program teacher, and six learning assistants.

Field School houses grade 4 and 5. Special education teachers are in both the ACCESS and the Language-based Program and there are three learning center teachers. Teachers loop at Field school (move with their cohort from grade 4 to grade 5). Math is supported primarily through a co-teaching model. Ten learning assistants support students at the Field School.

The elementary special education classrooms observed were large and bright and most teachers have their own spaces. Students appear to be familiar with routines, engaged and challenged. Teachers express the desire to receive additional training and would also like to see learning assistants have opportunities for training.

At **Weston Middle School**, there are two ACCESS Programs; ACCESS I is a substantially separate program for students with severe challenges, ACCESS II is for students with moderate challenges who are integrated. Each program has a lead teacher. ACCESS I students are taught “replacement curriculum” for all academic subjects.

Language-based programming at Weston Middle School occurs in both a substantially separate model where students are in the LB classroom for English Language Arts, math, and phonology and a model where English Language Arts classes are co-taught. There are six additional special educators who work in learning centers or as co-teachers, and there are fifteen learning assistants across special education programs. In the ACCESS program, teachers loop with their students.

The 2015-2016 school year is the first year of a co-teaching model for mathematics at the middle school. In-house training was offered for those who wanted to pilot co-teaching. Most pairings include a new and a veteran teacher.

The middle school operates with a “House” concept with two house teams at each grade level. This offers special educators, general education teachers, and related

service providers weekly opportunities to meet. Guidance counselors are a part of each house, and this year the middle school was able to hire a school adjustment counselor.

In September, before school begins, general education teachers and special education liaisons from each house gather for transitional meetings. Liaisons share information on student profiles, accommodations, and services. Weekly communication during the school year facilitates smooth transitions and provides time to discuss student challenges and plan support.

A review of student schedules, IEPs, and teacher schedules reveals much of the student schedule is driven by the complex middle school master schedule. Academic support, or *Study Skills* class appears in most IEPs in either the B grid (special education and Related Services in General Education Classroom), C grid (Special Education and Related Service in Other Locations) or both. In many instances “Learning Assistant” is listed as the service provider. Teacher schedules do not always appear to match student schedules and service delivery grids. During one of the focus groups, it was reported students receive a grade for the Study Skills class.

At Weston High School services are provided in the learning center or via a co-teaching model. Academic support is provided in the learning center through *Skills* classes. Typically, groups of 8 – 12 students work with at least one teacher and one or more learning assistants. Schedules, assignments, and notes are on display to support students. Students observed showed evidence of engagement and accessed available support personnel to work on assignments or to prepare for tests and quizzes. The model appears to provide academic support rather than remedial support.

The high school also offers language-based programming. A teacher and learning assistant are assigned to the language-based program in a substantially separate classroom. Students in all four grades may receive language-based support. In addition to language-based programming, the high school offers the *Bridge* Program. *Bridge* began in the 2012-13 school year as a program for students in general education that had missed a lot of school due to medical issues. These students’ needs included social emotional challenges and the program evolved into one for all students with short or long term social-emotional issues. The *Bridge* team includes a special education teacher, an adjustment counselor and an adjustment counselor intern. Students who require a therapeutic setting may be scheduled into the *Bridge* Program, typically five students per period, but students are allowed to drop in to the *Bridge* classroom for immediate needs. The special education teacher provides academic support while the counselor and intern meet emotional needs. In addition, the Bridge team has made Transition planning a priority. The program features transition assessment and curriculum geared toward post-secondary skills.

There is currently no *ACCESS* program at Weston High School; however, the special education department is looking into programming for students in *ACCESS* who will transition to WHS at the end of this school year.

At Weston High School the *Goal* program supports students with intellectual impairments who are eligible for services until age 22.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

For 2014, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education designated Weston as a Level 2 district. Districts are rated at the lowest level of need of any of their schools. Points are awarded annually for narrowing proficiency gaps, growth, and two high school indicators: annual dropout rate and cohort graduation rate. Ratings are based on a measure of the improvement that a group makes toward its own targets over a two-year period on up to seven different indicators. Groups are eligible for ranking if a sufficient number of students were assessed (20 for schools, 30 for subgroups) in English language arts and mathematics in the most recent year and one of the two prior years. A group is awarded points and rankings based on the amount of improvement it makes from one year to the next:

100 - Above Target

75 - On Target

50 - Improved Below Target

25 - No Change

0 - Declined

Summary of Improvement at WPS:

District-wide

- ELA -Narrowing proficiency gaps (Composite Performance Index) On target
- ELA - Growth (Student Growth Percentiles) – Improved below target
- Math - Narrowing proficiency gaps (Composite Performance Index) On target
- Math - Growth (Student Growth Percentiles) – Improved below target

Country – Level 1 - Meeting gap narrowing goals, commended for high progress (no student w/ disabilities subgroup)

Woodland – Level 1 – Meeting gap narrowing goals (no student w/ disabilities subgroup)

Field - Level 1 - Meeting gap narrowing goals, did not meet target for students with disabilities

- ELA -Narrowing proficiency gaps (Composite Performance Index) - Improved below target

- ELA – Growth – (Student Growth Percentiles) - Improved below target
- Math - Narrowing proficiency gaps - (Composite Performance Index) Above target
- Math – Growth – (Student Growth Percentiles) - On target

Middle – Level 2 – Not meeting gap narrowing goals, did not meet target for students with disabilities

- ELA -Narrowing proficiency gaps - (Composite Performance Index) On target
- ELA – Growth – (Student Growth Percentiles) - Improved below target
- Math - Narrowing proficiency gaps - (Composite Performance Index) Declined
- Math - Growth - (Student Growth Percentiles) - Improved below target

High School – Level 1 – Meeting gap narrowing goals (No student w/ disabilities subgroup)

PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN WESTON

Impressions – Parent Focus Groups

- ✓ Lack of trust among parents causes concern for the integrity of this program review. Parents wonder if there a conflict of interest because Weston is a member of EDCO Collaborative.
- ✓ Parents are “fatigued” from dealing with special education department.
- ✓ Fundamental question: Is WPS committed to educating students with disabilities?
- ✓ There is a blatant culture of discrimination toward students with disabilities.
- ✓ Historically, students with disabilities receive a minimal level of services and many eventually leave the district.
- ✓ The culture of excellence in Weston does not extend to special education.
- ✓ Many general educators have limited exposure to /understanding of special education.
- ✓ Need more emphasis on differentiated instruction/UDL
- ✓ There is no incentive for teachers and administrators to keep students in district, but Weston taxpayers have an interest in keeping kids in district to the greatest extent possible.
- ✓ Parents wonder if the general education curriculum is too rigorous. Why do kids in general education need tutoring to get through our curriculum?
- ✓ Student Services, in addition to the principals, should play a role in the hiring of special educators and service providers.
- ✓ Need to develop a succession plan for Student Services administration.
- ✓ Special education decisions at Team meetings are not data driven, parents do not have concrete information for decision making.
- ✓ A significant number of students with disabilities are diagnosed with language-based learning disabilities yet there are few resources for teachers to support these students. Data driven approaches and early intervention are needed.
- ✓ Programs have been developed haphazardly as needs arise.
- ✓ Need to focus on how math and science are taught to students with disabilities and on closing the achievement gap in these two subjects.
- ✓ Better supervision of service providers is needed. Sessions are missed and not made up.
- ✓ How do you build quality programs and maintain that capacity in a smaller district with relatively small cohorts of students in need of substantially separate settings?
- ✓ Need entry and exit criteria for specialized programs.
- ✓ Need improved RTI as well as clarification on the progression between RTI and special education.
- ✓ Need a continuum of programs and services. Students are taught using Wilson Reading System some years, and then switch to Orton-Gillingham, for example. Also need a continuum of programs for moderate and severe special needs,

