



Equity Audit and Systemic Implementation Support

Submitted by Cambridge Education, LLC

September 2020

Michael Kelly
Chief Procurement Officer
Milton Public Schools

Dear Mr. Kelly:

The Town of Milton is a diverse suburban community with a public-school system that is among the top performers in the Commonwealth. Many graduates go on to success in college and career owing to the high-quality academic experiences offered by the schools. However, we know that not all Milton students share in this success and achievement and opportunity gaps persist. While all students deserve an education that prepares them for lifelong learning and success when they enter the workforce, there are students who are not receiving the high-quality educational experiences that are needed to reach these goals

Milton Public Schools has taken the bold and important first steps toward addressing these gaps: The district recognizes that opportunity gaps cause achievement gaps between White and Asian students and students of color in the district. The district sees that disparate outcomes for students are the result of racial inequities in society and in school. The district further recognizes the need to bring all stakeholders to the table and understand the experiences of those who are less heard in the community. Further, the parent community, which formed the Milton Anti-Racist Coalition (MARC), developed a platform (signed by over 400 community members) for transforming the district into an exemplar antiracist, excellence-with-equity district. The School Committee and Superintendent pledged their support and intent to adopt this platform.

To begin this process of transformation, the district will begin with an Equity Audit. The audit engages the Milton Public Schools stakeholders, the Superintendent, the Board, and staff, parents, and students as well as community stakeholder groups such as Milton Anti-Racist Coalition, Citizens for a Diverse Milton, Courageous Conversations Toward Racial Justice, and Equity and Justice for All Advisory Committee, a group newly formed by Town Meeting/Select Board. The audit examines systems, policies, and practices to identify the equity challenges to eliminate and mitigate. The resulting report is a tool that the district can use to make guided reforms, based on data. The district can identify and address structural and institutional barriers that prevent students from equitably accessing educational opportunities in all schools.

Cambridge Education will partner with Milton Public Schools' in this endeavor to create a more equitable school system. Partnership for us means that we create a customized approach with each of our clients, that we meet our clients where they are, agree to a plan, and implement a process that makes the most sense in the client's context. We roll up our sleeves and work shoulder-to-shoulder with our clients to implement improvement plans and track achievements.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our ideas and potentially support Milton Public Schools in this important work. Should you have any additional questions for our team, please reach out.

Yours sincerely,



Renee Chandonnet
Resource Manager, Cambridge Education, LLC

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Executive summary

Cambridge Education's District-Wide Equity Audit (review) is a deep and thorough study of the district's strengths and areas of opportunity for growth based on the impact on student learning, progress, achievement, and overall development and wellbeing.

Cambridge Education's District-Wide Equity Audit (review) process is an enhanced and customized version of our flagship school quality review program which engages districts in a process of reflection and review aimed to set them on the path to continuous improvement. The criteria are modified as required to meet specific demands of individual districts but concentrate on the effectiveness of the district to meet the learning needs of all students and the requirements of all stakeholders.

Over the past eighteen years, we have provided technical assistance and support to a wide range of partners across the U.S. to help them develop a coherent system of school baseline assessments and quality reviews. In developing these systems, we initially called upon our extensive experience and expertise of conducting both English and Scottish models of school self-evaluation and external review. However, over the intervening years, based on our experience and expertise of leading over 4,000 U.S. school and district reviews, we have developed a well-deserved reputation for designing, developing, and implementing customized reviews that draw on the best practices from around the world to meet the specific requirements of our U.S. partners.

Fundamental reasons for implementing a District-Wide Equity Audit (review) Study in Milton Public Schools are to:

- enable leadership and teams to gain a clear, shared understanding of the inequities in relation to student opportunities,
- guide Milton Public Schools district and school teams through a process of self-reflection,
- develop a data-driven, shared understanding of areas that promote equity and opportunities for improving student learning, student achievement, engagement and wellbeing,
- articulate recommendations based on high quality, research-based approaches and models, that are both reasonable and attainable for the school district, and to
- provide a comprehensive report of findings and recommendations which act as a springboard for enhanced and continued district development and improvement planning.

A review is a key component of comprehensive continuous improvement since it is a third party, evidence-based, objective validation of the district's work and qualities. Having lived first-hand the challenges associated with effectively and efficiently meeting the needs of all students and families served in Massachusetts schools, we at Cambridge Education believe our proposed district review team, project skillset, and partnering approach make us best placed to meet your needs. In short, we can successfully undertake this review study for Milton Public Schools because we have:

- an experienced team of education professionals with subject matter expertise with experience working and partnering in schools and districts across the spectrum of Pre-k-12 school systems with roles such as teachers, principals, assistant superintendents, and deputy superintendents.
- comprehensive review experience spanning over 470 school districts across 38 states and 4,500 schools, we are a true leader in this field.
- deep evidence base of partnerships yielding actionable results encompassing trends from meta-analysis identifying trends across schools based on our structured approach and methods.
- a rigorous project management approach which brings together all of the above services to ensure meeting project deadlines and assuring you the quality standards you require.

1 Approach

The key questions that the equity framework addresses are: 1. What does current district data reveal about achievement inequities in Milton Public Schools? 2. What factors do staff, students, and parents identify as contributing to achievement inequities in Milton Public Schools? 3. What initiatives (district-level, school-level, classroom-level) can be implemented to build cultural competency and enhance students' schooling experiences in Milton Public Schools?

1.1 Equity Audit Framework

Cambridge Education's review process helps school districts understand how their actions, efforts, culture, structures, systems, and policies impact student learning and school performance. Review reports articulate key findings to inform district priorities, improve plans, and implement key strategies. To provide these insights, reviewers focus five areas:

- **Antiracist School Culture:** Does the district take a proactive approach to teaching all students and staff about the harm of racism? What is the strategy for creating equitable and antiracist school cultures? How are we support school staff and students creating antiracist and equitable school cultures where all students and staff thrive academically and emotionally?
- **Teacher and Staff Diversity:** Does the district hire for quality, expertise, and diversity? Are diverse voices sought and heard so as to consider a broad range of perspectives from all staff and students?
- **Healthy and Positive Working Conditions:** Do we have workplaces that acknowledge and address the complexities around racial equity, diversity, and inclusion and how these factors impact one's physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing? Do the students benefit from a healthy school environment where adults model healthy, respectful, and inclusive relationships and environments?
- **Culturally Responsive Curriculum:** How does our curriculum provide interconnected and interdisciplinary learning experiences for students, preK-12, that strengthens students' sense of racial, ethnic, and tribal identities, helps students understand and resist systems of oppression, and empowers students to see themselves as change agents?
- **Family and Community Engagement:** Are we reaching, including, and engaging all community members to hear their needs and perspectives? Are we effectively working with our community to meet the needs of the students we serve?

As with all partnerships, we will include a phase to review the rubric domains, indicators, and descriptions to ensure consistency in language. Additionally, our review team members have extensive experience and knowledge of educational settings in Massachusetts, which will help to ensure alignment and clarity throughout the process. The key questions that the equity framework addresses are: Are our students learning? Are they learning enough? How do we know? If not, why not? What are we going to do about it? The equity audit will be organized into six domains and audit findings will be reported with evidence on each of the criteria listed.

1.2 Research base

Our approach and materials draw from antiracist research from around the world as well as Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenets. The goal of an equity audit is to identify institutional practices that produce discriminatory trends in data that affect students. Schools and districts conduct audits to analyze data in several key areas: programmatic equity, teaching quality equity, and achievement equity.

Achieving educational equity begins by initiating some uncomfortable conversations about relevant data. "Systemic equity can only be created in an environment that embraces a set of underlying assumptions about the right of every learner to receive the best possible public education" (Scott, 2001).

Equity audits provide schools and districts with clear indicators for how well they are meeting the needs of their students and which areas need more attention. The framework and approach includes concepts race theory with the three basic tenets of critical race theory in education being that race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States; U.S. society is based on property rights, and the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Through the lens of the framework, the experiences of students, parents and caregivers, and teachers and leaders provide a way to identify the root causes of inequity in student experience and outcomes. See the Appendix for a selected bibliography and resources for this framework.

1.3 Evidence of implementation success

In **Newark Public Schools**, Cambridge Education provided a School Quality Review process to enable the leadership and staff at each Newark school to gain a clear understanding of the quality of learning currently being provided in relation to clearly articulated school quality standards that define a quality school. The process guides schools through a process of self-reflection. School leaders and staff develop a shared understanding within the school community of the areas that promote effective student learning and the priorities for improving student learning. The School Quality Review identifies needs with reference to a clear rubric using a structured process. The School Quality Reviews enable the district to identify common patterns of professional practice across schools so that they can better support school improvement. Resulting reports provide a starting point for school turnaround planning and implementation.

Cambridge Education's approach includes two-day reviews conducted on-site at each school by a one or two reviewers with expertise and skills in the areas of school improvement and school turnaround, including but not limited to the following: knowledge of effective leadership; standards-aligned curriculum, instruction, assessment; multi-tiered instructional systems; systems change processes; and evidence-based practices and approaches for meeting the needs of all students—including English language learners, students with disabilities, and students from historically underserved groups.

Cambridge Education has worked since 2018 school year with 39 school leaders as well as several individual schools in the **New York City Department of Education**. Cambridge Education strategically supported high schools to build awareness, academic achievement, and culturally responsive teaching that supports social-emotional and academic growth of students. Cambridge Education created a series of professional learning events aligned to the Chancellor's priorities as well as the Superintendent's district priorities. The NYC educators evaluated their own beliefs, examined data, and considered student perceptions to create more equitable opportunities for young people. Following is a description of the work as it has taken shape at two of the schools.

At one Bronx high school, Cambridge Education is facilitating the work of the school's Equity Team. The work began with an Introduction to Equity with the school's staff. The introductory session involved staff to examine disproportionality data in suspensions. Teachers reflected on areas of inequity or disproportionality in their own educational careers. They further examined potential disproportionality within the school and deepened understanding of implicit bias and how it can impede equity in policy and practice. Cambridge Education then facilitated a teacher-interest session, where teachers further discussed disproportionality in their school as it pertained to race, culture, gender, etc. Teachers recommended students for a Student Equity Team.

