

EDUCATION SERVICES ANALYSIS

for the

Bethlehem Central School District

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The staff of Alliance Education Associates is pleased to provide this report of the comprehensive analysis of the specified programs and services of the Bethlehem Central School District (the District) that was conducted from January through June of 2026. The primary purposes of the program analysis were to analyze, and to provide suggestions to improve specific areas within its education delivery system that included:

- (1) Related Services
- (2) Utilization of Para-Professional Supports
- (3) Out of District Placements
- (4) Continuum of Services
- (5) Organizational Structure and District Coordination of Programs and Services¹

In conducting this analysis, the review team employed proprietary methodology that triangulates information gleaned from qualitative and quantitative data. More specifically, the qualitative analyses comprised: (1) a series of confidential interviews or surveys with special education teachers, general education teachers, related service providers, paraprofessionals, central office administrators, parents, and school-based administrators; (2) a review of documents (i.e., IEPs) to ascertain the nature of educational programming and services; and (3) non-evaluative site visits to District programs to analyze the continuum of services and programs.

Quantitative analyses included: (1) multidimensional analyses of information contained within the IEPs; (2) comparative analyses of staffing and corresponding workloads; and (3) student outcome data. Given the number of data points, the results that are reported within this document represent recurring themes.

In addition to the areas of strength (e.g., relatively low numbers of SWDs in out of district placements) that the authors discuss and celebrate in the report, there are also areas of opportunity (e.g., processes to improve vertical articulation, inclusionary teaching models).

¹ Given the depth and breadth of the Financial report, comprising Medicaid and School Transportation, this is presented as a companion document.



GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

ABBREVIATIONS

CRASDs:	<i>Capital Region Analogous School Districts</i>
AIS:	<i>Academic Intervention Services</i>
ARI:	<i>Availability Ratio Index</i>
CPSE:	<i>Committee on Preschool Special Education</i>
CSE:	<i>Committee on Special Education</i>
DCT:	<i>Direct Consult Teacher</i>
ELA:	<i>English Language Arts</i>
FAPE:	<i>Free and Appropriate Public Education</i>
FTE:	<i>Full-time equivalent</i>
ICT:	<i>Integrated Co-Teaching</i>
IEP:	<i>Individualized Education Program</i>
LRE:	<i>Least Restrictive Environment</i>
OOD:	<i>Out of District Placements</i>
OT:	<i>Occupational Therapist or occupational therapy services</i>
PD:	<i>Professional development</i>
PT:	<i>Physical Therapist or physical therapy services</i>
MTSS:	<i>Multi-Tiered System of Supports***</i>
SEL:	<i>Social-Emotional Learning</i>
S-LP:	<i>Speech-Language Pathologist or speech-language pathology services</i>
SEL:	<i>Social-Emotional Learning</i>
SEPTA:	<i>Special Education Parent Teacher Association</i>
SWDs:	<i>Students with Disabilities</i>

TERMS

Continuum

of Supports: The range of programs, personnel, and resources to support all struggling students.

Horizontal

Alignment: Practices that correlate special education instruction to grade-level expectations.

Ownership: A concept whereby general and special education staff take responsibility for all students.

Vertical

Alignment: The degree to which the transition of SWDs is seamless as they progress from one grade, school, or program to another.



SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Eighty (80) confidential interviews with special education teachers, general education teachers, related service providers, paraprofessionals, central office administrators, parents and school-based administrators.²
- Analysis of the District’s central office Organizational Structure (as currently constituted).
- Quantitative comparisons to other capital region analogous school districts (CRASDs).³
- Data retrieved from the Cleartrack® system including one-hundred and five (105) IEPs.
- Data from the New York State Department of Education website

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

Because the primary programmatic areas are presumed to overlap, the report considers these with respect to *Organizational Considerations* and *Continuum of Services*. In turn, each area is divided into *Overview* and *Findings* (comprising *Driving Questions*). In addition, the substantive areas are addressed through “Driving Questions” that are designed to further streamline and enhance the intuitive experience of the reader. The report concludes with a Summary and Final Commentary, which highlights primary areas for leadership consideration. The Medicaid and Transportation report shall be provided as a companion document.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

OVERVIEW

The authors intentionally begin this document with a consideration of the cultural capacities of, and within, the special education delivery system. The reason for this is that without the requisite cultural capacities, the forthcoming recommendations concerning the programmatic and fiscal enhancements will have less potential for successful implementation. With respect to personnel as addressed in *Driving Question #4*, it is not possible to consider the efficacy of the District’s continuum of services and the concomitant horizontal and vertical alignment without an understanding of the current staffing models. To this end, the personnel under review available to support SWDs was gauged by benchmarking the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) special education staff with the number of SWDs whom they support. An explanation of these calculations is provided in that section; the corresponding metric, which we have termed “availability ratio index (ARI),” allows an equivalent comparison to expected staffing levels.

² The precise breakdown of interviewees is presented in *Appendix A; an additional 97 parents (93 in-District and 4 out of district) of SWDs provided input via a confidential survey*

³ These comprise: North Colonie, Niskayuna, Guilderland, Ballston Spa, Shenendehowa, and East Greenbush. State-wide districts that BCSD compares itself to (e.g., Pittsford CSD) are provided in Appendix C. All CRASD averages factored our BCSD data.



FINDINGS AND AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

Culture and Climate

Driving Question #1A: How is the Culture of Student Ownership Perceived?

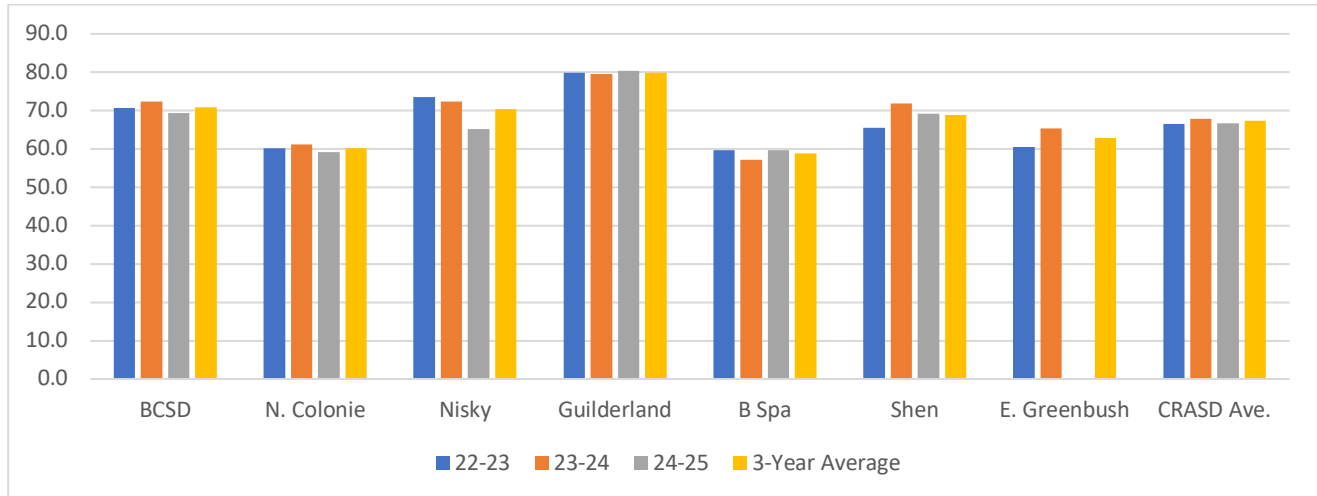
- Interviewees reported significant issues of concern regarding what was perceived as a troubled and deteriorating relationship between general education and special education. At the District level, and at the schools, this was characterized by distrust and disconnectedness. In the context of the declining relationship between general and special education, as noted above, it is not surprising that respondents reported ownership for SWDs to be variable across schools and individuals.
- Moreover, there were described instances of “your kid-my kid” thinking and of faculty and administrator expressions of wanting someone to take SWDs and “fix” them, or send them somewhere other than the general education program. Relatedly, there was a perception among some interviewees that special education and SWDs are generally not valued or recognized as part of the District.
- Frequent changes in leadership over the past several years have made it difficult to build trust and maintain consistency. Many interviewees expressed concerns about how decisions regarding programming are made, citing a lack of transparency and a perception that decisions are driven primarily by financial considerations. Some interviewees also shared a belief that key leaders have limited autonomy in decision-making, and subsequent decisions are top-down.