- across a range of disabilities. Need to build capacity for, and understanding of, students with low incidence special needs.
- ✓ Beyond the Goal and Bridge Programs, the primary supports at WHS seem to be co-teaching and Skills. The co-teaching that currently exists at WHS seems haphazard; parents report that one subject is offered one year, and a different one the next year. Skills class seems to consist of organizational and homework help, but not remediation.
 - ✓ Need more resources for mental health issues and to try to reduce the stigma.
 - ✓ In-district evaluation capabilities need to be stronger. In addition, teams should be more open to considering outside evaluations.
 - ✓ Team chair model has been an improvement, however, in some cases the use of team chairs has also distanced principals from engagement with families of students with disabilities.
 - ✓ Preschool parents are unclear as to the levels of service provided and the circumstances under which they need to pay tuition.
 - ✓ Are there adequate supports in place for families of children with special needs for whom English is not their first language?
 - ✓ Technology should be used to “level the playing field” for students with disabilities.
 - ✓ Extended School Year programs have not helped children historically; many parents no longer avail their children of these services.
 - ✓ Additional options are needed in the Goal program for students who are not college-bound.
 - ✓ Professional development should be focused and designed to address gaps and build in-district capacity for the long-term. There should be special education experts who can be called upon for advice if a teacher needs support.
 - ✓ What can we do to provide peer models for children with low-incidence disabilities? Can we partner with other districts?
 - ✓ Learning assistants need professional development; the district needs to pay overtime to learning assistants for PD and to support students in after-school activities.
 - ✓ An analysis of the number of learning assistants and their use in the district is needed. Are we helping students to become more independent?

Impressions – Staff Focus Groups (central office administrators, school level administrators, general and special educators at all levels, and related therapists)

- ✓ RTI programs have been an area of focus over the last several years and processes have improved. General education teachers are involved to a greater degree.
- ✓ Parents are engaged and supportive.
- ✓ Students with more severe disabilities are now being serviced within the district.
- ✓ Training provided by the new Student Services Director at school staff meetings was very helpful.

- ✓ Preschool program location in the primary schools is a benefit as older students serve as role models.
- ✓ Consultative model of related therapy at preschool and elementary levels is working.
- ✓ Appreciation for consideration of specialists in planning of professional development.
- ✓ Appreciation for district support of initiatives such as Social Thinking.
- ✓ Team concept is important at all levels; teams at some levels work more effectively due to common planning time and school culture.
- ✓ Team Chair model is an asset; provides support for special educators, support for administration with regard to supervision of special educators and challenging students.
- ✓ Appreciation for testing done by Team Chairs.
- ✓ Appreciation for administrative assistant support for special education at each level.
- ✓ Overall, general educators are aware of accommodations and services.
- ✓ There is a perception in Weston that average is not ok. Average students are put on IEPs.
- ✓ High expectations have led to curriculum being too rigorous. General education students require outside tutoring to pass courses. This creates tremendous challenges for students with disabilities.
- ✓ Leaders are not in a position to support special education due to lack of understanding of special education and the law.
- ✓ IEPs and services rendered do not sync.
- ✓ Concern that master schedules drive services. "We are trying to fit kids into schedules."
- ✓ District focuses on high achievers, the gap is widening for students with disabilities.
- ✓ Need for clear entry and exit criteria for substantially separate programs.
- ✓ Need for clarity around the determination of need for aides, learning assistants.
- ✓ Need for more effective assigning and supervision of learning assistants.
- ✓ Need for teacher input in learning assistant hiring process.
- ✓ Need for training for learning assistants: disabilities, data collection, working in inclusive setting, etc.
- ✓ Need for protocols / procedures: "nuts and bolts:" evaluation, eligibility, IEP writing (in particular, documentation of services in service delivery grid). Also, procedures for special education purchasing.
- ✓ Concern for staff / parents circumventing the pre-referral process.
- ✓ Concern that as more severely disabled students enter the high school, teachers are not prepared.
- ✓ General education curriculum is aligned/consistent from school to school, level to level. Curriculum in special programs is not. Individual teachers often develop "replacement curriculum" for their students.

- ✓ Need for training in special education regulations and procedures for general education teachers.
- ✓ Need for specific disability training for general education teachers who serve students in substantially separate programs.
- ✓ Teachers are not equipped to handle behaviors of students in in-district programs.
- ✓ Inconsistency in use of *Infinite Campus* by general education teachers makes it difficult for students with disabilities.
- ✓ Need for professional development on co-teaching, there are varied degrees of expertise throughout district.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Commendations

First and foremost, it is important to note that staff who attended the Focus Groups consistently articulated deep concern and dedication to students and families. Responses were thoughtful and delivered with a sense of introspection. Participants acknowledged weaknesses in the system and appeared eager to make improvements. Throughout the process WPS staff gave the sense of being anxious to provide exemplary services to all students, not just high achieving students.

Knowing the history of special education in Weston and the associated perceptions of the program, Weston administrators are to be commended for undertaking a review of special services. As evidenced by parent focus groups, there are many constituents who harbor feelings of anger and mistrust toward the department. Weston's Interim Superintendent and Director of Special Services recognized this and moved quickly to explore concerns with an eye toward improvement.

Weston Student Services has undergone significant change over the last several years. In 2012, a new Director of Student Services and Assistant Director began. Their work resulted in many staffing and programmatic changes. Parents and staff alike expressed positive feelings about the changes but also reported not enough was done.

The current special education administrative model, with a Team Chairperson at the primary, elementary, and high school levels, has led to stronger Team decisions with increasingly consistent consideration to regulations and best practice. In addition, regular meetings involving special educators, related service providers, and Team Chairpersons have been an asset to supporting students. All schools in Weston have reported that a Team approach to student services and problem solving is a priority.

Weston provides a part time administrative assistant for special education staff at each level. The clerical support is much appreciated by staff and frees teachers up to focus on students.

At the preschool level, the Team approach includes a consultative model for the provision of related services. This model provides consistency for students and has been proven to support generalization of skills across settings. Preschool classrooms observed were warm and welcoming. Schedules and readiness curriculum are posted throughout the classrooms and students demonstrated familiarity with routines. The adult:student ratios are favorable for individualized support.