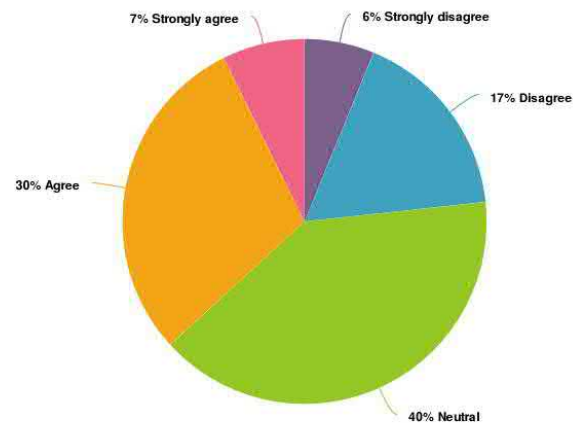
The school created a Teacher Equity Team and Cambridge Education facilitated sessions with the team to develop initiatives and action plans to address disproportionalities in the school (curriculum, after-school groups, academic outcomes). Teachers took part in professional learning on Culturally Responsive-Sustainable Learning and Teaching strategies and created action plans to implement these practices, school-wide. A Student Equity Team was created, and Cambridge Education facilitated sessions with students to discuss equity and disproportionality in the school. Students developed action plans to address these concerns. At the end of the school year, Bronx Compass High School will host a Culminating Equity Event where students and teachers engage in a panel discussion and share learnings and outcomes of the school wide initiatives and action plans. They will also begin planning for summer and next school year.

At another high school, Cambridge Education began the Equity Teamwork with a school-wide student survey on School Culture. The Equity Team members analyzed this data to determine the areas that they could better address as a school. This included determining which sub-groups (Latina girls, ESL students, boys of color, etc.) felt that they were under-represented across the school and strategizing ways to better support these groups.

The data was unpacked during Equity Team meetings and students were asked to join sessions to voice their concerns and ideas about school-wide initiatives. Students and teachers brainstormed ways to better address the needs of the sub-groups. They also planned periodic check-ins to analyze the progress and impact of these initiatives. This team is also developing a year-end event that will display the work that the Equity Team has engaged in. The work will continue into next year, and the survey responses will be used to measure improvements.

Since the COVID-19 school facilities closures, Cambridge Education has continued the work with this schools, supporting them remotely. Cambridge Education facilitated sessions for school leaders, teachers, parent coordinators, guidance counselors, and assistant principals to unpack the tragic events that spurred the worldwide Black Lives matter protests. Teachers not only had the opportunity to examine their own biases, but the systemic and institutionalized racism and white supremacy that exists in our culture and our schools and begin to plan for a future where we examine the effects of our policies and practices on our students of color.

3. Students in my school know how to report harassment or racial abuse to school officials.



Student survey item

2 Project plan

2.2 Cambridge Education's District-Wide Equity Audit

In order to provide a succinct, comprehensive and high-quality review report within the timeframe specified by Milton Public Schools, it will be necessary to employ a variety of data-gathering tools in order to gather sufficient information on which to base our findings and make meaningful recommendations. Our approach to this work will entail a combination of onsite and offsite collection including a review of relevant documents, interviews with key Milton Public Schools school and district personnel, an online survey of stakeholders, analysis of financial records, observation of instructional delivery, and comparative analysis of progress and achievement in peer school districts.

Our partnership will begin with a project initiation meeting that will confirm a shared understanding of all aspects of the proposed scope of work and will provide clarification and confirmation around the following:

- Milton Public Schools' detailed requirements and scope of work
- Identification of the Milton Public Schools project liaison and other key personnel on the project
- Roles of Cambridge Education team members and Milton Public Schools personnel including the project communication plan
- Project activities, schedule, timelines, logistics, and deliverables

2.3 Phase One (1): Preparation and Self-Evaluation

In our experience, thorough preparation increases the value to the district and schools. Cambridge Education reviewers will develop a solid knowledge base and understanding of the district, including results and context, to make informed, valid judgements. Additionally, when district leaders have a good, shared understanding of the process and its purposes, they are better equipped to use preparation time to its benefit. If district teams, school leaders, and teachers know what to expect from the review; before, during, and after; then they are more engaged. Reviewers will seek to gather relevant documents and data sets prior to the onsite review. The district and schools will receive a self- evaluation form (SEF) prior to the onsite review. Both are very important parts of the review process. When the SEF is completed thoughtfully, thoroughly, and collaboratively, it provides insight into how the district and schools know and evaluate their racial equity impact.

2.4 Phase Two (2): Audit

The audit phase includes data collection through surveys, focus groups, interviews, document reviews, and a virtual or in-person site visit (if it is safe and prudent to do so). In the event COVID-19 safety measures and restrictions are in place, all of the review can be conducted remotely. Virtual visits will be interactive, such as through phone and video calls as well as remote learning classroom and school meeting observations.

The racial equality review consists of the following methodological steps: data gathering and analysis, focus groups and individual interviews, survey development and deployment, and report compilation with recommendations. In this audit, educational specialists will take a deep dive into student outcomes as evidenced by test score data on state assessments, evidence of student learning and growth, including student growth measures and non-state test-based measures (e.g. unit assessment data), discipline data, honors/AP and special program (i.e. French immersion) placement data, IEP referrals and placements, attendance and chronic absenteeism, dropout/district student exit data). The auditors will examine this evidence along with stakeholder perceptions and other qualitative data to determine strengths and areas for improvement in terms of equity and excellence for all.

2.4.1 Audit process plan

| Phase | Deliverables | Deliverable Description | Timeline |
|---|--|--|-------------------------|
| Initiation and Planning | Initial Meeting(s) | Presentation of proposal to the committee & other constituent groups | October 2020 |
| | Project Plan of Work | Word document defining the approach to management of the project through-life; also defines the deliverables and schedule for the project. | October 2020 |
| | Project Schedule | Document a plan and schedule for project execution including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dates and times for survey team meetings Dates and times for committee meetings Dates for all deliverables | October 2020 |
| | Project Charter | Engagement letter signed by the respective project leads, providing an overview of the project | October 2020 |
| | Survey Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing survey (if any) Research team design survey questionnaire (assumption of two drafts) Finalize survey items and response choices to be included in the survey Finalize translated survey versions (if needed) | November 2020 |
| | Survey Specification | Specification includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rostering information All rules for responses and how certain responses are to be treated in the data set (e.g. response types or patterns that are not to be counted; a respondent doesn't answer enough of the items) Specification for report(s) and data dashboard (what is reported and how the response data will be visualized; disaggregation specification; comparisons; interactive reporting comparisons) Report distribution specification (who gets what report and when; what goes on the website/ online; define access roles) | November 2020 |
| | Administration Instructions | Instructions include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructions for project coordinators Instructions for survey participants | November 2020 |
| Data and documentation collection and review | Document review and interviews with key leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess leadership team's readiness to address institutional racism and equity. Review professional development offerings related to equity, diversity, and creating schools free of bias, prejudice and discrimination. Make recommendations for improvement programs to support staff readiness. Provide analysis on district data relative to student academic performance, enrollment based on tracking, discipline, achievement, attendance, social emotional needs, dropout and graduation rates, involvement in extracurricular activities, special education, and English Language Learners classification. Disaggregate the data by race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, disability, and English language proficiency. Review of Milton Public Schools practices as outlined in Board Policy, Employee Handbook, and the Student Code of Conduct Handbook. Submit recommendations based on identified best practices. Review targeted intervention supports for academic, social emotional and behavioral needs. Identify strengths, challenges, opportunities and effectiveness. Review family and community engagement practices and provide recommendations on strategies for creating a safe and welcoming environment for all families including families of color. High-level review of curriculum to ensure it is fully representative of the diverse community. Provide recommendations on how to increase representation within the curriculum. Recommend supports to increase student representation in advanced classes or programming. Review current efforts to recruit and retain staff of color. Provide recommendations on how to improve staff recruitment and strategies on how to support a diverse workforce by creating a welcoming, bias free work environment. | October - November 2020 |
| Survey Pre-Staging | Rosters Collection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cambridge Education collects and processes roster files for Milton Public Schools selected students, faculty and staff. | October 2020 |
| | Instructions Delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online invitation delivered (survey instructions and access codes) | November 2020 |

| Phase | Deliverables | Deliverable Description | Timeline |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| | Window Open | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey window opens to receive responses from different survey respondents | November 2020 |
| Survey Data Processing | Data Compilation and Analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver data files to Milton Public Schools | December 2020 |
| Survey Communications | Communication Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documented plan identifying what will be communicated to whom, when and how | October 2020 |
| | Communication Materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CE to work with Milton Public Schools to review and update the existing communication materials for the project | October 2020 |
| | Communication Outreach Events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Webinars/emails about the surveys for participants will go live | October 2020 |
| Survey Monitoring | Help Desk – administrative level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update Milton Public Schools on responses for each school and each group Continue to invite and reach out to groups that may be underrepresented | Weekly during the survey window |
| Survey Help Desk | Help Desk – respondent level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toll-free number 866-329-1530 (Mon-Fri 9am – 5pm EST) Online support form https://app.cedu.io/support Support email: support@cedu.io Self-signup system for participants who lose their codes Online self-service code retrieval portal for participants who lost their codes | Daily during survey window |
| Focus groups and interviews | Focus groups questions and schedule | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devise focus group questions for each group on each school using data from survey responses and information garnered from document review Identify the groups and individuals to participate in focus groups, insuring to include seldom heard voices Schedule school visits and/or virtual focus groups with the local team Conduct focus groups with students, families, teachers, principals, central office staff and community partners. Provide a detailed report on common themes that emerge. | November 2020 |
| Reporting and presentation | Report(s) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interim reports provided monthly and include audit progress and developing findings Final report that recommends strategies supported by researched best practices. Reports include detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of student administrative, assessment and baseline data; survey and focus group data, and recommendations Present final report to the district Board | December 2020 |
| Focused Equity Improvement Planning | Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate a process to use audit outcomes as a starting point to identify areas for improvement Identify the activities that the district will engage in to achieve its equity goals Identify metrics to monitor the effectiveness of actions toward producing equitable outcomes Update the plan as needed to achieve equity goals | January 2021- ongoing |

2.5 Rationale for the methods

2.5.1 Surveys

Equity surveys provide schools and districts with a clear picture of how stakeholders are thinking and feeling about diversity, equity, and inclusion in school. Further, the survey can help schools and districts track the progress of equity initiatives through the lens of the student, identify areas for celebration and improvement, and signal the importance of equity and inclusion to the community. Survey data best represent perceptions of the school

environment when response rates are high. This data can be looked at from the lens of individual schools and across the district as a whole. It can be analyzed for one year or for patterns and trends in multiple years.

Cambridge Education is uniquely suited to assist organizations with the development and deployment of survey administrations and reporting. We will work with the district to choose a valid and reliable instrument that is publicly available to collect stakeholder perceptions from many stakeholder groups. We will assist the district in customizing the survey to suit local context. Cambridge Education will utilize its in-house developed Survey Logistics Suite platform that supports online administration at all levels. These tools monitor the survey process from multiple perspectives. The survey process protects anonymity and allows for quick and easy collection and digital writing of data to our database. As an added value, each participating school and the district will receive a survey report for each stakeholder group. Survey results can be used independently by schools to understand stakeholder perceptions and make plans for improvement.

2.5.2 Focus groups

There are various drivers and influences to consider when designing engagement activities for people and groups who are more likely to experience barriers to inputting into traditional consultations. Our experience of engaging with less/seldom heard groups is built into our Communication and Engagement Plan.