Despite this general sense of frustration, there was near unanimity for interviewees to be more meaningfully included in key planning and projection discussions; as well as for greater clarity and communication around decision-making processes that would presumably result from clear administrative direction, leadership, visibility within the schools, connectivity to students with disabilities, and a more coherent vision.

Alternatively, the general “picture” that emerged at the elementary level, especially for those involved in collaborative instructional practices (e.g., integrated co-teaching), is that individual schools are moving in a positive direction with respect to ownership. Although the culture is not yet fully pervasive, every person interviewed described a clear and encouraging shift toward stronger collective responsibility.

- Although this “upward trajectory” was especially prominent at the elementary-level, it is notable that several teachers noted that the recent shift from a full-day to a half-day co-teaching model has made this level of collaboration more challenging to sustain.
- To the degree that inclusionary practices may, at least in part, reflect a culture of ownership it is notable that, as depicted below in **Figure 1**, the percentage of District SWDs spending at least 80% of their school day in general education is just under 71% during the past 3 years; this compares favorably to the Capital CRASDs.

Figure 1. *The Percentage of SWDs Spending at least 80% of Their Day in General Education-3 Year Trend Data*



Driving Question #1B: With respect to culture, what could help the District continue to move forward in a positive manner?

- To build culture and climate, the following are offered to promote further harmony, develop a unified vision, and enhance the working environment among general and special education departments across the District:
 - ✓ Develop Professional Learning Communities at all schools that involve the integration of special education and general education personnel.
 - ✓ Create a mission statement explicitly containing elements of general and special education and make this visible to personnel at all schools.
 - ✓ As new teachers are hired in the District, provide all principals with an operational hiring guide, thus ensuring all teachers understand the ownership standard of their jobs. This would also include expectations around MTSS with respect to procedures and “ownership.”⁴

CSE Processes

Driving Question #2A: What is the Perception of the CSE Process?

- The processes and procedures of the CSE were viewed by respondents as generally uniform, consistent and understood by participant stakeholders; albeit with some variability across different CSE chairpersons. Relatedly, interviewees reported clarity of CSE scheduling and expectations of what was due from them and when it was due (e.g. draft IEPs in advance of meetings, etc.).

⁴ This recommendation anticipates the forthcoming discussion on MTSS



- In general interviewees reported that Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) was discussed in CSE meetings, but are not necessarily emphasized at all meetings.
- With respect to Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), it was reported that those CSE meetings ranged from celebratory to anxious and resistant in climate, on a case-by-case basis, including some instances in which parents wanted programs or services not to be discontinued (e.g., occupational therapy)⁵; to address these potential challenges, interviewees made reference to using exit and entry guidelines to further optimize equity of related services.
- Specific to extended school year (ESY) services, it was also mentioned by several interviewees that they did not understand eligibility for ESY and that it seems to change.
- Although there was acknowledgement of the work of the Special Education Cabinet in developing program descriptions and learner characteristics, there was not wide-spread awareness on the part of those interviewed regarding the existence of written eligibility and exit guidelines for the various special education instructional programs, related services, paraprofessional supports or testing accommodations or modifications.

Driving Question #2B: How Might the CSE Processes Improve With Respect to Uniformity and Consistency?

- It will be beneficial to continue to refine and publicize the in-District continuum of programs. With respect to “rolling” out the information, develop user-friendly formats (e.g., trifold) that could be placed at each school and on the District’s website. In essence, the District’s excellent document titled *Special Education Plan (2025-2028)* that includes Program Descriptions and Learner Characteristics, could serve as the foundation for this user-friendly version. The authors shall provide District leadership with examples upon request.
- To enhance education for, and engagement with, parents and guardians of SWDs, it is recommended that principals take the lead in hosting (rotating) building-based SEPTA meetings that will provide information on special education topics to parents, guardians, and other stakeholders. It is notable that the authors commend the current practice of hosting the SEPTA meetings at the high school; rotating the site of the meetings will ensure all schools are represented and all school principals’ involvement.

Central Office Considerations

Driving Question #3A: What is the Nature of Central Office Structure, Staffing, and Support?

- Collectively, interviewees expressed satisfaction with the District provision of professional learning, and are rarely denied the opportunity to attend conferences. However, some potential areas for improvement in this area included suggestions to address:

⁵ It was the perception of some interviewees that some parents were “in the know” regarding how to get what they wanted.



- ✓ Expansion of de-escalation training and proactive approaches to appropriate behavior for students who may not have mandated services.
 - ✓ During superintendent days, allowing teachers and other service providers time to work on IEPs and/or have trainings with more thematic relevance to special education.
 - ✓ Specific to para-educators, although there was unanimity regarding their appreciation for receiving TCIS training (in fact, they use key paraprofessionals to help lead the training), there was an expressed desire to continue professional learning. More specifically, cited possible embedded coaching or training to help them respond and interact more successfully with students.
- There was an overwhelming response that the District provides sufficient curricular, instructional and technological resources to enable the teaching and learning process. All interviewees indicated that they had what they needed and if they did not, they could ask and knew that they would be supported.
 - It is evident that the District values inclusive planning and decision-making, as demonstrated by the creation of structures such as the Special Education Cabinet and the MTSS District Guiding Coalition, both of which include representation from a range of roles and schools. The Special Education Cabinet has contributed to work related to the development of learner characteristics and was tasked with addressing the continuum of services. However, many participants noted that these groups have not consistently translated discussion into action and would benefit from a more focused, results-oriented approach.
 - The District's current organizational structure for special education administration is inclusive of a Director of Special Education (1.0 FTE), an Assistant Director of Special Education (1.0), and 3 CSE chairs with administrative responsibility. From a quantitative perspective, this equates to a ratio of 1 administrator for every 113 SWDs (Pre-K-12) compared to an expected range of 1:150-300. Therefore, the District's administrative structure is generous. For the 2026-27 academic school year, the projected 4.4 administrators equates to a ratio of 1 administrator for every 128 SWDs.

Driving Question #3B: How Could Central Office Support Be Enhanced?

- Continue to provide PD with thematic relevance and, if budgets allow, expand allowances for staff to access required continuing education opportunities. Develop Professional Learning Communities at all schools that involve the integration of special education and general education personnel. Specific to special education para-educators, continue to seek their input to provide the most beneficial learning experiences.
- In addition, explore increasing school-based administrative capacity to allow the special education director to focus on more global programmatic enhancements, consider creating a scope and sequence of a "Special Education 101" monthly Professional Learning Community, which could be led by a special education administrator or another facilitator.



The ultimate goal of this initiative would be to support school-based leadership’s capacity to be more conversant on CSE-related topics, and for them to view themselves as instructional leaders at their schools for all students, thereby simultaneously enhancing the aforementioned “ownership” issue as well.

Driving Question #4A: As Currently Constituted, How Does the District Compare to Other New York Districts with Respect to Instructional and Related Services Staffing Supporting Special Education?

- As indicated below in **Table 1**, the District’s personnel ranges from leanly staffed (special education teachers) to generously staffed (e.g., Occupational Therapy).