Weston's learning assistants are highly skilled, most hold a bachelor's degree or have related experience. The role of learning assistant has evolved over the last several years. Weston has been studying at the current model for utilization learning assistants in order to maximize student learning.

Teachers at every level report “looping” is part of the model of service. Looping from grade to grade with students allows both students and families additional time for relationship building. The transition process from grade to grade is made easier because of familiarity with service providers. Service providers become familiar with students’ learning styles and challenges, and the strategies that work for them. Communication is often facilitated when families and school staff have the opportunity to bond over several years.

Weston is to be commended for their diligent work on transition across grade levels and school buildings. Each school reports a process where sending and receiving teachers are able to observe, meet, and share information. Time is spent at the end of each school year as well as the beginning of the new school year for teachers to learn about their new students.

In addition, the high school has made transition planning a priority. Beginning in freshman year, the Bridge program assesses student strengths, preferences, and interests, uses the information gleaned for goal-setting, and then provides appropriate curriculum and activities for students to realize post secondary goals.

Weston has also developed a post-secondary program, the Goal program at Weston High School. This is aimed at providing students opportunities to reach their goals in the least restrictive setting.

A review of IEPs developed in Weston indicates for the most part, they are well written, particularly the *Student Strengths and Key Evaluation Results summary* component. Assessments are well documented with evaluators’ names and dates, and the primary disability is noted. Goals are appropriate and appear to be developed utilizing evaluation summaries, Present Levels of Performance A and B, and specially designed instruction data.

Weston has developed an exemplary District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP), however it is in draft form. The plan is meant “to assist the regular classroom teacher in analyzing and accommodating diverse learning styles of all children in the regular classroom and in providing appropriate services and supports within the regular education program including, but not limited to, direct and systematic instruction in reading and provision of services to address the needs of children whose behavior may interfere with learning, or who do not qualify for special education services under chapter 71B.” The plan will prove valuable for Instructional Support Team members as they consider struggling students.

The Director of Student Services has begun to provide trainings for administrators and staff on special education regulations and issues of non-compliance. Examples are guidance on IEP development, particularly how services should be documented in

service delivery grids, provision of accommodations to both typical students and students with disabilities, and other issues where non-compliance exists. Staff report this guidance has been helpful. In addition, a workshop featuring a special education attorney has been scheduled for all staff in January 2016.

Recommendations

Communication has been cited in responses to both the parent survey and parent focus groups as an area of critical need. Thirty-six percent of parents who responded to the survey do not agree that communication is appropriate and frequent enough to keep them informed and 38% feel that they do not receive progress reports with the level of frequency needed to keep them informed. Only 44% of parents feel they are equal partners in planning their child's individual education program.

Contrary to these statistics, 87% of staff responding to the survey agree that parents are encouraged to participate in making decisions about their child's educational programs and services and 76% feel the school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents of children with disabilities. Sixty-nine percent feel parents and family members value their recommendations.

This disconnect in parent and staff survey results, history, and information shared in focus groups is evidence of the division that exists between parents and special education administration. Communication must be a priority for administrators, teachers, and all other school-based staff moving forward. Progress reports provide an excellent vehicle for communication and must be completed quarterly and in a timely fashion.

The Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC), under the leadership of Christen Lacey, has proven to be a strong advocate for special education in Weston. Dr. Connolly has reached out to this group and begun to work with them with the goal of relationship building and parent education. As Dr. Connolly and her staff continue in their efforts to improve relations with parents, the SEPAC can be instrumental in facilitating opportunities for focus groups, informal conversations, and parent workshops. One way for Weston to partner with the SEPAC is to continue to provide special education personnel to present to parents on specific areas related to special education.

In addition, Weston may wish to consider participating in training offered by the Federation for Children with Special Needs and MassPAC. Annually these groups sponsor a three-day APPLE (Advancing Parent Professional Leadership in Education) Institute for parents and school districts to help them build collaborative working relationships. The training focuses on helping parents and professionals develop skills to become full and effective partners toward improving student outcomes. Topics include: Respectful Conversations, Deep Listening, and Consensus Brainstorm.

Through the Team Chair model, Weston has made strides in making stronger Team decisions, considering best practice, and adhering to regulations. The absence of a Team Chair at the middle school level is a deterrent to consistency in programming, procedures, professional learning opportunities, and district-wide communication. Weston must take steps to include an additional position in the budget so that a Team Chairperson represents all levels. In addition, the job description of the Team Chairperson should be reviewed to ensure consistency in responsibilities.

Weston appears to have documented some processes, procedures, and program information; however, staff report they have not accessed such. Improved dissemination of information is imperative. It would be helpful to use a database such as Google Docs to make special education information available to all staff, including general education teachers. The database should include special education compliance policies including state and federal regulations, program descriptions with entry and exit criteria, the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan, and any business processes related to special education, i.e., purchasing. Administrative Advisories and Technical Advisories published by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education support compliance with special education regulations and could be posted as resources. Team chairpersons could also conduct trainings in the processes and procedures and then the information is posted on the websites you recommend.

In addition, special education program review criteria published in the *Coordinated Program Review* manual should be utilized by Team Chairpersons to ensure teams understand the expectations with regard to special education. An example of this is to bi-annually review a student folder to test compliance in various categories of the Coordinated Program Review.

It is critical that all administrators and staff receive training in legal issues related to educating students with disabilities, both students with IEPs and students on 504 Accommodation Plans.

Administrators and staff alike demonstrate a lack of knowledge of special education regulations that has resulted in issues of noncompliance. Weston's special education attorney should present to staff on "pitfalls" of Team process: child find, timelines, responsibilities of general educators, independent educational evaluations, and parents' rights. Special education regulations must be part of annual civil rights training, and discussion of regulations and pitfalls should be on-going as regulations change frequently. Weston has already made strides in this area through presentations provided by the new Director of Student Services and will present a professional learning workshop with their attorney in January 2016.

Similarly, professional development is needed for general education staff and learning assistants with information and strategies necessary to teach students with disabilities.

Fifty-five percent of staff responding to the survey believe the need for general education teachers to have focused professional development on special education and teaching students with disabilities is important and the lack of said professional learning opportunities is a challenge for programs for students with disabilities, 26% see it as a barrier. Likewise, 42% report general education teachers need for more focused professional development on differentiated instruction as a challenge, 25% view it as a barrier.

Beginning in 2016, all teachers will need 15 hours of professional development in special education to relicense. This presents an opportunity for Weston to provide professional learning opportunities targeting instruction in disabilities and related teaching strategies. Another area of focus should be co-teaching. Although several schools are utilizing a co-teaching model, it does not appear that formal training was done. A workshop on best practices related to co-teaching followed by observation and consultation would support the effectiveness of this model and allow it to be utilized more fully.