The types of groups/meetings we will schedule include:

- Teachers, staff – Focus groups for teachers and staff will be held at district level. Questions for interviews will correlate with the district's self-evaluation and we will monitor survey responses to test any emerging issues.
- Students – Focus groups will be conducted for elementary, middle, and high school students. Reviewers will talk with students in focus groups to assess their understanding and knowledge of various aspects of their experience, knowledge, understanding, and attitudes.
- Community – Meetings with community members will be conducted. Local organizations and service providers may be called upon to participate.
- In conducting the focus interviews our consultants use a protocol which engages all stakeholders in a supportive and reflective dialogue. This way all stakeholders are put at ease and are generally more open with their responses, which enables our team to gain a significant amount of relevant and informative qualitative and quantitative data and insights.

2.5.3 Milton Public Schools Personnel Interviews

Cambridge Education will interview key Milton Public Schools central office personnel, including those with direct responsibility for the administration of specific programs in the school district.

2.5.4 Document Reviews

In order to accurately assess the Milton Public Schools program, it will be beneficial to have a comprehensive review of documents related to the staffing, organization, and operation of the program. The Appendix provides a list of the documentation that will be requested during the review. This list is inclusive, but not limited to the items listed. During the project initiation meeting, Cambridge Education and Milton Public Schools officials will reach a mutual agreement on the completeness of the document request list. All data requested will be from the 2019-2020 school year and the two previous school years. Whenever possible, documentation should be provided electronically.

2.5.5 Remote activities

While we anticipate that the "old normal" of face-to-face instruction will eventually return to schools, it is not possible to determine exactly when. Periods of remote learning due to COVID-19 are predicted into the 2020-2021 school year, and perhaps, beyond. We do not want to delay this important work if travel and onsite work is curtailed or prevented by the safety measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We are prepared to conduct all review activities remotely.

2.5.6 Ongoing and Final Feedback

Throughout the review, the Lead Reviewer will meet with the district's point of contact regularly to give feedback on the progress of the review, check and clarify understandings, and request any other necessary information. The Lead Reviewer will provide the District Equity Leadership Team with an overview of the observations and experiences as well as have an open exchange of findings at that point in the review process. At the end of the data gathering period, the reviewers will provide verbal feedback of initial findings to the District Equity Leadership Team, the school Board, and any other members of the district leadership team chosen to be present.

2.6 Phase Three (3): Written Report

The review report details the context of the district and schools, main factors that impact the quality of support being provided to schools, main factors that support effective student learning, main factors that hinder effective student learning, overall evaluation and detailed sections for each of the domains of the review rubric. The report also contains recommendations and opportunities for increased effectiveness. The report will be completed and sent in draft form to the superintendent and assistant superintendent within 15 working days from the last day of the review.

Once the district has completed a factual accuracy check and corresponding edits have been made, the document will be finalized. The resultant report should provide an excellent baseline for future development and effectively inform the subsequent actions of district and school leaders.

2.7 Goalsetting and planning for improvement

Three core competencies of high-performing school systems are: (1) understanding what the work is—a deep understanding of the core business of facilitating learning, a vision of what that looks like, and an awareness of where the system is in relation to that vision; (2) knowing how to do the work—a theory of action for improving instruction, a focus on key strategies, and effective alignment of resources; and (3) building the individual and organizational “habits of mind” that foster continuous improvement.¹

Cambridge Education’s comprehensive approach to strategic planning is driven by an unrelenting focus on learning. Cambridge Education engages all stakeholders in the development of a motivating school vision and mission and a tight strategic plan focused on a few core improvement strategies. Guided by vision, mission, and a progression of achievable benchmarks, this plan is used, referenced and lived throughout the implementation process.

2.7.1 Cambridge Education’s Approach: Focused Improvement Planning (FIP)

Cambridge Education will host sessions with the district to facilitate the development of an implementation plan (co-developed with the district and school committee) that builds on the strategic recommendations of the findings report and provide advisory and external monitoring of the district’s implementation of the planned reforms.

Fundamentally, a strategic plan is a guide to getting important things done with a sense of urgency and an eye to sustainability. The Focused Improvement Planning (FIP) process supports districts in transforming their work and dramatically increasing student learning outcomes. There are several fundamental principles underlying this approach to FIP:

- The process is grounded in a cycle of continuous improvement, informed by data, driven by results, and focused on implementation of a few high-leverage, strategic objectives.
- The process requires time, attention, and commitment and should be a central part of district leaders’ daily work.

^{1/2} Adapted from *Strategy in Action - How School Systems Can Support Powerful Learning and Teaching*, Rachel E. Curtis and Elizabeth A. City, Harvard Education Press.

- Regular monitoring of progress and accountability is focused on student outcomes.
- Collaboration between and among stakeholders at central office and in all of the schools is required for accelerated and sustained improvement.
- The process requires a culture of candor and a willingness to make mid-course corrections based on a continual analysis of data.

Cambridge Education's approach to Focused Improvement Planning differs from traditional improvement plans. Where traditional planning processes tend to be static and focused on compliance (plans are created at the beginning of the year, shelved, and reviewed every twelve months), Cambridge Education's research-based planning methodology is collaborative, focused on outcomes, and dynamic (plans are continually reviewed and adjusted based on progress, experience and interim results).

Image 1.1 Features of Cambridge Education's process for Focused Improvement Planning²:

| Traditional Improvement Planning | Focused Improvement Planning |
|--|---|
| Status Quo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizes work • Focuses on compliance | Innovative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draws on research and best practices • Builds conviction |
| Written for external audiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows that there is a plan | Drives the system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on outcomes and process |
| Broad and incremental <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something for everyone | Deep and intentional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does a select few things very well • Incremental and accelerated |
| Discrete <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct, disconnected initiatives | Interdependent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key initiatives require cross-functional collaboration |
| Static <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not shaped by new information, completed at one moment in time | Dynamic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusts in light of new learning, experience, and interim results |

Coherence and an effective framework for long-term strategic planning keep in mind the following principles.

The plan is to be easily understood by all stakeholders within the community. The plan must capture in direct, plain English the critical issues that have to be addressed in the district to bring about accelerated improvement. What will be done and why - the priorities for the district - must be clear to parents, teachers and the community. We will support Milton Public Schools to achieve this by focusing on the most effective forms of communication for the different stakeholder groups and designing communication tools accordingly.

The plan must be implemented by individuals who are entirely committed to its success. The expectation is that all stakeholders understand their role in helping to achieve the priorities and goals. Those who lead any area of the plan will commit their energy to Milton Public Schools successes. Our process will encourage Milton Public Schools to leverage what is working well and to identify and respond to what could be more effective, including the identification of what to stop doing.

The plan must focus on outcomes related to student progress and achievement. The plan must focus on the impact of our actions (outcomes) to determine whether activities are making a positive difference for students. Far too often, improvement plans consist of a series of activities that assess simply if people did what they planned to do-this measures inputs only and fails to assess whether each activity is having the desired and anticipated impact. We will support Milton Public Schools to achieve this by ensuring that the strategic actions identified in the plan are strongly linked to the strategic objectives and initiatives and will lead to the outcomes identified in the plan.

The plan requires collaboration and a willingness to challenge and be challenged. Not every step will work perfectly or end up being the right step. We will support Milton Public Schools to establish working norms and expectations to ensure the collection and analysis of relevant information so the team can honestly assess the plan's implementation and make necessary mid-course corrections. This principle supports focused, accelerated improvement.

The plan must be a useful tool to those who must implement it and should be developed in partnership with those who will implement it. The plan should not be too long, and strategic objectives should be transparent. It should be used and referenced daily by those responsible for its success. To achieve this, it must be understood and embedded in ongoing conversations and actions about improvement, leading to behaviors and ways of working within central office and with schools. As we work with Milton Public Schools, we will make connections to the work underway and help to ensure the plan is clearly and precisely written by enabling individuals and teams to recognize that a good plan may change but a robust analysis of evidence must guide decisions about its creation and all changes; an objective or initiative should not disappear because it becomes challenging or difficult, if it is to have a rapid impact, the plan must honestly confront the difficult issues.

2.8 Consulting and technical service supports

Our experts are highly experienced in offering equity and antiracist training to clients on how best to embed equity considerations into projects and policy changes, as well as within their own organizations. This supports clients in building their own capacity to deliver more positive equity outcomes and allows for our clients to implement best practice in their future work.

In particular, we have expertise in:

- Facilitating the creation of equity frameworks
- Culturally responsive learning and teaching training
- Anti-racism working group facilitation and training
- Implicit bias and disproportionality professional learning for educators at all levels
- Advising on how to promote culturally and linguistically responsive practice
- Developing frameworks and strategies to promote equity that are tailored to particular organizations
- Designing bespoke equity and social value quantification tools to help prioritize investment and inform decision making
- Advising on inclusive design and infrastructure accessibility
- Delivering training on how to meet the needs of all students and groups

3 Evidence of qualifications

Cambridge Education proposes to partner with L&P Educational Services to provide the best possible services to Milton Public Schools.

Cambridge Education is a leading provider of education services in the United States, and throughout the world. Since 2002, we have led projects in over 470 districts across 38 states and in over 4,500 schools. In nearly every instance, our work has supported the improvement of services to special education in one form or another. We work in partnership with schools, districts, states, and other reform support organizations to deliver high quality research-based services that improve learning outcomes. Our approach builds the capacity and capability of classroom teachers and school and district leaders to deliver people-led change. Understanding and respecting the unique issues that every client – and child – faces, helps us to develop the right strategies for achieving sustainable outcomes. Cambridge Education supports the implementation of The Calculus Project in Milton through our team member, Dr. Adrian Mims. Cambridge Education will provide survey services, documentation, management support, report writing and presentation, and planning and monitoring support for this project.

Unlike most educational consulting organizations, the team at L&P Educational Services currently serve as educators within public schools and institutions of higher education in Massachusetts. Given the challenges of this country's educational system, their daily experience as educators gives insight and fortitude needed to help redefine educational communities. L&P works in partnership with school and district leaders (PreK-16) and state officials that are conscious of the role race and culture play in pedagogy and leadership practices; and provide the tools, skills, and knowledge for educators to challenge and disrupt the patterns and policies of systemic inequities. L&P Educational Services helps to build the capacity, confidence, and expertise of educators to teach, lead, and sustain equitable and culturally responsive classrooms and institutions. L&P will conduct the deep dive into Milton Public Schools' student attainment and administrative data, curriculum offering, learning opportunities and access, special education policy and data, English learner policies and data.