Table 1. *The Availability Ratio Index for Personnel Within the Exceptional Education Department*

Discipline	FTE	ARI	Expected Ratio	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Special Ed. Teachers*	38	11.9:1	10:1	+/- 1.5	Leanly Staffed
Para-educators (serving SWDs)*	73	6.2:1	8.9:1	+/- 3.1	Within Expectations
S-LP Staff**	10	47.4:1	70:1	+/- 19	Generously Staffed
Occupational Therapists**	5	94.8:1	164:1	+/-58	Generously Staffed
Physical Therapists**	2	237:1	298:1	+/-95	Within Expectations
Behavioral Health Providers**	20	23.7	27.7:1	+/- 6.6	Within Expectations

* Using 453 in-District SWDs as the numerator

** Using 474 (in-District and Parentally-Placed SWDs) as the numerator

Additional Commentary

Teachers and Para-professionals: A reading teacher is in the process of being hired for next school year to provide reading instruction to SWDs; this will change the ratio to 11.6 (which is still considered to be leanly staffed). Another mitigating factor is that, as mentioned above, there are currently 73 teacher aides, equating to a ratio of 6.2:1, which although is within the range of expectations is more staffed than the average 8.9:1.

Speech-Language Pathologists: Two hundred and forty-six (246), or approximately 52% of the in-District K-12 SWDs (whom the SLPs serve) currently receive mandated speech-language services, which compares to an expected range of 40-60%. Thirty-seven (37) percent of services are individual, which is within expectations. The average mandated (IEP-directed) caseload of 24 compares to a State average of 32 (as reported in the



2024 American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s School Survey).⁶ Seventy-four (74) % of the Speech-Language service minutes are occurring at the K-5 grades, which adheres to a “front-loading” model. The average weekly service minutes per student is 64.2 and compares to a typical 42-52 range.

Occupational Therapists: One hundred and sixty-four (164), or approximately 35% of the in-District and parentally-placed K-12 SWDs currently receive mandated occupational therapy services, which compares to an expected range of 15-20%. Twenty-two (22) percent of services are individual, which is considered to be within expected limits. Commendably, 98% of the services are occurring at the K-5 grades, which adheres to a “front-loading” model. The average weekly service minutes per student is 55.8 and compares to a typical range of 45-52 weekly minutes.

Physical Therapy: Seventy-two (72), or approximately 15% of in-District K-12 SWDs currently receive mandated physical therapy services, which compares to an expected range of 4-6%. Twenty-six (26) percent of services are individual, which is lower compared to expected range. Commendably, and consistent with the other related services noted above, 97% of the services are occurring at the K-5 grades, which also adheres to a “front-loading” model. The average weekly service minutes per student is 47 and compares to a typical range of 42-52 minutes per week.

Driving Question #4B: How Could Staffing Be More Effective and Efficient?

- The District is encouraged to re-visit systematic, District-wide entry and exit criteria for related services. This document will focus on the binary issue of whether a student should qualify for (any or all) services based on educational impact and performance on composite scores based on standardized tests as well as to specify the intensity of service delivery based on the variables of age, effect(s) of the disability on academic performance, and the nature of the educational curricula.

Once ratified, it could be posted on the District website. In addition, a diagnostic team model would optimize implementation of these guidelines and will be discussed with District leadership

- Specific to para-educators, it is axiomatic that the “true” number of paraprofessionals, especially 1:1 paraprofessionals, needs to be based on objective student need, Least Restrictive Environment, and enhancing student independence. Therefore, the District leadership is commended for its plan to add quantitative parameters for eligibility for para-professional supports.

In this manner, further parity, and equity of access to services can be ensured for the students across the District. The authors shall provide District leadership with rubrics that further operationalizes assignments of 1:1 or shared para-professionals. As part of a long-range District plan, it may be beneficial to re-imagine finite instructional dollars and hire more certified special education teachers.

⁶ Because the District has so few students in out of district placements, this will have an impact on individual times and caseloads given the clinical complexity of the student population. This is true for the other providers’ as well and for the paraprofessionals.

CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS

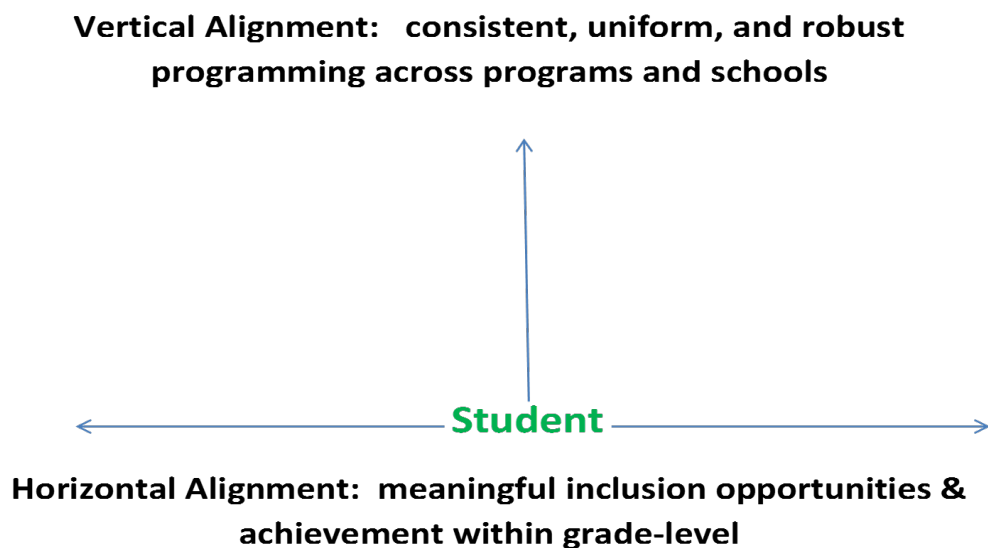
OVERVIEW

Although the term “continuum of services” is associated with special education, it is useful to broaden this definition to “continuum of supports” because it can be used to conceptualize a system of instructional and programmatic provisions for all students (i.e., students with and without disabilities). Ideally, this continuum provides programming, personnel, and resources to appropriately address the educational needs of students in the general education classrooms; or, if needed, in special education programs designed to be tightly integrated with the general education environment.

The other framework that is inherent in a programmatic discussion encompasses the student-centric constructs of *horizontal alignment* and *vertical alignment*. As indicated in **Figure 2**, Horizontal Alignment refers to practices that correlate special education instruction and supports grade-level expectations; it can be measured academically by student achievement and more broadly by the quantity and quality of opportunities that SWDs have with their typical peers.

Vertical Alignment is the degree to which the transition of SWDs as they progress from one grade, school, or program, is seamless; vertical alignment requires consistent, uniform, and robust programming that ensures the needs of SWDs are consistently met until they graduate or are deemed ineligible to receive special education services.

Figure 2. *The Two-Dimensions of Alignment*



Source: Alliance Education Associates, 2026



FINDINGS AND AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered System of Supports⁷ and 504 Plans

Driving Question #1A: As Currently Constituted, Are the RtI/MTSS and 504 Processes Working Well?