A study of IEPs in Weston raised concerns about the eligibility determination process and team understanding of eligibility criteria, particularly at the secondary level. For example, one student's *Student Strengths and Key Evaluation Summary* indicates the student "showed significant strengths" in four separate areas of cognitive testing, was in the "average to high average range for age" in two additional categories, "is performing on grade level," in reading, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, and shows "significant strengths" in math. MCAS scores are reported as proficient in both ELA and Math, Education Records Bureau (ERB) scores are reported in the 90th percentiles for both Reading and Math. None of the data reported in this IEP supports a determination of eligibility and yet the student's services are consistent with a high level of need including significant support from a learning assistant.

The transition to high school is reportedly very challenging for many students. The rigor of the curriculum combined with the perception that special education is the only source of support at this level results in inappropriate findings of eligibility. Utilization of the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan as well as additional training for chairpersons will address this issue.

The number of referrals at the secondary level also raises a question regarding the distribution of school psychologists throughout the district. As Weston reviews its staffing patterns, a look at school psychologist assignments is recommended as well.

Evaluations utilized to determine eligibility must be comprehensive and appropriate to the referral questions of concerns and the area of suspected disability. Although the district maintains a variety of current and appropriate assessment tools, some staff members reported they are not aware of what is available. In addition, 31% of parents completing the survey *disagree or strongly disagree* that their child's evaluations were

thorough and comprehensive and accurately reflected their child's needs. They also report having difficulty understanding results with the manner they are communicated. It would be helpful for the district to perform an inventory of test tools, and then review tools to ensure appropriateness and currency. Available tools could be posted by category on a Google Doc accessible by all evaluators in the district. Next, the district must ensure that all staff who evaluate are trained in test administration, interpretation, and written and oral reporting. This will alleviate concerns about the validity of evaluations, support accurate eligibility determinations, and result in more efficient Team meetings. Given the high percentage of students identified with specific learning disabilities in Weston, specific training in eligibility determination of specific learning disabilities is recommended for Team Chairpersons, special educators, and evaluators.

The District Curriculum Accommodation Plan should be reviewed by the administrative team, finalized, and disseminated. At the secondary level, confusion and misperceptions exist regarding the provision of accommodations for typical students as well as students on IEPs or 504s. This confusion has the potential to result in denial of student civil rights. The DCAP provides clear guidance on allowable accommodations, which will level the playing field for struggling students and will also support appropriate eligibility determinations. Principal observation, supervision and evaluation of staff with an emphasis on using the strategies to address meeting the needs of diverse learners (standard 2, indicator A of the evaluation rubric) will be critical follow up to the completion of the DCAP.

Although some schools have a procedure in place to disseminate relevant IEP information to general educators, only twenty-eight percent of parents who responded to the survey believe general education teachers are aware of their child's learning style and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP. Just less than 37% believe general education and special education teachers collaborate on IEP implementation. Thirty-five percent feel teachers demonstrate knowledge of their child's learning style and just less than 34% believe teachers understand their role in implementing the IEP.

Sixty-three percent of staff responding to the survey reported regular and special education teachers do not have sufficient time to collaborate and 44% feel there is insufficient communication and collaboration among general and special education teachers and parents to help special education students to make an effective transition into their school. Weston educators are extremely fortunate to have an eight-hour school day as part of their collective bargaining agreement. There is a span of contracted work time, about sixty minutes, at the end of the student school day. This time should be utilized for collaboration among general education and special education staff. One or two days per week could be designated specifically for this desired collaboration time.

There is variability in substantially separate programming from school to school. Weston must look at best practice with regard to serving students in the language-based programs and ACCESS programs and ensure consistency from school to school. In order to accomplish this, staff must be trained in a variety of scientifically based, data driven approaches. Ideally, language-based teachers will have *Wilson Reading System* or *Orton-Gillingham* certification (not merely an overview), *Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing*, and a program geared toward basic writing skills such as *Framing Your Thoughts*. Staff that is trained in a variety of specially designed instructional models will be well prepared to select the appropriate methodology for individual students. For the ACCESS program, methodologies must be geared toward the level of need of the students. Consider *Training and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH)*, *Social Thinking*, and *Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)*.

Just less than 40% of parents who responded to the survey disagree or strongly disagree that a variety of methodologies are available for consideration during the IEP process. A variety of curriculum must be available to support learners' unique needs. Many specialized curriculums/methodologies will benefit students with disabilities across educational environments, not just in substantially separate classrooms. It is important that all teachers and learning assistants who are working with the students be trained in appropriate methodologies. A Train-the-Trainer model could be utilized so that general education teachers and learning assistants can be made aware of philosophies and strategies within identified programs. One way to share information with general educators and learning assistants is to offer opportunities for special educators to model lessons using a specific approach.

Specialized curriculum should not be limited to students on IEPs. A program such as *Lexia Reading* will be beneficial for all students who are struggling with sound symbol relationships.

Substantially separate programming will be most effective when consistent methodologies and practice are known by all special educators and can be implemented as needed from level to level. The district must undertake vertical alignment of curriculum used in substantially separate programs and must ensure students are given consistent opportunities for 1:1 or small group instruction from level to level.

At the middle school level, language based programming must be more consistent from grade to grade. The grade 6 language-based program is exemplary and should be duplicated throughout the middle school. Co-taught classes should also be available at each grade for students requiring a lesser restrictive educational environment.

Due to the size of the district, Weston is challenged with small cohorts of students requiring substantially separate programming. The district would be well served to consider consolidation of programming at the elementary level to ensure reasonable

cohort sizes and to maximize resources. While serving students outside of their home school may appear less than ideal, students learn best while learning with others and the opportunity for students of similar profiles to learn from each other will be beneficial.

Staffing models should be studied at all levels with the aim of ensuring compliance with special education regulations, providing supervision through a special education lens, equity in caseloads, adequate time for collaboration, and effective, frequent progress monitoring. It is important to keep in mind that equity in caseloads is not driven by number of students. For example, a teacher leading a substantially separate classroom should be responsible for fewer students than one in a learning center setting, due to the level of need of the students. While looping occurs in certain programs, Weston should consider utilizing a looping model for students in lesser restrictive settings.

Job descriptions for special education staff, including learning assistants, should be revised to ensure consistency in roles from level to level and to clearly define responsibilities. A learning assistant should not be responsible for designing or providing direct instruction nor should they be responsible for developing lesson plans.

There are over 60 paraprofessionals supporting students with disabilities employed in Weston; at the preschool level there are 4 learning assistants and 3 instructional aides, 18 learning assistants at the primary level, 10 at the elementary level, 15 in Middle School and 10 in High School.