3.1 References from recent review and equity projects

Fayette County Public School, Lexington KY

Contact Name, Position **Schuronda Morton, Chief of Staff, FCPS**

| | |
|---|--|
| Contact Email | schuronda.morton@fayette.kyschools.us |
| Contact Phone | (212) 406-9411 |
| Description of Services: reviews, surveys, improvement planning, plan implementation and monitoring | Fayette County Public Schools has entered into a partnership with Cambridge Education to conduct school reviews for their schools designated as Comprehensive Support and Intervention (CSI) schools. The CSI review is anchored in a variety of data, test performance, demographic, achievement, perceptual surveys and contextual. The reviews are used to (a) identify strengths and challenges; (b) ascertain the potential reasons for a school's low performance and lack of progress; and (c) make recommendations regarding next steps for the school and district to substantially improve student learning. Cambridge Education works with the schools to build the capacity of the district to conduct reviews at low-performing schools in the district; create and implement improvement plans; implement a framework for instructional improvement; and provide the technical support necessary to improve outcomes for students in FCPS. |
| Timeframe | 2016-present |
| Value | \$900,000 |

Newark Board of Education

Contact Name, Position **Nicole Johnson, Deputy Superintend**

| | |
|---------------|---------------------------|
| Contact Email | NTJohnson@KCTCS.K12.NJ.US |
| Contact Phone | 973-733-7334 |

Contact Name, Position **Nicole Johnson, Deputy Superintendent**

| | |
|---|---|
| Description of Services: reviews, surveys, planning, professional development | Cambridge Education has supported the Newark Public Schools (NPS) for years. Recently, Cambridge Education conducted School Quality Reviews in each of the district's schools, providing an assessment of quality in five domains, and making recommendations for improvement. This provides us with a unique opportunity to hit the ground running with improvement efforts as the areas of strength and focus have been identified and clarified with school leaders. More broadly, Cambridge Education understands the areas of focus for the district at large and can strategize with school and district leaders to create programs that provide the best levers for improvement. |
| Timeframe | 2008 to present |
| Value | \$1,000,000 |

New York City Public Schools' Bronx Community School District 10

Contact Name, Position: **Maribel Torres-Hulla, Superintendent**

| | |
|---|--|
| Contact Email: | MHulla@schools.nyc.gov |
| Contact Phone: | 718-741-5834 |
| Description of Services: Equity and antiracism assessment, planning, and professional development | Cambridge Education has worked for the past three years with more than 70 school leaders as well as several individual schools in the Bronx to strategically support high schools to build awareness, academic achievement, and culturally responsive teaching that supports social-emotional and academic growth of students. Cambridge Education created a series of professional learning events aligned to the Chancellor's priorities as well as the Superintendent's district priorities. The Bronx educators evaluated their own beliefs, examined data, and considered student perceptions to create more equitable opportunities for young people. |
| Timeframe: | 2017 to present |
| Value | \$300,000 |

3.2 L&P recent experience

L&P Educational Services provides Bridgewater-Raynham Regional School District (BRRSD) leaders professional development that seeks to develop an understanding of cultural competency and responsive practices. Moving along the cultural continuum, L&P works with district leaders to mitigate inequities and to reflect on their ways of being to enhance and improve school climate and culture, student development and learning outcomes with particular attention to students and families of diverse backgrounds. L&P also provides a Curriculum Review for the BRRSD to address the inclusiveness of their Social Studies program in grades 5-8. L&P's goals are to access and analyze pertinent Social Studies program documents (i.e. reports, policies, grade-level curricula, and instructional materials for grades 5-8); prepare a report on the equity and diversity of Social Studies program materials, shares findings and offer recommendations; support district leadership in addressing Social Studies inclusiveness deficits, and engage grade-level educators in exploration of ameliorative measure to become thoughtful users of the curriculum. L&P also supports district leaders in the creation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and provides coaching and consultation to district leaders.

L&P Educational Services has partnered with the Archdiocese Schools of Massachusetts to provide professional development for school leaders and staff. Through this work, L&P worked to transform the mindset of educators to become more culturally proficient and apply promising personal practices to transform themselves as reflective practitioners. Moreover, L&P introduced concepts that ensure high quality teaching and learning and develop educators who continuously pursue educational equity for all students, while celebrating diversity and embracing the richness of human experiences for all learners in schools. These strategies respond to educational inequities for students of racially, culturally, academically, and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

3.3 Team bios

The team that we have assembled for this project have decades of service in special and general education in the US and Massachusetts and have the depth of experience and knowledge necessary to conduct the review and support the recommendation and planning process. Resumes are available upon request.

**Cambridge
Education
consultants**

Biography

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Chris Finn | <p>Chris joined Cambridge Education in 2015 and immediately went to work supporting Superintendents, Principals, Instructional Coaches and Teachers in improving their practice. He went on to engage in Leading School Quality Reviews, Executive Coaching and facilitating professional learning sessions with clients across the United States on topics such as; Common Core Curriculum Development, Assessment For Learning (AFL), Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR), Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning (CRTL), amongst many others.</p> <p>Chris' work has included supporting implicit bias training, anti-racism programming, and the development of Equity Teams in schools. The implicit bias training has helped educators dig deep and uncover the root causes of some of the disproportionalities that exist within their schools. The anti-racism sessions have pushed educators to think more deeply about their curriculum, instruction, and policies that can negatively impact the students that they serve.</p> |
| Dr. Adrian Mims | <p>Dr. Adrian B. Mims Sr. is the founder of The Calculus Project, a program that was derived from his dissertation, Improving African American Achievement in Geometry Honors. The goal of the project is to increase the number of Black, Hispanic and low-income students enrolled in Calculus Honors, AP Calculus and AP Statistics so they can pursue careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). He currently serves as the National Calculus Project Director at Cambridge Education and the Project Director of the Calculus Project and Leadership Academy at Boston University. His program pre-teaches core mathematical concepts and teaches leadership skills to Black, Latino, and low-income students in a college setting from the moment they enter the eighth grade until they become seniors in high school.</p> |
| Keith Lezama, Principal, L&P | <p>Keith Lezama has over 15 years of experience in K-16 education. He has served as a public-school teacher, high school administrator, district director, researcher, adjunct professor, and consultant. Dr. Lezama currently oversees the 2nd largest school integration - district in the country (METCO Program). As an adjunct professor in the School of Education at Emmanuel College he works closely with undergraduate and graduate practitioners. He is also the co-founder and co-Chief Empowerment Officer for L&P Educational Services.</p> |
| Mindy Paolo, Principal, L&P | <p>Mindy Paolo is the PK-12 Director of English Language Education with the Public Schools of Brookline where she has worked since 2001. She has served in several advisory roles for the Massachusetts Association of Teachers to Speakers of Other Languages, the Office of Language Acquisition at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the national Minority Student Achievement Network. Ms. Paolo has been an adjunct professor at the Boston University Wheelock College of Education and Human Development in the Department of Language and Literacy and is also the co-founder and co-Chief Empowerment Officer of L&P Educational Services.</p> |
| Dr. Karen Shmukler | <p>Dr. Karen Shmukler has a diverse and multi-layered career with experience and expertise spanning pre-K-college in the educational and human services domain in under-resourced and marginalized communities in South Africa, St Louis, Missouri and Brockton to affluent communities in Brookline and Newton, Massachusetts. Regardless of context, her work centers and braids issues of race, equity and culture as she strives to support and build inclusive organizations that are culturally-sustaining and healing centered. Karen was at the forefront of introducing wraparound technologies and system of care principles in the areas of public education, mental health and child welfare in Massachusetts. She brings deep expertise in building multi-tiered systems of support that integrate social emotional and academic development and has worked and presented nationally on mechanisms to disrupt disproportionality in special and general education at the systems, school and individual educator level.</p> |
| Dr. Geoff Tegnell | <p>Dr. Geoff Tegnell has been a Social Studies educator for over 42 years. He has spent the lion's share of his career as a teacher and administrator for the Public Schools of Brookline. He is a graduate of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, Ed.D. in History of Education, Curriculum and Instruction. He has served as a Social Studies consultant for public and private schools including the Hudson Public Schools, Newton Country Day School, and the Solomon Schechter School, and has also led various Social Studies program reviews in Massachusetts districts such as Cambridge, Belmont, and Bedford. Dr. Tegnell has led many professional development workshops for educational organizations including Fitchburg State University, Teaching American History, Primary Source, the Children's Museum, Northeast Regional Conference on the Social Studies, and the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies. Dr. Tegnell has also taught history and Social Studies methods courses at Harvard, Northeastern, and the University of Massachusetts Boston. In addition, he is a published author of multiple print and online curriculum units, scholarly papers, book reviews, and learned journal articles.</p> |
| Dr. Angela F. Allen | <p>Dr. Angela F. Allen is a passionate educator who has an enduring commitment to educational equity for all students. She has nearly 30 years of experience in education that spans from kindergarten through college in private, public and higher education institutes where she has had the opportunity to work in diverse school communities from impoverished to affluent and from varied homogeneous to heterogeneous racial/ethnic and religious groups.</p> <p>Since July 2015, Angela has served as the Head of School/CEO of the Prospect Hill Academy School located in two cities, Cambridge and Somerville; three campuses and four divisions serving over 1100 uniquely diverse students from 43 different communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.</p> <p>Angela has previously served as the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Professional Development in the Public Schools of Brookline whereas she was responsible for the recruitment, hiring, and retention of professional staff, the supervision and evaluation process as well as professional learning.</p> |

4 Cost proposal

In Table 1 below we have provided a pricing table that separates out the project cost into three main components: Data gathering, reporting, and planning; and implementation and technical support. The fees are inclusive of all related expenses.

4.1 Table 1: Pricing

| Scope of Work Component | Price |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Audit -data gathering and reporting | \$40,000 |
| 2. Planning | \$5,000 |
| 3. Plan Implementation & Progress-monitoring | \$5,000 |
| TOTAL | \$50,000 |
| Additional coaching, workshops, and professional learning events | \$2,500 per diem |

Table 2: Payment

| Milestone | Invoice Amount |
|---|----------------|
| Kick-off meeting to agree final scope of work | \$20,000 |
| Final Report delivered | \$20,000 |
| Progress Monitoring completed | \$10,000 |

4.2 District Responsibilities

The district will provide a single point of contact at the school district who will coordinate the efforts of Milton Public Schools throughout the project. Activities of this Milton Public Schools Internal Coordinator include:

- Organizing meetings of senior staff for program management
- Scheduling
- Securing meeting spaces, rooms, copying and printing of materials
- Securing requested documents from participating departments
- Coordinate language services of communication to parents and community. (It is assumed that all staff will participate in English language communications, and students will receive communications in English or Spanish – the language of instruction. Any additional required translations will be developed by the school district.)
- Coordinating the generation of rosters for surveying stakeholders (students, parents, staff, and community partners).
- Coordinating the necessary technology to participate in stakeholder surveys.
- Coordinating and sending invitations of stakeholders to focus group and other meetings
- Securing on-time approvals at program milestones to stay on schedule
- Liaising with the Cambridge Education project manager on a weekly basis to discuss plans and schedule activities
- Provide regular feedback to Cambridge Education on progress and project metrics.
- Make available any data and reports that may be pertinent to this process in a timely manner.
- Communicate with stakeholders and encourage and recruit participation from staff, students, parents, and community members in this process.