- District level administrative leadership and responsibility for MTSS is under the Director of Multi-Tier System of Support and Universal Pre-Kindergarten.
- The state of MTSS in the District was described by interviewees as a work in progress. It was reported that the development and implementation of MTSS have been hampered by changes in leadership, curriculum and models over recent years. Relatedly, there is a District MTSS Plan, which was also described as an evolving work in progress and not necessarily well-known or used as a resource by the District-wide staff.
- There was reference to a District-wide MTSS guiding coalition, but it did not appear that the work of this District team has been able to influence practice across schools or the District. It was shared that the District-wide meetings are not productive.
- It is important to note that the District has undertaken, and begun the execution of, a multi-year strategy to improve the MTSS process. The current status is:
 - ✓ Year 1 (Past Year): The District administrative team partnered with Solution Tree to explore the RtI at Work framework and map out the necessary organizational structures.
 - ✓ Year 2 (2026–2027): All faculty and staff will launch a year-long professional learning experience (including a book study and collaborative learning sequence). The focus will be on building building-level Guiding Coalitions, strengthening collaborative teacher teams, and clarifying intervention processes.
 - ✓ Year 3 (2027–2028): Full operational rollout of the MTSS framework aligned to RtI at Work.
- It was shared that instructional staff perceive MTSS as a heavily front-loaded process leading to little substantive support for themselves or students (i.e., process over purpose); there are also procedures identified online (the Snake), but they are viewed as complicated and cumbersome. An example of the schism between theory (how the process should work) and practice (what is actually happening) are “Intervention Blocks” that are built into school schedules, but it was not clear to the interviewees how this connected or if it connected to their school MTSS team and data tracking system.

⁷ With the understanding the RtI framework is still in place as it transitions to an MTSS paradigm, the authors will use the term MTSS forthwith for ease of presentation.

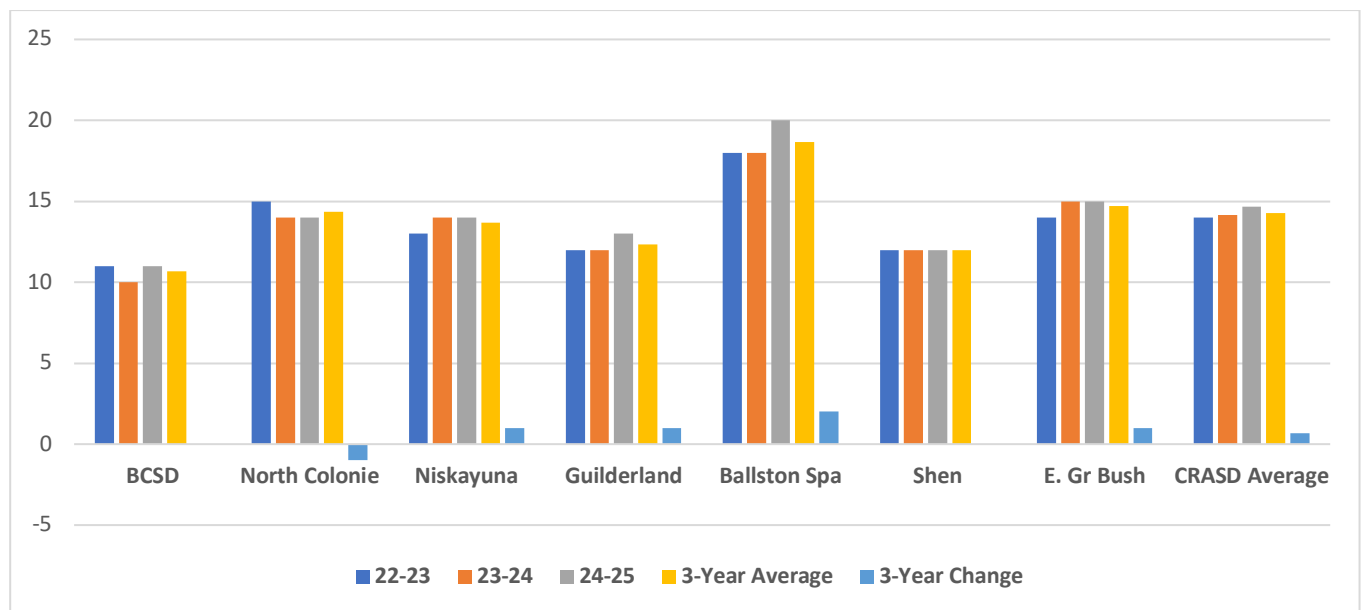
Consequently, teachers and related service providers were perceived as having become disenchanted, discouraged, and disengaged with MTSS, especially in content areas (i.e., math and SEL/behavior) where there is a perceived dearth of interventions.

- Commendably, school principals acknowledge their role in ensuring MTSS is viewed as a general education initiative and not as a “pass through” to CSE referral. Not surprisingly, instructional and related services providers also consider MTSS to be in the singular purview of general education.

Perhaps as part of this over-riding culture, there are two data points that demonstrate the District’s culture regarding not over-referring and over-identifying students is “paying off.” To the degree these data points also speak to some general principles of MTSS being adhered to, these are certainly worthy of celebration with respect to that process.

The first, as presented in **Figure 3**, is that the District’s 3-Year average SWD population of 11% is 3% less than the CRASD cohort. It is also notable that the District has experienced a 0% change in the last 3-years compared to a .67% increase for the CRASDs.

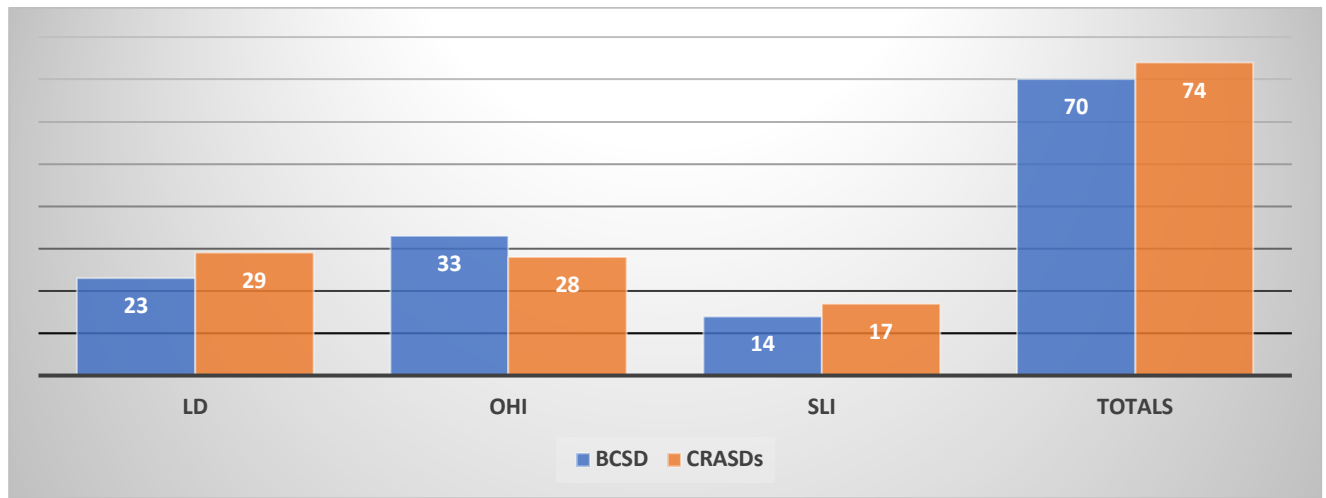
Figure 3. 3-Year SWD Population Trend Data



The other, as depicted in **Figure 4**, is that the constellation of high-incidence/low need disability classifications (comprising Other Health Impairment, Learning Disability, and Speech-Language Impairment) constitute 70%⁸ of the SWD K-12 population, compared to 77% for the State and the 74% CRASD average.