The chart below shows a study of districts of similar size shows the following (data from DESE 2014):

District	# Students	# Students w/ Disabilities	% of Total	# Paraprofessionals	Student : Paraprofessional Ratio
Lynnfield	2205	352	15.9%	45	7.8:1
Swampscott	2250	341	15.0%	47.3	7.2:1
Weston	2253	391	17.1%	61.1	6.4:1

It is recommended that the Weston administrative team consider whether or not the current number of learning assistants/instructional aides is the most effective use of resources. Many districts have studied their use of paraprofessionals and determined that licensed special educators would offer students and staff significant educational benefit and as such, these districts have reduced the number of paraprofessionals and increased the licensed special education staff in their employ. Administration should also consider involving teachers in interviews for learning assistants who will be assigned to their classes. Good relationships are essential in teacher/paraprofessional partnerships and may be facilitated by an initial bond formed during the interview process.

As stated under Commendations, *Student Strengths and Key Evaluation Summaries* reviewed during this process are well written with enough detailed information about students to allow the reader to become familiar with the learning style and challenges. I recommend those who are developing IEPs receive training on other sections, specifically, PLEP-A and B, and service delivery grids. PLEP-As and PLEP-Bs reviewed included lengthy lists of accommodations. Many did not rise to the level of a true accommodation but instead could be categorized as “good teaching practices.” The lengthy lists are problematic for two reasons. First, an accommodation is defined as “a change in course/standards/test presentation, location, timing/scheduling, expectations, student response necessary to provide access for a student with a disability to participate in a course/ standard/test and demonstrate what (s)he knows and can do. Many accommodations listed are in fact, practiced on a daily basis for all students, not just students with disabilities. Second, as it is necessary for a general education to commit accommodations to memory, it is important to document accommodations that are appropriate and meaningful for the student. A committee of special educators and general educators could work together to review, discuss and define what is considered “good teaching” versus “true accommodation” in order to make IEPs more accurate and tailored to individual student need.

The service delivery grid is a key component of the IEP for several reasons. The grid defines the student’s specific services, settings, staff, and, in some cases the group size, i.e. 1:1 or small group. For the district, the grid is an essential component of applications for circuit breaker reimbursement. For these reasons, it is critical that grids be completed in a thorough and accurate manner that reflects **individualized** services. Thirty-one percent of parents who responded to the survey do not agree that services and supports are provided as written in the IEP.

Weston uses *Infinite Campus* as its student information system. Many special educators and related therapists noted the use of *Infinite Campus* for recording home assignments is a tremendous benefit for students with disabilities. Some reported, however, that the recording of assignments is not done consistently throughout the district. It is recommended that all teachers be required to utilize this function of *Infinite Campus*, or another platform, to share home assignments and projects. This will assist not only students with disabilities, but also any student who struggles with executive functioning skills.

Weston’s administrators reported they have made substantial gains in supporting students using an instructional support process in their buildings. Specific, defined methods for progress monitoring of students considered by IST teams must be put in place. Also, there must be a method for transferring information from one level to the next. Sharing of IST referral information could prevent time lapses in special education referrals for students who have been discussed in a prior school. In addition, a review of the processes used in each school, with the aim of ensuring more consistency school to

school would be advantageous. Use of consistent forms and processes would benefit all who utilize the process, including parents, and would facilitate record keeping and student progress monitoring. Finally, a method for progress monitoring must be in place.

Summary

Weston has implemented many excellent programs and curriculums and is striving to continue working toward improvement in processes, practice, and accountability. Administrators are motivated to learn and utilize best practice to support students with disabilities and staff demonstrates determination to ensure positive student outcomes. The lack of consistency from school to school and level to level, however, has created obstacles.

Weston has many of the essentials in place needed to improve special education programs and services: motivated staff, invested and collaborative families, curriculum leadership, and resources. This will positively impact the implementation of recommendations.

The first priority for Weston must be to reestablish trust with families. As the Weston Special Services Department grows, parents must be partners in the process. The SEPAC will be a strong advocate as relationships are repaired.

Many of the recommendations set forth involve professional development across the district. Priorities for professional learning are:

- ✓ Legal issues in educating students with disabilities
- ✓ Disability awareness
- ✓ Eligibility Determination / IEP development

Next, special educators must be trained in a variety of specially designed instructional methodologies appropriate for the population of students they are working with. Teachers of substantially separate programs should receive priority status.

Planning and implementing professional learning opportunities will take time but frameworks are in place to make this happen. Similarly, alignment of curriculum in content areas is in place and will serve as a model for completing this process for substantially separate programs.

Special education procedures and practices are in place and many have been documented. These should be reviewed and put in one document that can be easily accessed by all staff. Regulations specific to special education could be included.

Staff report Weston has a variety of appropriate and current assessment tools. In order to ensure access by all evaluators, tools should be inventoried and lists of assessments

shared. Next, evaluators should be surveyed to ascertain whether additional training in test administration / interpretation is needed.

Weston's Administrative Team must review the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan, revise if necessary, and plan for implementation and follow-up.

Steps should be taken to make the Instructional Support Process more consistent from building to building. Processes are very different and although schools must practice what works for the building staff and students, forms and record keeping should be consistent. In addition, there must be a process developed for progress monitoring and sharing of information.

The current model of hosting similar substantially separate programs in both primary schools may not be the most cost-effective or beneficial for students. Providing programming at one school rather than two will maximize resources and facilitate training in disability awareness. It will also offer students greater opportunities for learning with peers.

Finally, a review of how learning assistants are utilized is imperative. It is important to consider the unique needs of every child, particularly those in substantially separate programs, when considering assignment of 1:1 learning assistants.

EDCO is grateful for the opportunity to review special education programming in Weston. We thank all of the participants, parents, staff, and administration for their openness, honesty, and assistance in this work.

APPENDIX

Weston Public Schools Data: (www.profiles.doe.mass.edu)

Selected Populations in Weston

Title	% of District	% of State
First Language not English	9.2	18.5
English Language Learner	3.6	8.5
Students With Disabilities	17.1	17.1
High Needs	23.5	42.2
Economically Disadvantaged	3.4	26.3

Weston's Enrollment Compared to State

Total enrollment	Our district		Massachusetts	
	2,333		955,739	
By high needs population	Our district		Massachusetts	
	#	%	#	%
Low income students	85	3.6	365,885	38.3
Students with disabilities	389	16.5	164,336	17.0
English language learners	76	3.3	75,947	7.9

Graduation Rates in Weston

5-Year Graduation Rate (2013)							
Student Group	# in Cohort	% Graduated	% Still in School	% Non-Grad Completers	% GED	% Dropped Out	% Permanently Excluded
All Students	180	95.6	3.3	0.6	0.0	0.6	0.0
Male	86	91.9	5.8	1.2	0.0	1.2	0.0
Female	94	98.9	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
ELL	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Students w/disabilities	28	75.0	21.4	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Low income	10	90.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
High needs	39	82.1	15.4	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Afr. Amer./Black	10	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Asian	21	90.5	9.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hispanic/Latino	8	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White	134	95.5	3.0	0.7	0.0	0.7	0.0
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	7	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Special Education Data

Indicator 5 - Educational Environments for Students Aged 6 - 21 with IEPs

For 2013-14, the state target for % of Students with IEPs served in **Full Inclusion** is 60.5%, the target for % of Students with IEPs served in **Substantially Separate** placements is 14.5%, and the target for % of Students with IEPs served in **Separate Schools, Residential Facilities, or Homebound/Hospital** placements is 5.5%.