A. Sample reports

CONFIDENTIAL

Special Education Quality Review

████████ School District

July 2018

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North Lobby
Westwood MA 02090
United States of America

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Special Education Quality Review Report

District Name: [REDACTED] Scho [REDACTED] rict

Superintendent Name: Carol Merlone

Address: 42 Grove St
[REDACTED], CT 06401

Review Date(s): May 31 June 6, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Christopher D. Finn

Team Reviewer(s): Lisa Tirrozi

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1 District Quality Review Methodology

1.1 Methodology

Cambridge Education's District Quality Review (DQR) process is an enhanced and customized version of our flagship school quality review program which engages districts in a process of reflection and review aimed to set them on the path to continuous improvement. The criteria are modified as required to meet specific demands of individual districts but concentrate on the effectiveness of the district to meet the learning needs of all students and the requirements of all stakeholders.

Cambridge Education's DQR process helps school districts understand how their actions, efforts, culture, structures, systems, and policies impact student learning and school performance. Review reports articulate key findings to inform district priorities, improve plans, and implement key strategies. To provide these insights, reviewers focus on six core domains:

- Promoting Positive Outcomes for Students
- Supports for Student Learning
- Leadership & Management
- Engagement of Families, the Community, and Other Stakeholders
- Human and Fiscal Resources
- Operational Systems

The Scope of Services includes six areas for examination and opportunities for improvement which align with Cambridge Education's DQR Domains. As with all partnerships, we included a phase to review the rubric domains, indicators, and descriptions to ensure consistency in language. Additionally, our review team members have extensive experience and knowledge of CT state which helped to ensure alignment and clarity throughout the process.

It was necessary to employ a variety of data-gathering tools to gather sufficient information on which to base our findings and make meaningful recommendations. Our approach to this work entailed a combination of onsite and offsite collection including a review of relevant documents, interviews with key [REDACTED] school and district personnel, an online survey of stakeholders, observation of instructional delivery and student learning in classrooms, and comparative analysis of progress and achievement in peer school districts.

Our partnership began with a project initiation meeting to confirm a shared understanding of all aspects of the proposed scope of work and provided clarification and confirmation around the following:

- [REDACTED]'s detailed requirements and scope of work
- Identification of the [REDACTED] project liaison and other key personnel on the project

- Roles of Cambridge Education team members and [REDACTED] personnel including the project communication plan
- Project activities, schedule (onsite and offsite), timelines, logistics, and deliverables
- Identify comparison school districts

The Cambridge Education DQR team was comprised of two members whom spent a total of five days onsite in the district and in all four schools to gather information from observations, documents shared, and focus group/individual conversations. We then triangulate findings enclosed in this report based on the indicators and sub-indicators in the agreed upon [REDACTED] DQR Rubric

The on-site portion of the review took place over a five-day period (May 31, June 1, 4, 5 & 6), 2018.

Day one was spent in the district office where we interviewed district level personnel including the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent, the Director of Special Education, the District Instructional Coach for Math and Science, the District Instructional Coach for Social Studies and English Language Arts and the Secretary of Transportation. The day concluded with a check-in meeting with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent

Day two included on-site visits to [REDACTED] High School and [REDACTED] Middle School. These on-site visits included focus group meetings with school leaders, students, special education teachers, general education teachers, school counselors, and special service providers. We also visited multiple classrooms and had the opportunity to sit in on PPT meetings with students and their parents. The day concluded with a check-in meeting with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent.

Day three included on-site visits to Mead School and Prendergast School. These on-site visits included focus group meetings with school leaders, students, special education teachers, general education teachers, school counselors, and special service providers. We also visited multiple classrooms and had impromptu meetings with parents we came across in the building. The day concluded with a check-in meeting with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent

Day four included on-site visits to Mead School and [REDACTED] Middle School. These on-site visits included further classroom observations of pre-kindergarten classrooms, self-contained special education classrooms, and meetings with school leadership. The day concluded with a check-in meeting with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent.

Day five consisted of another meeting with the Director of Special Education and calibration time for the reviewers. The day concluded with a sharing of main findings with the district leaders.

One of our goals is to provide anonymity to all participants in the data gathering phases of the review, as a result, no names of students, staff members, or family members will appear in the report.

Each domain of this report has been organized in the following manner:

- A scoring descriptor for the domain
- Context
- Factors that support district effectiveness
- Factors that limit district effectiveness
- Recommendations

The report also contains comparative data with four other districts, as well as comparisons with the state of [REDACTED]'s aggregates when available.

1.2 Key terms

Child Study Teams: are groups of professionals who provide consultative, evaluative, and prescriptive services to teachers and parents regarding students who are experiencing school related difficulties

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional and academic success.

Delta T Group is a private company which provides paraprofessional support staff to the [REDACTED] School District as a contracted service. Delta-T paraprofessionals in [REDACTED] serve in the role of Instructional Aides (IAs) for students with disabilities. There are approximately 86 Delta-T staff across the district.

STAR Reading Assessment are short tests that provide teachers with learning data. Star tests are computer adaptive, which means they adjust to each answer your child provides. ... Students may take a Star test for early literacy, math, reading, or other subjects of their teacher's choice.

Grade level teacher teams will analyze, monitor and discuss student and grade level growth as measured by the STAR assessment.

Grade level teacher teams will use the STAR assessment to progress monitor student achievement. (Prendergast will use BURST through June 2017)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups of educators that meet regularly, share expertise, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. PLCs are used throughout the district to allow teachers the opportunity to discuss student academic data that will inform future instruction.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a document that creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is the requirement in federal law that students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a four-part (A-D) piece of American legislation that ensures students with a disability are provided with Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that is tailored to their individual needs.

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is an educational right of all children in the United States that is guaranteed by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973[1] and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under Section 504, FAPE is defined as, " the provision of regular or special education and related aids and services that are designed to meet individual needs of handicapped persons as adequately as the needs of nonhandicapped persons are met and are based on adherence to procedures that satisfy the requirements of" the section Under the IDEA, FAPE is defined as an educational program that is individualized to a specific child, that meets that child's unique needs, provides access to the general curriculum, meets the grade-level standards established by the state, and from which the child receives educational benefit.

504 plan is a plan developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives accommodations that will ensure their academic success and access to the learning environment

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.

The Planning and Placement Team Meeting (PPT) a meeting is to initiate and discuss evaluations; determine eligibility for special education services; develop a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP); or to review and/or revise the child's program.

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a systemic, continuous- improvement framework in which data based problem solving and decision making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students.

2 Main Findings

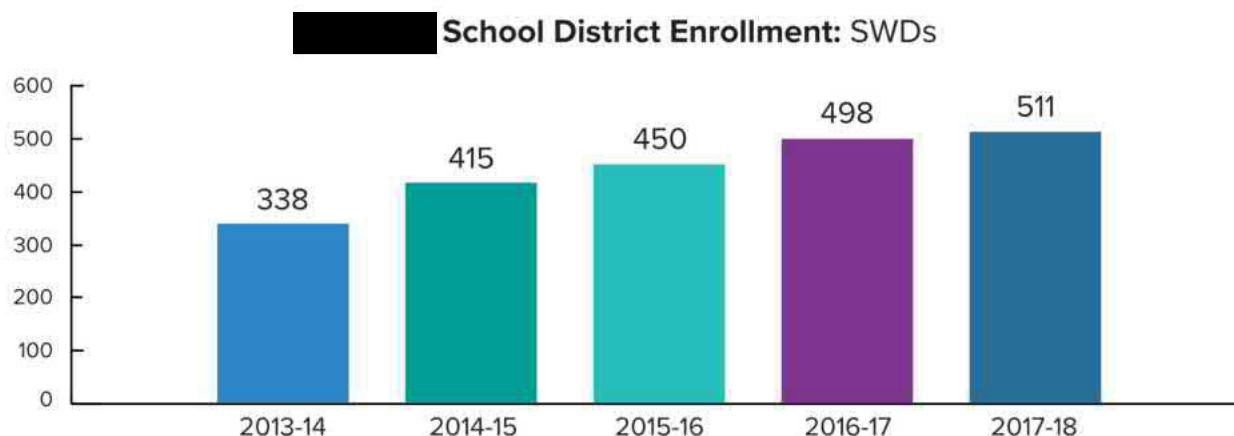
Like many small, urban school districts, [REDACTED] has the challenge of responding to ever-increasing demands for special educational services, with limited or declining funding to support these services. Given greater constraints on resources, it is vital that the district understands which initiatives to prioritize.

[REDACTED] presently has the sixth highest percentage of students with disability across the state of [REDACTED]; when looking at school districts that have at least 200 students with disabilities, [REDACTED] has the highest percentage in the state.

Educating students with special needs accounts for nearly 30% of the education budget.¹ Out of-district placements is a significant portion of that budget. In-district resources are constrained due to the lack of funds and resources to meet the increasing demand for services.

[REDACTED] has the tenth highest special education student to-teacher ratio in the state of [REDACTED].² Lower than average salaries in [REDACTED] make it difficult to keep qualified staff. Cost-cutting solutions, such as outsourcing special education aides, have been brought in to fill the gaps in personnel and reduce costs.

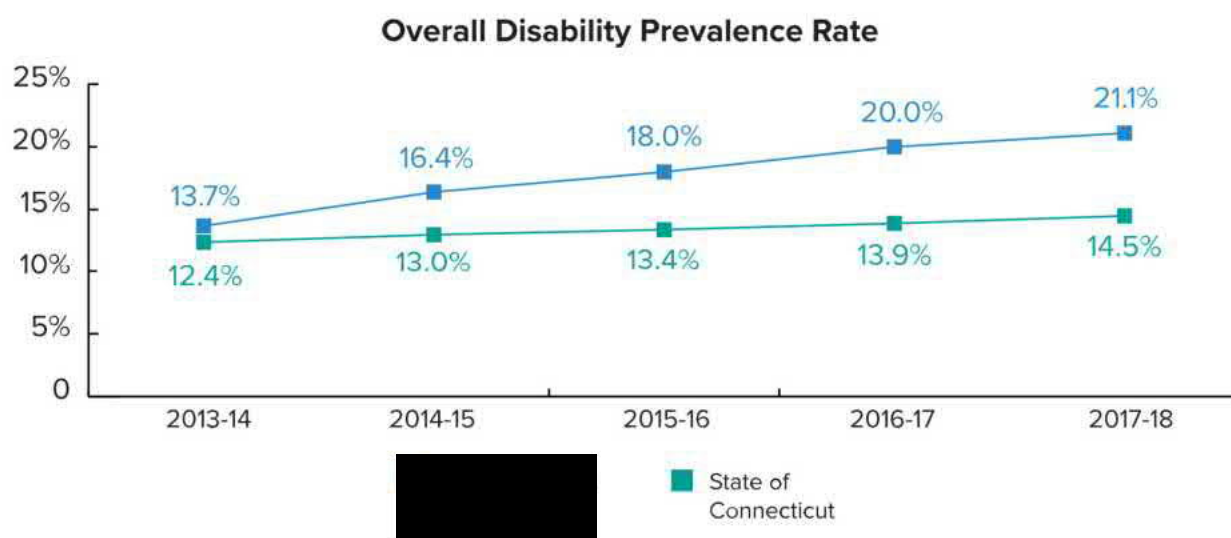
K-12 Students with Disabilities in [REDACTED]



Source: Primary Disability reports. Retrieved from EdSight.ct.gov.