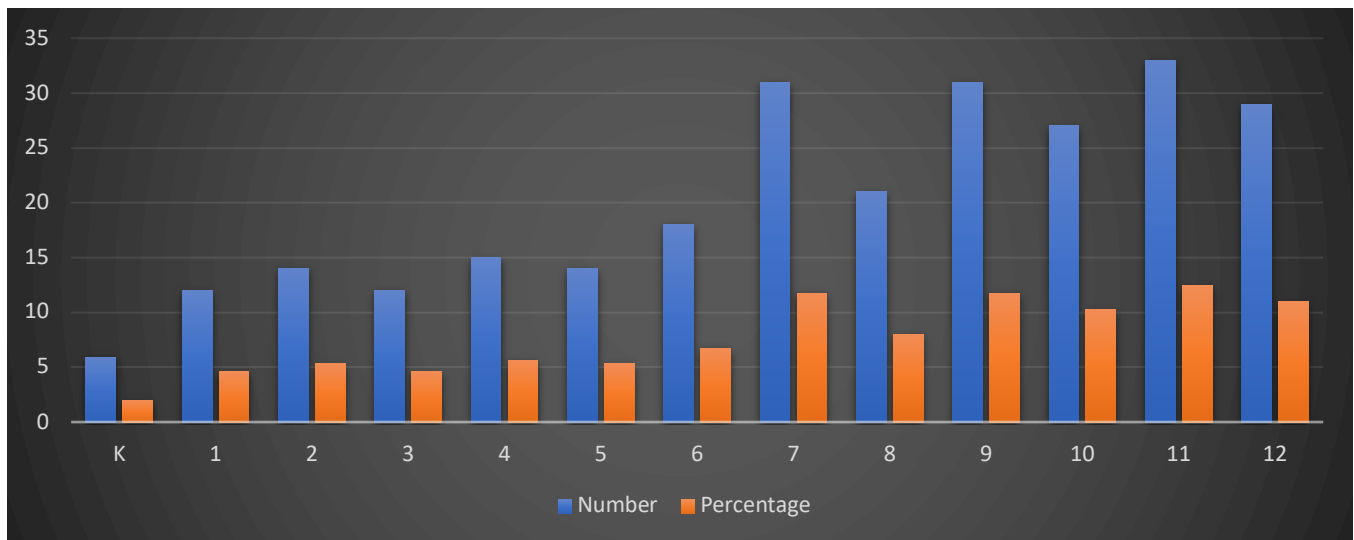
⁸ In fact, the 70% is the lowest percentage the authors have computed in the past 10 years in the state.

Figure 4. *The Proportion of Low-Needs, High Incidence Disabilities*



- With respect to 504 plans, the District currently has 263 students with active plans; the number and percentage is broken down by grade in **Figure 5**. This constitutes 6.5% of the K-12 school population and compares to the state average of 2.63%⁹

Figure 5. *The Number and Percentage of 504 Plans By Grade*



Driving Question #1B: How Could MTSS and 504 Processes Be Improved?

The authors recognize the work already being undertaken through the District's phased implementation of its MTSS framework aligned to the RtI at Work model. In particular, the authors applaud the following practices embedded within the plan, which align with some additional suggestions we have provided below.

⁹ Source: <https://perryzirkel.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/zirkel-and-gullo-2021e2809322-state-rates-article.pdf>



- ✓ Refining the common intervention processes established through RtI at Work implementation.
 - ✓ Supporting the development and calibration of Guiding Coalitions and collaborative teacher teams.
 - ✓ Continue building staff capacity to use common formative assessments and progress-monitoring data to drive instructional decisions.
- As referenced previously, as part of the hiring process ensure that all teachers understand the ownership standard of their jobs. This would also include expectations around MTSS with respect to procedures and “ownership.” In a larger sense, principals might consider planned “teachable moments” whereby they will have opportunities to promote the message that MTSS is a general education initiative and may be supported by special education personnel as necessary. As part of this modeling, it is suggested that principals continue to take the lead in all aspects of the MTSS process that include:¹⁰
- ✓ Setting the culture and climate
 - ✓ Parent (or guardian) outreach
 - ✓ Data Management
 - ✓ Ensuring staff support and accountability
 - ✓ Optimizing Logistics
- Once MTSS is more systematic and operational across all schools with respect to processes and procedures (e.g., high quality core instruction, timely/effective interventions, use of data to evaluate/problem-solve issues of student learning) it may be “reversed” (i.e., the MTSS pyramid is in effect inverted) as a systematic step-down for students who are no longer eligible for IEPs). It has been the authors’ experience that this may be “beta-tested” in a particular school with the greatest chance of success. This model is illustrated in **Appendix B**.
- There may be opportunities for the related services providers (RSPs) to support Tier 1 instruction more systematically in the younger classrooms to support communication, fine motor, gross motor, and SEL in the elementary schools. The authors will provide District leadership with resources in this area.
- Review the Section 504 program with respect to eligibility and exit guidelines to ensure those who qualify are truly in need of these services. The authors will share resources on this topic with District leadership.

Driving Question #2A: Once Identified Is the Continuum of Services Meeting Students’ Needs?

- At the time of the visit, the District had a number of programs and services within its continuum for SWDs that included:

¹⁰ In essence, the principal is both the driver and the “hub of the wheel” of a successful and sustainable MTSS process.



- ✓ At the High School: A resource Room, Direct Consultant Teacher, Special Classes in English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Sciences, co-taught by general and special education teachers, and a life skills program, and the Ready for Independence, Success and Employment (RISE) Program.
- ✓ At the Middle School: Resource Room, Direct Consultant Teacher, various special classes, including self-contained Skills Classes, Secondary Skills Classes (part-day, Regents bound), and self-contained Connections (NYS Alternative Assessment) Classrooms.
- ✓ At the elementary level: Resource Room, Direct Consultant Teacher, Integrated Co-Taught, reading supports, and special classrooms such as Connections (Elsmere) and Foundations (Hamagrael) that are designed to meet the needs of SWDs with more significant needs.
- Although interviewees expressed common themes that spoke to collective pride with respect to the continuum (e.g., a student-centric culture with talented staff), there were expressed concerns regarding the continuum as currently constituted. These included:
 - ✓ Concerns raised regarding a reduction in special education teacher time in the ICT classes.
 - ✓ There was also concern that, in some instances, it was perceived that students were fitted into programs and services based upon program availability, rather than developing IEPs and program placements based upon individual student need(s). The main concern that was articulated was a desire for programming or classes that meet the social/emotional and behavioral needs of students.
 - ✓ It was expressed by interviewees that the key transition points were in need of attention and enhancement of communications between the sending and receiving environments, in order to enable effective instructional and related support to SWDs.
- As indicated in **in Figure 6**, the District's SWD proficiency (24%) and achievement gap (i.e., it has narrowed 4%) compares favorably for ELA. However, as indicated in **Figure 7**, the math proficiency data does suggest room for improvement in this area. Interestingly, a review of several IEPs (overall N=105) suggested a need for goals pertaining to math to be more measurable and aligned to grade-level expectations.

Figure 6. ELA Achievement Data for the SWD Population

District	ELA 2024-25 Gen Ed Prof.	ELA 2024-25 SWD Prof.	2024-25 ELA GAP	ELA 2021-22 Gen Ed Prof.	ELA 2021-22 SWD Prof.	2021-22 ELA GAP	GAP Change
BCSD	77	25	52	74	19	55	-3
North Colonie	72	23	49	64	21	43	6
Nisky	78	15	63	70	16	54	9
Guilderland	69	21	48	63	17	46	2
Ballston Spa	65	18	47	50	6	44	3
Shen	79	22	57	73	22	51	6
E. Greenbush	74	30	44	69	19	50	-6
CRASD Aver.	73	22	51	65	17	48	3



Figure 7. Math Achievement Data for the SWD Population

District	Math 2024-25 Gen Ed Prof.	Math 2024-25 SWD Prof.	2024-25 Math GAP	Math 2021-22 Gen Ed Prof.	Math 2021-22 SWD Prof.	2021-22 MATH GAP	GAP Change
BCSD	79	26	53	69	19	50	3
North Colonie	77	32	45	58	21	37	8
Nisky	82	26	56	64	16	48	8
Guilderland	75	33	42	56	15	41	1
Ballson Spa	78	28	50	52	10	42	8
Shen	86	35	51	69	20	49	2
E. Greenbush	82	36	46	67	19	48	-2
CRASD Aver.	80	32	48	61	17	44	4