	Enrollment	District Rate	State Rate	State Target
Enrolled students with IEPs	362	--	--	NA
Full Inclusion (inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day)	295	81.5%	61.1%	60.5%
Partial Inclusion (inside the general education classroom 40%-79% of the day)	32	8.8%	17.3%	NA
Substantially Separate (inside the general education classroom less than 40% of the day)	7	1.9%	14.7%	14.5%
Separate Schools, Residential Facilities, or Homebound/Hospital placements (does not include parentally-placed private school students with disabilities)	28	7.7%	6.8%	5.5%

Special Education data are suppressed for enrollment counts fewer than 6.


Accountability

2014 Accountability Data - Weston

District Information			
District:	Weston (03300000)		
Region:	Greater Boston		
Title I Status:	Yes		
Accountability Information			About the Data
Accountability and Assistance Level			
Level 2 One or more schools in the district classified into Level 2			
This district's determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention			
Meets Requirements-At Risk (MRAR)			
This district's progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps (Cumulative Progress and Performance Index: 1-100)			
Student Group (Click group to view subgroup data)	On Target = 75 or higher - ■		View Detailed 2014 Data
	Less progress	More progress	
All students		96	Met Target
High needs		78	Met Target
Low income		68	Did Not Meet Target
ELL and Former ELL		100	Met Target
Students w/disabilities		75	Met Target
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.		-	-
Asian		100	Met Target
Afr. Amer./Black		84	Met Target
Hispanic/Latino		82	Met Target
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.		100	Met Target
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.		-	-
White		95	Met Target

School Accountability Information			About the Data
School	School Type	Title I Status	Accountability and Assistance Level
Country	Elementary School	Title I School (TA)	Level 1
Field Elementary School	Elementary School	Title I School (TA)	Level 1
Woodland	Elementary School	Non-Title I School (NT)	Level 1
Weston Middle	Middle School	Title I School (TA)	Level 2
Weston High	High School	Title I School (TA)	Level 1

District Report Card



2014 Massachusetts District Report Card Overview

WESTON PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT (03300000)

John Brackett, Superintendent
89 Wellesley Street, Weston, MA 02493

Phone: 781.786.5210
Website: <http://www.westonschools.org>

Report cards help parents/guardians and the general public see where schools and districts are succeeding and where there is still work to do. This report card overview answers important questions about our district's performance. For the full report card containing additional data contact the district or visit the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu>. For more information about report card data, visit our [Profiles Help](#) page.

How is our district doing overall?

Accountability & assistance levels	Overall progress in narrowing gaps										
<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black;">Level 2</div> </div> <p>One or more schools in the district classified into Level 2</p> <p>Most schools are assigned a level from 1-5, with those meeting their proficiency gap-narrowing goals in Level 1 and the lowest performing in Levels 4 and 5. A district is typically assigned a level based on the level of its lowest performing school. Placing schools and districts into levels helps districts know which schools need more support, and helps the state know which districts need the most assistance.</p>	<p>Massachusetts aims to reduce proficiency gaps by half between 2011 and 2017.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">All students</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Met Target</td> </tr> <tr> <td>High needs students</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Met Target</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Low income students</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Did Not Meet Target</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Students with disabilities</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Met Target</td> </tr> <tr> <td>English language learners & former ELLs</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Met Target</td> </tr> </table>	All students	Met Target	High needs students	Met Target	Low income students	Did Not Meet Target	Students with disabilities	Met Target	English language learners & former ELLs	Met Target
All students	Met Target										
High needs students	Met Target										
Low income students	Did Not Meet Target										
Students with disabilities	Met Target										
English language learners & former ELLs	Met Target										
<p style="text-align: center;">District determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;"> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 10px; display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black;">Meets Requirements-At Risk (MRAR)</div> </div> <p>Districts, including single school districts, are assigned a determination of need for special education technical assistance or intervention. These determinations, which are typically based on the district's accountability and assistance level, range from <i>Meets Requirements – Provisional</i> (districts with insufficient data) to <i>Needs Substantial Intervention</i> (Level 5 districts). The determination, which also incorporates compliance measures, helps to identify whether the Department will require districts to take additional actions to support improved outcomes for all children, especially students with disabilities.</p>											

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group:

Date:

Attendees/Roles/Responsibilities:

Primary questions:

What do you believe your school does exceptionally well in delivering special education services to students with disabilities?

What do you believe should change or be improved in the delivery of special education services?

Specific Areas to discuss:

- Communication - gen. ed., sped, related svc. providers, parents
 - Time for communication?
 - Support for gen educators in disability awareness, other special education topics?
 - Co-teaching model
- Learning Assistants
 - Trained?
 - Effectively assigned?
 - Effectively utilized?
- IST Process
 - RTI utilized?
 - Documentation
- IEP
 - Goals and objectives aligned with need and curriculum?
 - Services provided as written?

- How are general education teachers / learning assistants made aware of IEP?
 - Are accommodations provided throughout settings?
- How is progress monitored?
- Is progress reported using data?
- Substantially separate programming:
 - Adequate methodologies to meet unique needs?
 - Adequate programming?
 - Vertical alignment of curriculum?
 - Methodologies?
 - Qualified instructors?
- Transition planning
 - Occurs at 14 and older?
 - Transition goals?
- Parent involvement
 - Parents encouraged to participate?
 - District responsive to parents?
 - District recommendations valued?
 - Education offered for parents?
- Professional learning opportunities:
 - Who has access?
 - Topics?

Parent Satisfaction Survey Results

71 responded to the survey

Respondents by child's grade:

1 Pre-K
10 Primary
9 elementary
20 MS
25 HS
4 post-graduate
2 no response

Respondents by child's gender

23 female
46 male
1 male/female
1 no response

Respondents by child's disability

3 Autism Spectrum Disorder
5 Communication
7 Developmental Delay
2 Emotional
2 Health
3 Intellectual Impairment
4 Neurological
20 Specific Learning Disability
18 Multiple Disabilities
7 not sure

Was your child found eligible for an IEP prior to enrolling in Weston Public Schools?

31 yes
30 no
9 n/a
1 no response

If your child was found eligible by WPS, in what grade level?

16 PK
18 K-2
13 3-6
5 7-8
2 9-12
4 multiple referrals
13 no response

Evaluations are thorough and comprehensive.

15.5% strongly agree

32.4% agree

18.3% neutral

11.3% disagree

19.7% strongly disagree

1.4% no response

Evaluations accurately reflect my child's needs.

16.9% strongly agree

29.6% agree

19.7% neutral

15.5% disagree

15.5% strongly disagree

1.4% no response

Evaluations include specific recommendations.