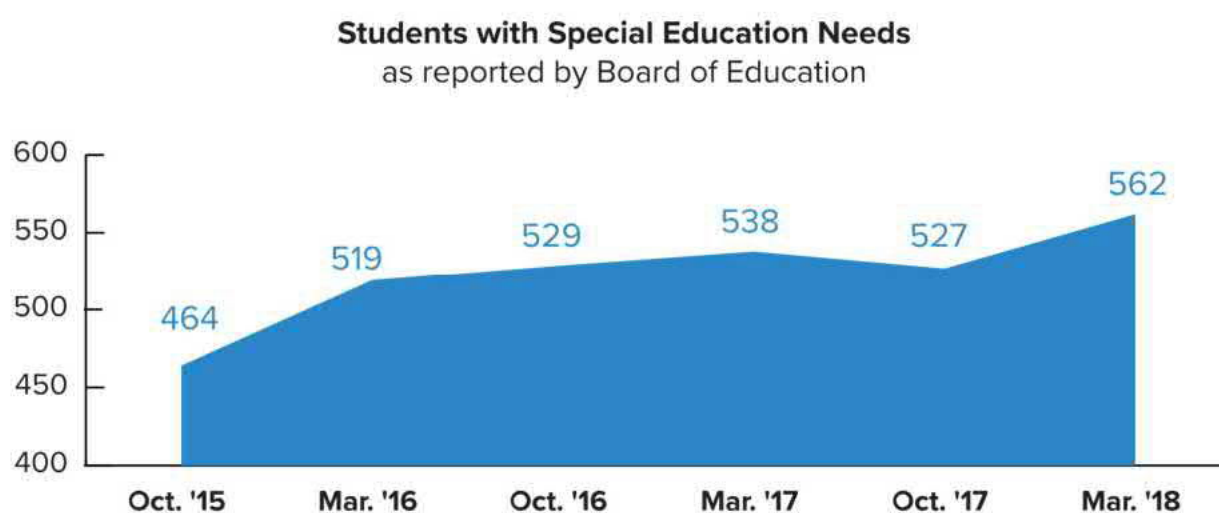
¹ Rabe Thomas, Jacqueline, CT Mirror: SPECIAL EDUCATION DRIVING COSTS AND CONTROVERSIES
ctmirror.org/2016/12/14/troubled-schools-on-trial-special-education-driving-costs-and-controversies/

² IBID



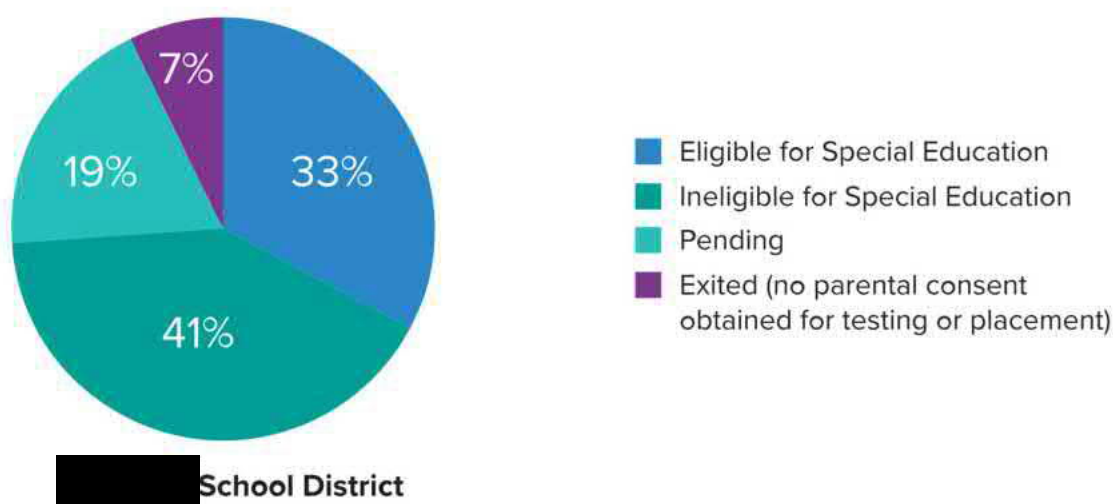
Within special education, the largest populations of students with disabilities in 2017-18 were students with learning disabilities, other health impairment, and speech language impairment. The percentage of students with disabilities classified as having autism has decreased from 11.2% in 2013-14 to 9.2% in 2017-18; there has also been a decrease in the incidence of emotional disturbance and intellectual disability over the same period. While most categories of disability were similar in percentage value to state averages, in 2017-18, there was a larger population of students with other health impairment and speech language impairment than state averages.

The Board of Education's data shows that the population of students with disabilities increased rapidly from 527 in October 2017 to 562 six months later in March 2018.



Over the course of the 2017-18 school year, as reported in the Board of Education's April 2018 minutes, 165 students were referred for special education testing. One third were found to be eligible for special education services, while 41% were ineligible. It is not known to the reviewers what referral or screening process was undertaken to make these determinations.

April 2018 Referrals to Special Education and Their Outcomes



2.1 Factors that support district effectiveness

██████████ teachers, within their peer groups of special education, general education, and support services, share strategies and resources to support student learning. Many staff members in special education and general education, when interviewed, exhibited a strong sense of dedication to the ██████████ students. District employees shared that they stay here for the children and for each other.

Teachers across all schools, and particularly in special education, express a desire to implement consistent approaches regarding instruction. School leaders and teachers expressed that there are systems that they want to improve in their schools and they are seeking district support to develop these processes.

District leadership team members exhibit a passion for improving outcomes for special education students. The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent are currently working to leverage community partnerships to support the academic and other support needs of students at every grade level.

2.2 Factors that limit district effectiveness

Given these yearly increases in incidence of disability and strains on budgets, insufficient resources have been allocated to provide for special education in ██████████. The central office is knowledgeable and responsive, but there are not enough staff to provide clear policies and expectations, planning support, monitoring and supervision of staff, and support to meet anything but compliance-level requirements.

At the school level, educators work hard to meet the daily demands of providing special education services to ever increasing numbers. However, schools are implementing services for students with special needs as budgets and schedules allow. There are no district wide policies for best practice. Most schools have reverted to a pullout model to support students with special needs as it seems to be the easiest way to ensure that all students receive services. Few classrooms follow an inclusion model, which would ensure the least restrictive environment for special needs students. The district employs many Instructional Aides (IAs) through an outside agency. Since they are not district employees, it is difficult for school leaders to monitor and supervise their work. Across schools, master schedules do not allow for common planning time so that general education and special education teachers can collaborate on how to meet the needs of individual students and ensure they are receiving appropriate instruction.

Each school follows its own practice for referrals and testing and a disproportionate number of males and students of color are referred to and placed in special education in [REDACTED]. Once a student is on the rolls of special education, there is a tendency for general education staff to relinquish responsibility for those students' needs. Special education staff are often called away to deal with individual students in crisis, which sometimes prevents them from attending to their caseloads.

There is no clear system designed to provide teachers and support staff with professional development that is aligned with the goals of the district. Para professionals are not mandated to receive the same training as the general education teachers and as a result, they are often ill-equipped to provide students with the academic support services that they need.

2.3 Recommendations

- The district should conduct an internal study to look at the high numbers of referrals for special education. Are these large numbers of referrals due to special needs, or could students be supported in other ways? The numbers of males and students of color that are receiving special education services should also be examined. Ensure that a multi-tiered system of support is firmly in place for students in all settings.
- The district should convene a committee to establish plans and actions that will result in improved outcomes for special needs students. Given the level of resources, it is imperative that [REDACTED] focus on strategies that can be implemented within budgets. Time must be set aside by central office staff to monitor the provision for special education across the district and ensure that agreed best practices and actions for improvement are implemented. All policies and practices that are adopted across the district need to be communicated to schools and parents. Feedback on effectiveness of the practices and policies should be collected from all stakeholders on a regular basis to inform the plans.
- The Director of Special Education should develop a committee of stakeholders from each school and parents of special education students to outline a common referral process. This process should include guidelines for Child Study Teams to put academic and behavioral interventions in place for students before they are classified, using Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks. The referral process

should be approved by the Board of Education and then exist as the standard for all schools throughout the district

- Paraprofessionals that provide many of the front-line services to student with special needs must be trained and monitored. Strategies to provide access to a rigorous curriculum for all students need to be implemented in all settings. Common planning time must be built into the master schedule so that general education and special education staff can plan collaboratively.

3 Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Rating: Low or lack of effectiveness

3.1 Overview

Academic growth and achievement for students with disabilities in [REDACTED] is below the state average. There is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and typical students, and the gap has been widening, year-on-year. Math and English Language Arts (ELA) scores for students with disabilities have decreased over the last two years. Science DPI for students with disabilities has risen slightly in the last year but is still well below the performance of students without disabilities.

3.2 Factors that support district effectiveness

Students with disabilities in all schools exhibited a desire to learn and a desire for structure in their schools. Students openly shared that they enjoyed school and that they had built strong relationships with staff members and peers. Students in focus groups stated that their teachers are willing to provide them with extra support if they are struggling with an academic issue.

In surveys, students who reported that they receive support for special needs responded more favorably to questions about support they receive from their schools and teachers than the average of all students. At the secondary level, 44% of students who receive special education services reported that the school communicates with their parents frequently, versus 25% in the aggregate. 75% of secondary students with special needs report that there is an adult at the school they can go to if they need to talk, which is higher than any other subgroup. At the elementary level, 84% of students who receive special education support reported that their teachers offer multiple ways of learning in class (small groups, computers, etc.). In the aggregate, only 73% report that is happening in their classes. 85% of elementary students receiving support for special needs report that they have caring adults to talk to in their schools. The educators of [REDACTED] have provided a supportive, enriching environment for students with disabilities and the students feel cared for.