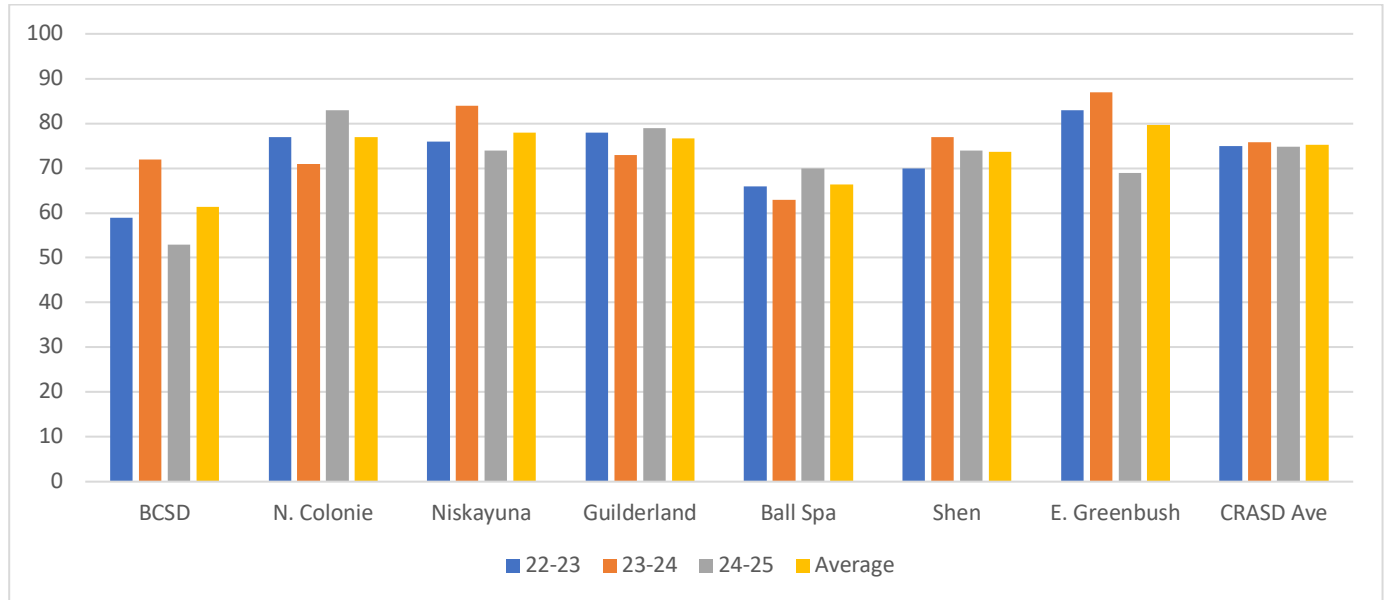
- With respect to the most recently reported Regent's Exams (2024-25), the SWD performance and achievement gaps compare favorably to CRASD data as indicated in **Figure 8**.

Figure 8. Regents Exam Results for the 2024-2025 ASY

BCSD			
	Gen Ed	SWD	Gap
ELA	98	73	25
ALG	97	72	25
GEOM	89	57	32
BIOL	94	50	44
GLOB HIST	97	81	16
US HIST	97	76	21
Average	95	68	27
CRASD			
	Gen Ed	SWD	Gap
ELA	94	64	30
ALG	85	42	43
GEOM	88	62	26
BIOL	88	51	37
GLOB HIST	93	59	34
US HIST	92	56	36
Average	90	56	34

- The graduation rates for SWDs (as indicated below in **Figure 9**) is notable and does suggest areas for improvement. The authors acknowledge that District leadership is well-aware of this need and has begun the process of addressing the low SWD graduation rates with an operational plan.

Figure 9. 5-Year Graduation Rates for the SWD Cohort



Driving Question #2B: How Might the In-District Continuum of Services Be Improved?

Expand Inclusionary Teaching Models and IEP Oversight

- Given the expansion of ICT at all schools, ensure adequate co-planning, general/special education dyads, and master scheduling to optimize success. Referring to the leadership capacity, it will be essential for special education leadership and the principals to collaborate on: (1) requisite professional development for the co-teaching dyads; (2) effective scheduling of students; (3) evaluation of the special education staff; and (4) on-going problem solving.
- Below, we have included some guiding principles that may bolster the ICT process:
 - ✓ Co-Teaching can be misunderstood to mean one general education teacher and one special education teacher in a classroom all day long. That may not always be the case. Co-teaching, like every other model on the continuum, can vary each day and for every class period. It does mean that based on Co-Planning, Co-Teaching, and Co-Reflection, teachers (general and special) make day to day and class to class decisions based on: (1) the needs of the special education student(s); (2) the IEP requirements; (3) the core content; and (4) the instructional requirements of these class periods.
 - ✓ Co-Teaching models may also include related services specialists working with other staff within special education. For example, as is currently being initiated within the District, an S-LP can be the co-teaching partner with a special education teacher serving a specialized classroom whereby academic and communication interventions are shared as part of a co-teaching model.



- ✓ When new concepts are introduced, it is often important that the special education teacher conduct some pre-introduction for younger SWDs. This preview of material could be accomplished in many ways (resource room, alternative co-teaching model for a brief period, etc.).
- ✓ During the actual direct instruction time, the co-teaching model (team teaching, station teaching, parallel teaching, or alternative teaching) is most useful. However, to maximize the efficiencies and expertise of the special educators' time (thereby allowing them to provide collaborative supports to other general education teachers), the co-teaching dyads should develop the classroom practices to ensure that SWDs can participate without the special education teacher having to be present the entire time. In this manner, it is the general education teacher who is "generalizing" learned skills from the strategists to better meet the instructional needs of the students.
- ✓ The key to good co-teaching is the effective and efficient use of teacher time. That does not necessarily mean being in the general classroom every minute. Co-planning is critical to ensure that special education teachers are utilized in the most effective and efficient manner; being in the classroom and "helping, assisting, or tutoring" is not an efficient use of a special education teacher's time if a paraprofessional or peer can assist the student.
- ✓ To ensure accountability, it is recommended that teachers involved in the co-taught model be evaluated with respect to their effectiveness in delivering this specialized instruction during their annual reviews, and that all administrators with requisite training in determining what constitutes effective co-teaching work in unison to develop a content-valid form and to execute it accordingly (e.g., 5-minute walk-throughs).
- ✓ After a content-validated assessment, co-teaching teams that are exemplary could then be assigned as mentors at their schools to support other co-teaching dyads. In addition, to the extent that continuity of team partnerships typically supports student achievement via mutual respect, collegiality, competence, and the acceptance of total ownership for all students, District leadership may consider maintaining the continuity of these teams when possible and to provide the teams with as much common planning as is possible and practicable.
- To expand upon the innovative practices the related service providers are currently employing, there are additional opportunities to include related services specialists working with other staff within special education. For example, an S-LP can be the co-teaching partner with a special education teacher serving general education students in both resource rooms and in resource/pull-out settings. The authors shall provide District leadership with resources on this topic.
- Continue to collaborate with staff on writing IEPs that are internally consistent, measurable, and aligned to grade-level essential standards; especially with respect to numeracy. To the degree practicable, a quarterly Professional Learning Community (PLC) comprising special education teachers and principals to reflect on specific cases may be helpful to enhance capacities for both instructional and administrative staff.