15.5% strongly agree

36.6% agree

21.1% neutral

11.3% disagree

12.7% strongly disagree

1.4% no response

Evaluation results are communicated in a clear manner that helps me understand my child's disability and learning needs.

18.3% strongly agree

26.8% agree

19.7% neutral

16.9% disagree

14.1% strongly disagree

2.8% no response

I am invited to a Team meeting at least once per year.

50.7% strongly agree

32.4% agree

2.8% neutral

5.6% disagree

0% strongly disagree

7.0% no response

My concerns and requests were documented on the IEP or in the IEP cover letter.

19.7% strongly agree

40.9% agree

12.7% neutral

5.6% disagree

8.5% strongly disagree

11.3% no response

The IEP accurately reflects the TEAM's discussion.

14.1% strongly agree

43.7% agree

14.1% neutral

9.9% disagree

7.0% strongly disagree

9.9% no response

The IEP states how progress towards goals and objectives will be measured.

12.7% strongly agree

39.4% agree

19.7% neutral

12.7% disagree

4.2% strongly disagree

9.7% no response

A variety of methodologies are available for consideration during the IEP development process.

11.3% strongly agree

14.1% agree

23.9% neutral

22.5% disagree

16.9% strongly disagree

9.9% no response

Services and supports are provided as documented in the IEP

14.1% strongly agree

26.8% agree

16.9% neutral

18.3% disagree

12.7% strongly disagree

8.5% no response

My child is making progress on the goals on the IEP

14.1% strongly agree

33.8% agree

19.7% neutral

12.7% disagree

8.5% strongly disagree

9.9% no response

I receive progress update with frequency to keep me informed.

11.3% strongly agree

18.3% agree

22.5% neutral

22.5% disagree

15.5% strongly disagree

8.5% no response

I am informed of my rights if I disagree with the school's decision.

15.5% strongly agree

35.2% agree

21.1% neutral

12.7% disagree

2.8% strongly disagree

11.3% no response

I feel that I am an equal partner in planning my child's individual education program.

18.3% strongly agree

25.4% agree

18.3% neutral

18.3% disagree

12.7% strongly disagree

5.6% no response

Teachers and administrators interact with me in a professional manner.

28.2% strongly agree

39.4% agree

15.5% neutral

7.0% disagree

5.6% strongly disagree

2.8% no response

I am encouraged by teachers and administrators to participate in decision-making.

- 15.5% strongly agree
- 39.4% agree
- 12.7% neutral
- 12.7% disagree
- 14.1% strongly disagree
- 4.2% no response

District staff are available and accessible.

- 21.1% strongly agree
- 29.6% agree
- 19.7% neutral
- 15.5% disagree
- 8.5% strongly disagree
- 4.2% no response

Communication from district staff is appropriate and frequently enough to keep me informed.

- 12.7% strongly agree
- 19.7% agree
- 23.9% neutral
- 26.8% disagree
- 9.8% strongly disagree
- 5.6% no response

The district offers education about disabilities for students and families.

- 8.5% strongly agree
- 22.5% agree
- 18.3% neutral
- 22.5% disagree
- 19.7% strongly disagree
- 7.0% no response

The special education teachers make accommodations and modifications as documented in IEP.

- 15.5% strongly agree
- 26.8% agree
- 15.5% neutral
- 22.5% disagree
- 4.2% strongly disagree
- 14.1% no response

General education teachers are aware of my child's learning style and provide accommodations and modifications as documented in the IEP.

12.7% strongly agree
15.5% agree
22.5% neutral
22.5% disagree
15.5% strongly disagree
9.9% no response

General education and special education teachers collaborate to insure the IEP is implemented.

14.1% strongly agree
19.7% agree
18.3% neutral
22.5% disagree
14.1% strongly disagree
9.9% no response

Teachers demonstrate their understanding of my child's learning style.

14.1% strongly agree
16.9% agree
28.2% neutral
21.1% disagree
14.1% strongly disagree
4.2% no response

Teachers demonstrate their understanding of their role in implementing the IEP.

12.7% strongly agree
21.1% agree
22.5% neutral
21.1% disagree
12.7% strongly disagree
8.5% no response

Therapists demonstrate that they understand my child's learning style.

14.1% strongly agree
25.4% agree
16.9% neutral
7.0% disagree
8.5% strongly disagree
26.8% no response

I am satisfied with the types of and amount of services my child receives in specialized instruction.

- 12.7% strongly agree
- 14.1% agree
- 19.7% neutral
- 22.5% disagree
- 22.5% strongly disagree
- 7.0% no response

I am satisfied with the amount of services my child receives from related therapists (SLP, OT, PT)

- 14.1% strongly agree
- 14.1% agree
- 11.3% neutral
- 16.9% disagree
- 9.7% strongly disagree
- 32.4% no response

I am satisfied with the amount of counseling services my child receives.

- 11.3% strongly agree
- 2.8% agree
- 21.1% neutral
- 14.1% disagree
- 8.5% strongly disagree
- 40.9% no response

I am satisfied with social-emotional support my child receives.

- 18.3% strongly agree
- 8.5% agree
- 23.9% neutral
- 11.3% disagree
- 14.1% strongly disagree
- 22.5% no response

The school ensures that after-school and extra-curricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities.

- 14.1% strongly agree
- 14.1% agree
- 22.5% neutral
- 4.2% disagree
- 9.9% strongly disagree
- 33.8% no response

Transition planning was part of my child's Team meeting.

5.6% strongly agree

18.3% agree

7.0% neutral

8.5% disagree

4.2% strongly disagree

54.9% no response

Individualized goals related to post-secondary options were developed as part of the IEP process.

2.8% strongly agree

16.9% agree

11.3% neutral

7.0% disagree

4.2% strongly disagree

56.3% no response

Overall, I am happy with the special education services my child receives.

16.9% strongly agree

14.1% agree

16.9% neutral

18.3% disagree

28.2% strongly disagree

2.8% no response

Overall, my child is happy at school.

23.9% strongly agree

29.6% agree

12.7% neutral

12.7% disagree

12.7% strongly disagree

7.0% no response

Staff Satisfaction Survey Results

81 responded to the survey

Respondents by level:

4 district-wide

3 Pre-K

13 Primary

9 elementary

21 MS

24 HS

7 multi-school assignments

Respondents by assignment:

5 administrators

32 general educators

3 learning assistants

7 related therapy providers

13 special educators

7 support staff

12 other

There is sufficient communication between general education and special education staff about the needs and progress of students with disabilities.

13.6% strongly agree

30.9% agree

14.8 % neutral

32.1% disagree

2% strongly disagree

6% no response

There is sufficient communication between general education and related services staff (SLP, OT, PT, School Adjustment, etc.) about the needs and progress of students with disabilities.

6.2% strongly agree

38.3% agree

18.5% neutral

28.4% disagree

2.5% strongly disagree

6.2% no response

Adequate time is available for general and special education teachers to collaborate in planning and delivering instruction students with disabilities.