Teachers at the elementary level have all been trained in the Wilson Reading program and the Orton-Gillingham Reading Program. This training provides teachers with a wealth of strategies to support struggling readers in the lower grades, as well as a common language amongst the elementary educators that will better align discussion concerning increasing reading levels in kindergarten through sixth grade. The Orton-Gillingham is known as an “approach” to reading intervention versus being a reading intervention “program.” This approach can be used to determine the reading

intervention need for a specific student and then address the need with specific reading strategies. More information can be found at: <https://www.orton-gillingham.com/>

3.3 Factors that limit district effectiveness

Achievement

There is limited growth in the academic proficiency of the special needs students across the district. According to the district report cards, District Performance Index (DPI) for students with disabilities is considerably lower than the students without disabilities, and lower than the state target ³

District Performance Index (DPI)

A District Performance Index (DPI) is the average performance of students in a subject area (i.e., ELA, Mathematics, or Science) on the state summative assessments. The DPI ranges from 0-100. A DPI is reported for all students tested in a district and for students in each individual student groups. Connecticut's ultimate target for a DPI is 75.

| 2015 – 2016 | English Language Arts (ELA) | | Math | | Science | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|-------|------|---------|------|
| | Count | DPI | Count | DPI | Count | DPI |
| Students with Disabilities | 209 | 43.6 | 209 | 40.3 | 93 | 33.0 |
| Students without Disabilities | 925 | 61.2 | 924 | 55.9 | 422 | 47.6 |

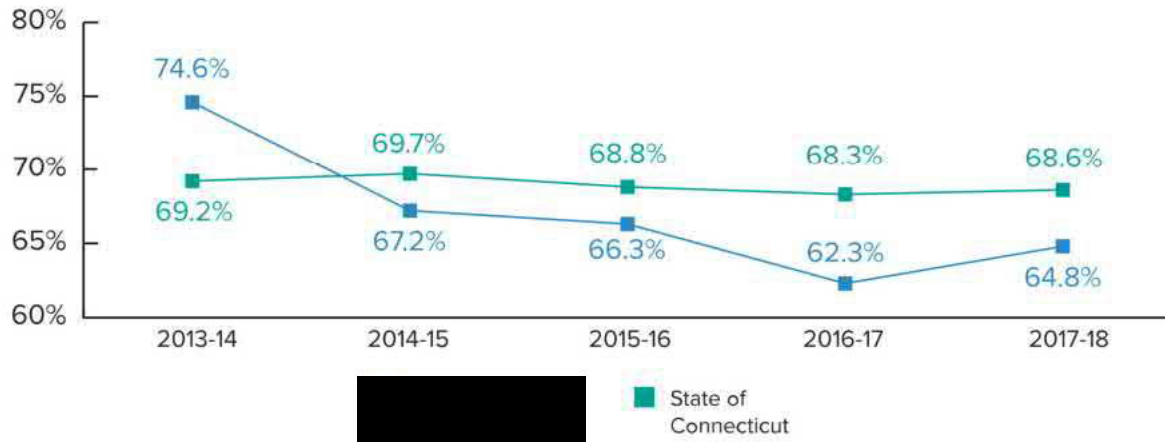
| 2016 – 2017 | English Language Arts (ELA) | | Math | | Science | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|-------|------|---------|------|
| | Count | DPI | Count | DPI | Count | DPI |
| Students with Disabilities | 223 | 42.8 | 221 | 36.9 | 112 | 34.8 |
| Students without Disabilities | 902 | 62.2 | 894 | 55.4 | 391 | 48.8 |

Inclusion

In [REDACTED], fewer students with disabilities spend 79% or more of their time in general education classrooms than the average across [REDACTED]. This number has gone down over the years.

³ State of [REDACTED], District Profile and Performance Report 2016-2017, [REDACTED]
http://edsight.ct.gov/Output/District/HighSchool/0020011_201617.pdf

Students with Disabilities Spending 79.1% – 100% of time with Nondisabled Peers
(Ages 6 – 21), all Disabilities

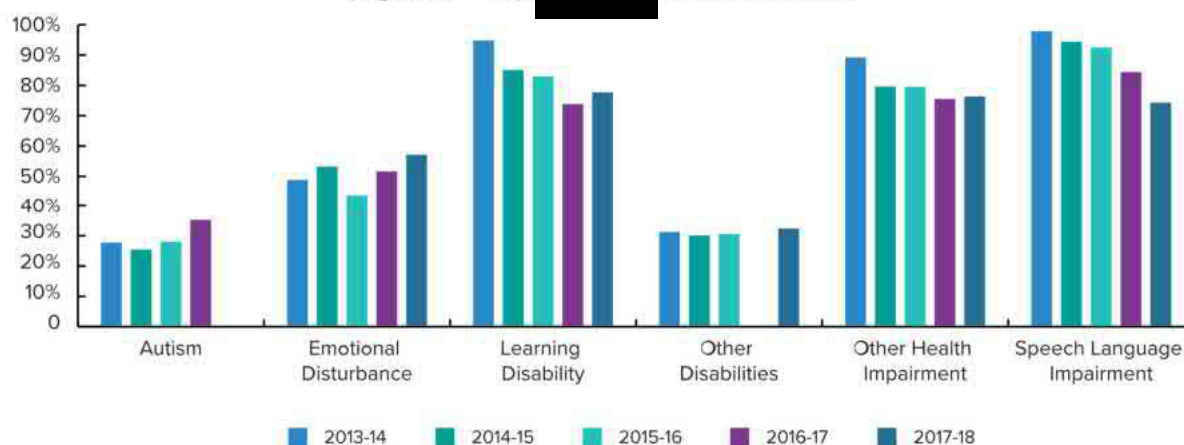


Source: Time with Nondisabled Peers Report. Retrieved from EdSight.ct.gov.

Note: students with intellectual disability are not included due to small sample size, as is the case for autism (2017-18) and other disabilities (2016-17).

While the reported statistics for time spent with nondisabled peers suggest room for improvement, the onsite observations conducted during this review may indicate that the numbers are even less optimal. Classroom visits and focus groups revealed that students with disabilities in [REDACTED] schools are more likely to receive their core instruction in pullout settings than in inclusive classrooms.

Students with Disabilities Spending 79.1% – 100% of time with Nondisabled Peers (Ages 6 – 21), [REDACTED] School District



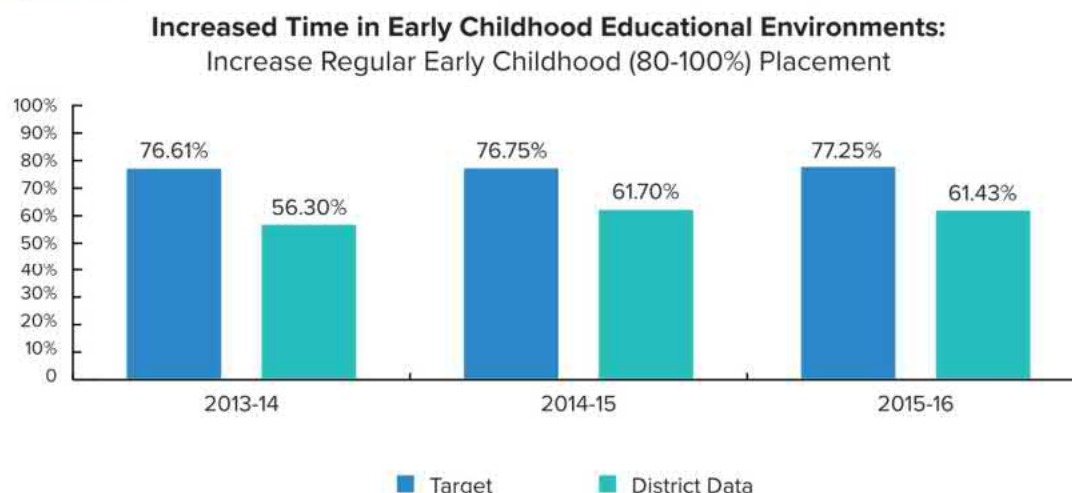
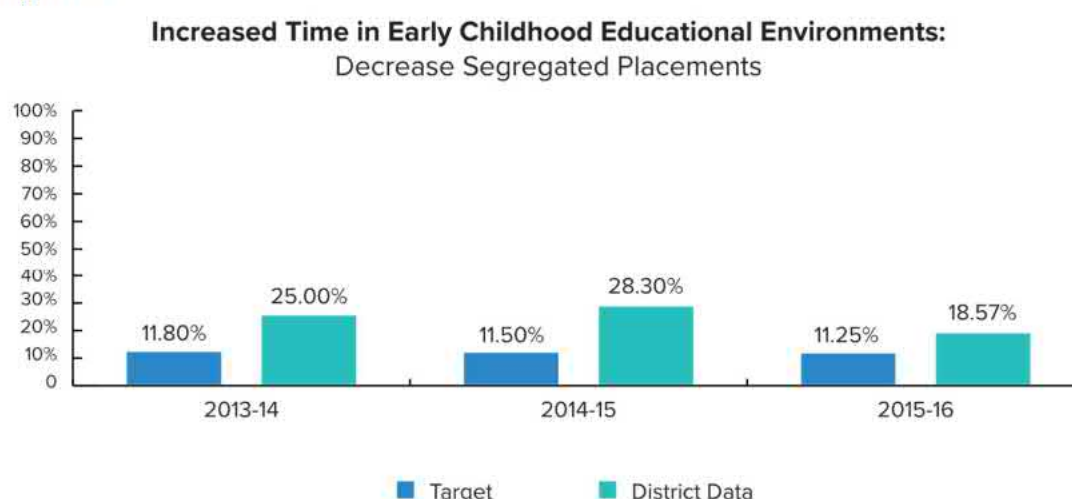
Source: Special Education Annual Performance Report on [REDACTED]'s State Performance Plan [http://edsight.ct.gov/specEdAPR/2015-2016/\[REDACTED\].pdf](http://edsight.ct.gov/specEdAPR/2015-2016/[REDACTED].pdf)

Students with autism, emotional disturbance, and other disabilities are often in substantially separate environments. The percentage of children with learning disability, other health impairment, or speech language impairment that are included in general education classrooms has decreased, year on year, since the 2013-14 school year.

While the on-site observations focused on K-12 educational settings, it is worthwhile to note that the pre-Kindergarten, located in [REDACTED] Middle School, also serves students with IEPs. In the 2017-18 school year, there were 23 students with IEPs out of a total 94 students in pre-kindergarten.

[REDACTED] has increased regular early childhood placements in a general education setting. While [REDACTED]'s special education Annual Performance Reports from 2013-2016 have positively demonstrated that the district "Meets Requirements" according to the IDEA on relevant Compliance Indicators, one area within this annual report that is consistently shown as not meeting indicator goals is the early childhood placement indicated in Figure 3. In fact, the related goal of decreasing segregated placements in early childhood has also consistently lagged below state targets, as demonstrated in Figure 4.⁴

⁴ Source Figure 3 and 4: Special Education Annual Performance Report on [REDACTED]'s State Performance Plan [http://edsight.ct.gov/specEdAPR/2015-2016/\[REDACTED\].pdf](http://edsight.ct.gov/specEdAPR/2015-2016/[REDACTED].pdf)

Figure 3**Figure 4**

Several district leaders, school leaders, teachers, and para-professionals reported that the deployment of the Instructional Aides (IAs) through the Delta T group is not providing students with the consistent academic and social assistance that they need to be successful. The IAs are not being adequately trained, and therefore some of the neediest students are not receiving the necessary supports. The review team observed several IAs on their phones, not paying close attention to students, and even absent from the classroom where they were scheduled. At a meeting where teachers were discussing the progress of the IAs in the building, there were multiple complaints from teachers concerning lateness, absences, and lack of training. One district leader said, "The training for IAs was more rigorous in the past but is now rudimentary, at best."