- To supplement topics around special education currently occurring at the high school with respect to the integration of general and special education students in extra-curricular activities, the District may wish to establish a credit-bearing peer mentorship program at the secondary level. This will ensure that the peer interactions remain systematic, meaningful, and interactive. In addition, this initiative should be included in the students' IEPs. The authors will provide District leadership with examples.
- Inasmuch as collaborative models will improve student achievement, and thus narrow the achievement gap, additional initiatives may also be beneficial. There are several resources available (as mentioned below)¹¹ that indicate best practices as part of a District-wide concerted plan. The commonalities of these approaches include setting a culture of high expectations, data-driven decision-making (which would include ongoing professional development around effective IEPs), and community engagement. The authors will also provide District leadership with additional resources.

Improving Vertical Articulation

- Institute "Vertical Articulation" teams for the upper grade of the sending schools and lower grade of the receiving schools with an overall agenda to ensure the continuum of services continues to meet the needs of all students. In this manner, it is speculated that the "gap" in vertical articulation between the aforementioned schools will be addressed and the staff at both schools can be part of ongoing solutions.

Graduation Pathways for SWDs

- It is speculated that these suggestions, in addition to the aforementioned initiatives BCSD leadership has undertaken, might help increase the graduation rates for the 47% of SWDs who are not graduating and narrow the current graduation rate gap between SWDs and general education students (which was last reported at 44%).
 - ✓ Provide elective options focused on specific areas of interest, career, and vocational preparation, etc.; these should be monitored to ensure these traditional and non-traditional options offer students a meaningful pathway to educational success culminating with high school graduation.
 - ✓ Create and implement a regular review process with specific questions that identify barriers to student success. This process should be completed yearly with evaluation of identified goals. The results of this analysis shall inform the high school regarding their ability to meet student needs as well as drive the addition, elimination, or targeted improvement of specific programs to maximize student outcomes.
 - ✓ The aggregation of data regarding predictive factors that may lead to increased graduation rates will be beneficial. To this end, the generation of a data base for SWDs with specific profiles (e.g., those

¹¹ These include: <https://www.hanoverresearch.com/insights-blog/k-12-education/k-12-closing-the-achievement-gap/>;
<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/SpeEd/Transition/ClosingtheGap.pdf>



with particular educational disabilities, access to CTE at certain grades, etc.) can then be monitored via post-hoc analyses to determine which variables can maximize future successful graduation outcomes. Once established, this same paradigm can be used to determine, and hence predict, successful post-secondary outcomes.

Driving Question #3: Are the Demographics of Students in Out of District Placements Within Expectations?

- Interviewees indicated that the CSE teams attempted to serve SWDs in programs within the District and sought outside placements only as necessitated by individual circumstances. The general perception of those responding was that the out of District program placements were appropriate to the needs of the individual student. There was some concern about the waiting lists and the subsequent need to serve SWDs within the District who might otherwise be more appropriately placed in out of district placements.
- As of May 2026, there are 32 SWDs served in out of District placements (non-parentally placed). This constitutes 6.6% of the SWD population, which is considered to be a low percentage for a District of BCSD's size. Furthermore, the constellation of student grades (69% are grades 6 or higher) and classifications of disabilities (78%; for disability types N=25; 15, 8, 1, and 1 for autism, multiple disabilities, emotional disability, and intellectual disability, respectively) are well within expectations.

Driving Question #3B: How Might the Outplacements Be Improved?

- As it pertains to the potential “bring back” of students currently in the out of district (OOD) programs and “keep in” of future SWDs who may need an outplacement, the challenge is for the District to provide the seminal elements of an “appropriate” educational program (as required by federal and state law) including environment, educational strategies, and personnel. The authors include this information strictly for informational purposes given that District is doing very well in this area.

The net fiscal, educational, and logistical “cost-benefit” devoted to the creation of special programs within the District to address the special education needs of some students, who might otherwise be in the OODs (or another out of district placement), would reflect best practice while keeping the following capacities in mind:

- ✓ Personnel capacity, or the degree to which staff in District programs have the requisite training, competence, and administrative support to serve students currently requiring out of district placements.
- ✓ Physical plant capacity, or the degree to which the District can house the programs in a manner that will meet student educational and medical requirements (e.g., provide bathrooms for SWDs with ADL and toileting needs).
- ✓ From a programmatic and logistical capacity perspective, it is necessary to have student cohorts of sufficient size to logistically operate these programs within the District.



SUMMARY AND FINAL COMMENTARY

This analysis revealed many celebrations and areas of commendation (e.g., LRE). The authors postulate that the following areas may be of most immediate value in that they have both programmatic and fiscal implications and are offered for consideration as part of the District's strategic planning and, although the two areas are intertwined, we have presented them with respect to organizational and programmatic considerations.

Organizational Considerations

1. Continue efforts to promote a pervasive culture of ownership for SWDs.
2. Increase leadership visibility and communication to strengthen relationships and reinforce transparency.
3. Implement, as a priority initiative, a plan to improve the relationship between general education and special education District wide.
4. Continue efforts to promote a positive and collaborative relationship with parents and with SEPTA.
5. Review and revitalize opportunities for professional development and training for professional and paraprofessional staff.

Programmatic Considerations

1. Continue implementation and refinement of the District's phased RtI at Work-aligned MTSS framework.
2. Revisit the in-district continuum of services to maximize the efficacy of ICT services.
3. Institute Vertical Articulation Teams of sending and receiving school representatives at all levels.
4. Review the Section 504 program with respect to eligibility and exit guidelines

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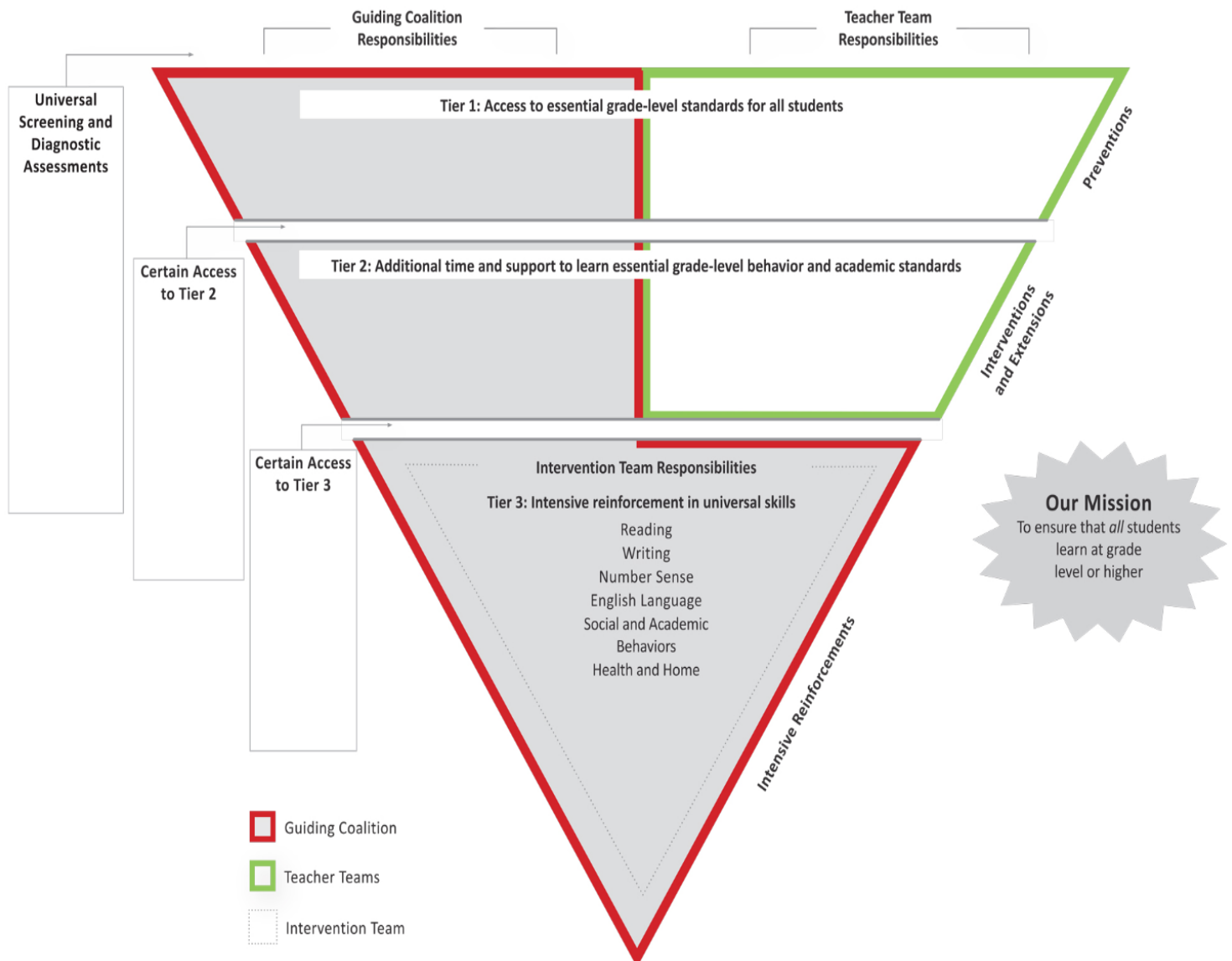
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS OR SURVEYS (N=80)