1.2% strongly agree

16% agree

17.3% neutral

42.0% disagree

18.5% strongly disagree

4.9% no response

General and special education teachers follow a clear model/process for co-teaching.

8.6% strongly agree
14.8% agree
14.8% neutral
27.2% disagree
12.3% strongly disagree
22.2% no response

General education teachers are provided with sufficient information and support for helping students with disabilities in their classrooms.

11.1% strongly agree
35.8% agree
17.3% neutral
22.2% disagree
7.4% strongly disagree
6.2% no response

I receive the support I need from the administration when facing challenges related to teaching or serving students with disabilities.

3.7% strongly agree
32.1% agree
28.4% neutral
21.0% disagree
2.5% strongly disagree
12.3% no response

Paraprofessionals are effectively assigned in order to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities.

4.9% strongly agree
28.4% agree
25.9% neutral
25.9% disagree
2.5% strongly disagree
12.3% no response

Paraprofessionals are effectively utilized to support the learning and progress of students with disabilities.

7.4% strongly agree
32.1% agree
33.3% neutral
9.9% disagree
3.7% strongly disagree
13.6% no response

The paraprofessionals I work with are sufficiently trained to provide instruction support to students with special needs.

7.4% strongly agree

28.4% agree

25.9% neutral

22.2% disagree

2.5% strongly disagree

13.6% no response

The district provides useful professional development related to meeting the needs of special education students.

1.2% strongly agree

8.6% agree

24.7% neutral

44.4% disagree

16.0% strongly disagree

4.9% no response

The training sessions I attended have been helpful to me in supporting the learning of students with disabilities.

1.2% strongly agree

14.8% agree

27.2% neutral

24.7% disagree

6.2% strongly disagree

24.7% no response

Our school makes every attempt to meet the unique needs of students through a pre-referral process such as RTI before a district referral to special education is made.

14.8% strongly agree

32.1% agree

17.3% neutral

17.3% disagree

1.2% strongly disagree

17.3% no response

Our school has a well defined and systematic process for implementing interventions prior to referral.

6.2% strongly agree

25.9% agree

23.5% neutral

23.5% disagree

7.4% strongly disagree

13.6% no response

The evaluations conducted through the special education process are sufficiently comprehensive to identify students' specific strengths and needs.

21.0% strongly agree
44.4% agree
19.8% neutral
4.9% disagree
0% strongly disagree
9.9% no response

The results of special education evaluations are shared with me in ways that provide meaningful insights into students' educational needs.

16.0% strongly agree
39.5% agree
12.3% neutral
22.2% disagree
1.2% strongly disagree
8.6% no response

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) process in the school involves general and special education teachers as equal partners in making recommendations.

11.1% strongly agree
33.3% agree
22.2% neutral
21% disagree
2.5% strongly disagree
8.6% no response

The Team considers the least restrictive environment in making recommendations for special education services.

24.7% strongly agree
53.1% agree
8.6% neutral
1.2% disagree
2.5% strongly disagree
9.9% no response

My students' IEP goals and objectives are specifically aligned with the general education curriculum.

13.6% strongly agree
37.0% agree
19.8% neutral
14.8% disagree
1.2% strongly disagree
13.6% no response

The special education services, accommodations, and/or modifications identified in my students' IEPs are provided as written.

16.0% strongly agree

50.6% agree

16.0% neutral

4.9% disagree

2.5% strongly disagree

9.9% no response

There is a consistent approach to progress monitoring in my school – there is a schedule and methods/tools for monitoring the progress of students with disabilities.

9.9% strongly agree

25.9% agree

25.9% neutral

18.5% disagree

4.9% strongly disagree

14.8% no response

The school's report card (or other progress report) effectively communicates the progress of students with disabilities.

2.5% strongly agree

33.3% agree

27.2% neutral

17.3% disagree

3.7% strongly disagree

16.0% no response

Students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in school-sponsored activities such as field trips, extracurricular activities, and sporting events.

61.7% strongly agree

30.9% agree

0% neutral

1.2% disagree

0% strongly disagree

6.2% no response

Parents are given the opportunity to participate as partners in evaluating their child's needs.

35.8% strongly agree

51.9% agree

7.4% neutral

0% disagree

0% strongly disagree

4.9% no response

Parents are encouraged to participate in making decisions about their children's educational programs and services.

42.0% strongly agree
44.4% agree
7.4% neutral
0% disagree
0% strongly disagree
6.2% no response

The school effectively responds to the needs and concerns of parents of children with disabilities.

29.6% strongly agree
46.9% agree
14.8% neutral
1.2% disagree
1.2% strongly disagree
6.2% no response

My professional recommendations are valued by parents and family members.

21.0% strongly agree
48.1% agree
23.5% neutral
3.7% disagree
0% strongly disagree
3.7% no response

Teachers in this school do not have high enough expectations for students with disabilities.

16.0% challenge
7.4% barrier
74.1% not a problem
2.5% no answer

Teachers in this school have expectations that are too high for students with disabilities.

32.1% challenge
6.2% barrier
58.0% not a problem
3.7% no answer

Regular and special education teachers don't have sufficient time for collaboration.

63.0% challenge
19.8% barrier
13.6% not a problem
3.7% no answer

Progress monitoring for special education students is not being implemented consistently.

38.3% challenge

16.0% barrier

39.5% not a problem

6.2% no answer

General and special education teachers need a toolkit of progress monitoring tools and training in how to use them

50.6% challenge

17.3% barrier

28.4% not a problem

3.7% no answer

Our school needs more guidance in the selection and use of intensive reading interventions for students reading below grade level.

35.8% challenge

19.8% barrier

38.3% not a problem

6.2% no answer

General education teachers need more focused professional development on special education and teaching students with disabilities.

55.6% challenge

25.9% barrier

14.8% not a problem

3.7% no answer

General education teachers need more focused professional development on differentiating instruction.

42.0% challenge

24.7% barrier

29.6% not a problem

3.7% no answer

Learning Assistants need more focused professional development on providing instructional interventions to students.

56.8% challenge

21.0% barrier

16.0% not a problem

6.2% no answer

Our school needs guidance and support on implementing a more systematic pre-referral intervention process (RTI or similar at the elementary level and a broader array of interventions before students are referred to special education at the middle and high school levels).

38.3% challenge

19.8% barrier

34.6% not a problem

7.4% no answer

There is insufficient communication and collaboration among general and special education teachers and parents to help special education students make an effective transition into our school.

30.9% challenge

13.6% barrier

49.4% not a problem

6.2% no answer

Overall, I believe that my school delivers high quality education programs and services for students with disabilities in my school.

13.6% strongly agree

51.9% agree

23.5% neutral

8.6% disagree

1.2% strongly disagree

1.2% no response

Overall, I feel WPS is meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the district.

8.6% strongly agree

51.9% agree

19.8% neutral

14.8% disagree

0% strongly disagree

4.9% no response