Discipline	Interviewer 1	Interviewer 2	Interviewer 3	Interviewer 4
Central Office Staff	3		1	
Directors and Assistant Directors	3		1	
Departmental Supervisors	1	1		
Chairpersons	1			
Other Non-School Based Personnel	2		3	
Principals/Assistant Principals	3	4		
Special Education Teachers	6	7		
General Education Teachers	4	4		
Para-professionals	6	8		
Speech-Language Staff				4
Occupational Therapists				4
Physical Therapists				2
RtI/MTSS Team Member	3	4		
Parents	5			
Total Interviews	37	28	5	10

APPENDIX B: THE USE OF MTSS as a STEP-DOWN APPROACH

Figure 10. Utilization of the “Step Down” from an IEP

RTI at Work Pyramid



The above is a District document

APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL DATA FOR STATE-WIDE COMPARISON DISTRICTS

ELA and Math Data

2024-25					
Brighton	ELA		Math		
	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	
Grade 3	64	25	71	40	
Grade 4	70	12	79	20	
Grade 5	72	24	75	38	
Grade 6	76	21	73	17	
Grade 7	70	25	76	15	
Grade 8	86	21	64	17	
Average	73.0	21.3	73.0	24.5	
21-22					
	ELA		Math		
	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	
Grade 3	52	12	58	14	
Grade 4	40	10	55	21	
Grade 5	59	11	74	16	
Grade 6	87	32	71	19	
Grade 7	75	19	62	4	
Grade 8	75	36	20	11	
Average	64.7	20.0	56.7	14.2	
2024-25					
Fay-Man	ELA		Math		
	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	
Grade 3	78	18	85	24	
Grade 4	81	22	87	23	
Grade 5	87	35	83	29	
Grade 6	82	30	91	29	
Grade 7	81	31	92	24	
Grade 8	89	32	91	65	
Average	83.0	28.0	88.2	32.3	
21-22					
	ELA		Math		
	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	
Grade 3	78	24	83	27	
Grade 4	74	18	83	21	
Grade 5	71	9	71	34	
Grade 6	84	23	83	29	
Grade 7	77	23	75	16	
Grade 8	82	30	76	33	
Average	77.7	21.2	78.5	26.7	



Jamesville-Dewitt

2024-25

	ELA		Math	
	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof
Grade 3	83	45	81	50
Grade 4	78	19	75	19
Grade 5	90	29	90	28
Grade 6	76	12	80	17
Grade 7	77	8	76	15
Grade 8	73	25	82	22
Average	79.5	23.0	80.7	25.2

21-22

	ELA		Math	
	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof
Grade 3	64	5	69	4
Grade 4	61	0	68	7
Grade 5	58	13	72	20
Grade 6	78	31	72	8
Grade 7	75	13	78	17
Grade 8	64	17	41	11
Average	66.7	13.2	66.7	11.2

Orchard Park

2024-25

	ELA		Math	
	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof
Grade 3	74	33	82	37
Grade 4	72	23	80	23
Grade 5	73	23	68	38
Grade 6	66	18	78	25
Grade 7	64	23	81	17
Grade 8	63	15	70	19
Average	68.7	22.5	76.5	26.5

21-22

	ELA		Math	
	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof	% Gen Ed Prof	% SWD Prof
Grade 3	66	32	72	21
Grade 4	64	15	66	24
Grade 5	64	16	60	28
Grade 6	86	43	60	21
Grade 7	64	12	44	6
Grade 8	70	14	25	0
Average	69.0	22.0	54.5	16.7



2024-25						
Williamsville	ELA		Math			
	% Gen Ed	Prof	% SWD	Prof	% Gen Ed	Prof
Grade 3	79		23		83	33
Grade 4	75		29		78	32
Grade 5	77		35		81	36
Grade 6	79		34		81	38
Grade 7	78		30		85	33
Grade 8	76		32		86	62
Average	77.3		30.5		82.3	39.0
21-22						
	ELA		Math			
	% Gen Ed	Prof	% SWD	Prof	% Gen Ed	Prof
Grade 3	82		37		79	39
Grade 4	83		29		65	27
Grade 5	65		15		61	24
Grade 6	86		45		62	23
Grade 7	69		22		56	26
Grade 8	68		20		39	14
Average	75.5		28.0		60.3	25.5
2024-25						
Pittsford	ELA		Math			
	% Gen Ed	Prof	% SWD	Prof	% Gen Ed	Prof
Grade 3	84		47		85	69
Grade 4	83		41		86	46
Grade 5	82		37		76	34
Grade 6	79		23		88	47
Grade 7	87		45		93	55
Grade 8	86		43		92	61
Average	83.5		39.3		86.7	52.0
21-22						
	ELA		Math			
	% Gen Ed	Prof	% SWD	Prof	% Gen Ed	Prof
Grade 3	69		31		90	48
Grade 4	76		25		87	40
Grade 5	75		34		84	53
Grade 6	69		39		86	47
Grade 7	81		16		90	51
Grade 8	83		40		77	54
Average	75.5		30.8		85.7	48.8



Regents Data

Brighton				Fay-Man		
Content Area	Gen Ed	SWD	GAP	Gen Ed	SWD	GAP
ELA	96	73	23	97	36	61
ALG	95	67	28	97	69	28
GEOM	79	29	50	96	80	16
BIOL				99	66	33
GLOB HIST	94	74	20	98	69	29
US HIST	98	60	38	97	68	29
Average	92	61	32	97	65	33
James-De				Orchard P		
Content Area	Gen Ed	SWD	GAP	Gen Ed	SWD	GAP
ELA	92	52	40	99	48	51
ALG	91	24	67	88	48	40
GEOM	86	30	56	94	61	33
BIOL						
GLOB HIST	97	49	48	93	44	49
US HIST	96	67	29	97	42	55
Average	92	44	48	94	49	46
Williamsville				Pittsford		
Content Area	Gen Ed	SWD	GAP	Gen ED	SWD	GAP
ELA	96	66	30	97	84	13
ALG	93	68	25	95	76	19
GEOM	93	93	0	95	87	8
BIOL				98	89	9
GLOB HIST	96	77	19	98	82	16
US HIST	96	70	26	99	82	17
Average	95	75	20	97	83	14