The support for students' mental health is viewed as the responsibility of the special needs staff (i.e. social workers, school psychologist, etc.). In all schools, these staff members are called on an ad hoc basis to address behavioral and mental health issues. Many of these staff members reported that they cannot serve the students on

their caseload because they are constantly being called away to address acute issues in their respective buildings. During staff focus groups, several general education teachers mentioned that the special needs students were “their students” when referring to the special needs staff.

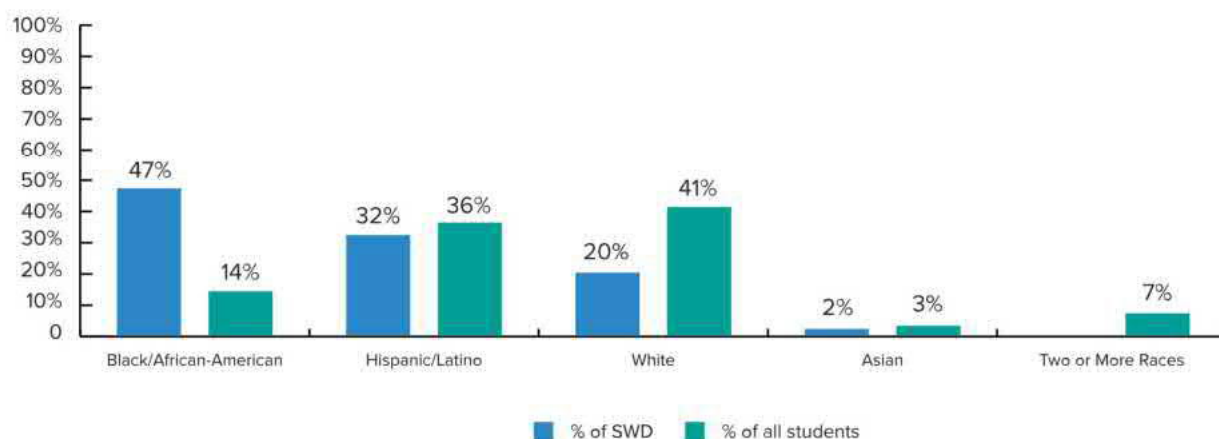
There is some disproportionality in the identification of special needs students in the district, with more males and students of color being identified. In one school, there are 134 special education students, 96 of whom are male and 87 of whom are Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. In another school, there are 129 special education students; 94 of whom are male and 88 of whom are African-American or Latino. In performing a demographic analysis of the student population in ██████ Public Schools, the reviewers attempted to analyze whether any trends exist regarding students with disabilities. While data was not provided to the reviewers about the breakdown of this population among racial groups or gender, an attempt has been made in the following pages to perform a rough analysis of these statistics. However, some important caveats must be provided regarding these data.

The breakdown of gender and race/ethnicity for students with disabilities was provided to the reviewers from three schools: Prendergast Elementary, Mead Elementary, and ██████ High School. However, the total number of students with a disability is slightly different to the numbers provided on the EdSight database. Additionally, the EdSight database does not list the exact numbers of students within some racial/ethnic groups when the population in that school is very small, so not all racial groups could be included in this analysis. Therefore, this approximate comparison should be augmented by further analysis by ██████ following this report.

The disproportionality between students of color with and without disabilities is not an issue unique to ██████ and should not be treated as such. The US Department of Education has required that states monitor disproportionality since the 1997 reissuance of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)⁵. Some degree of disproportionality is prevalent in school districts across the United States in both urban and rural settings. Since the inception of such monitoring, ██████ was never identified as a district that needed intervention for “significant disproportionality.” Some self-reflection, however, may be warranted. Often, this process begins with all educators in the district engaging in reflection protocols to examine the data on referrals as well as their own biases regarding race, gender, and educational attainment.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education Programs, “SIGNIFICANT DISPROPORTIONALITY (EQUITY IN IDEA)” September 2016. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/significant-disproportionality-qa-03-08-17.pdf>

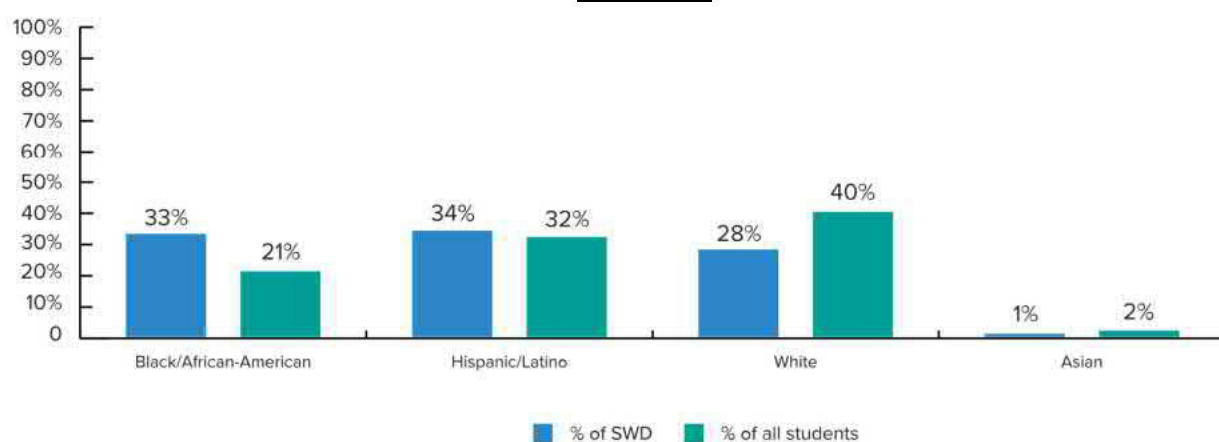
Race/Ethnicity: Prendergast School



Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports

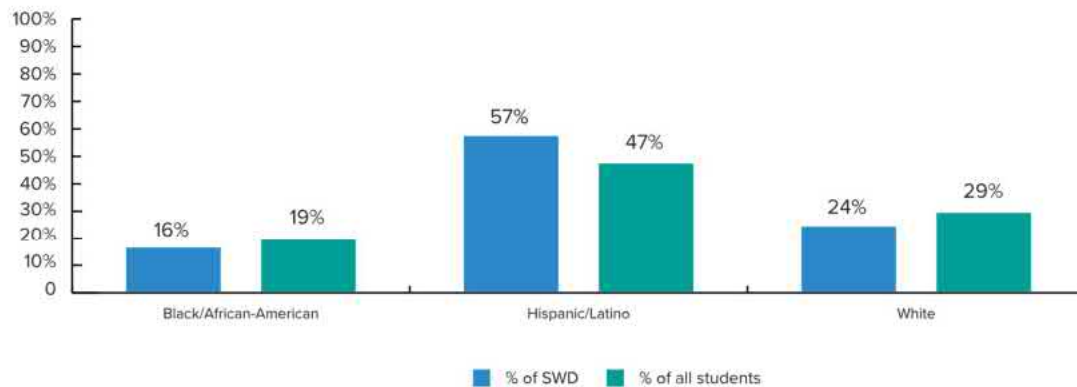
Notes: there are no Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian, or Alaska Native students.
of SWDs provided by school was 128, but EdSight report suggested number was 110 for 2017-18.

Race/Ethnicity: [REDACTED] High School



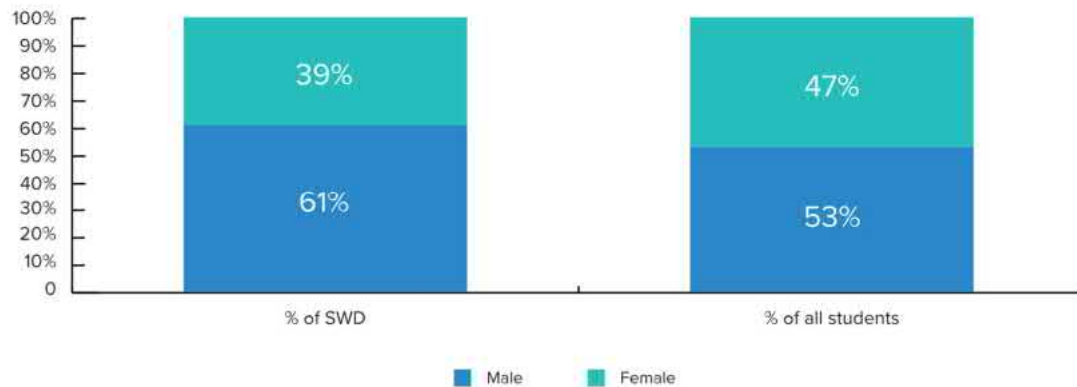
Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports

Notes: # of SWDs identified as Two or more races, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native were not included due to sample size and data available. # of SWDs provided by school was 134, but EdSight report suggested number was 131 for 2017-18.

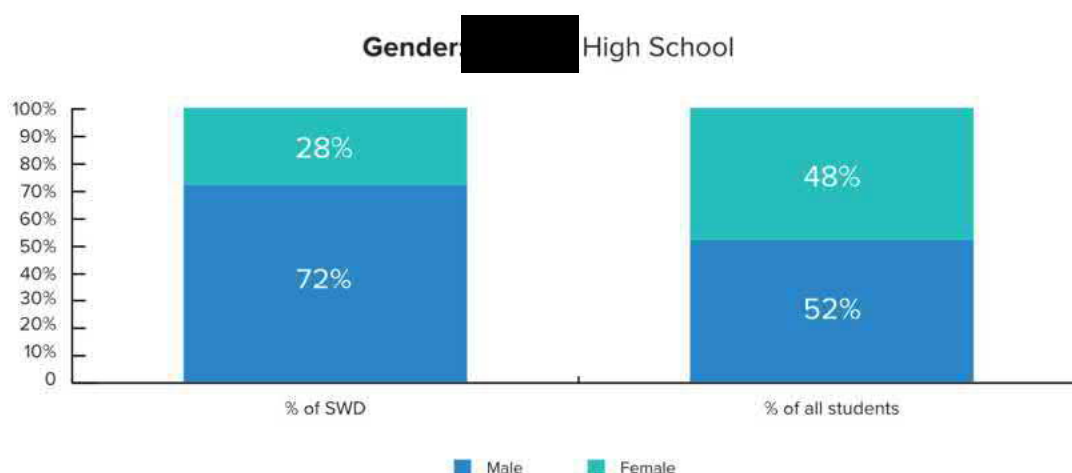
Race/Ethnicity: Mead School

Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports

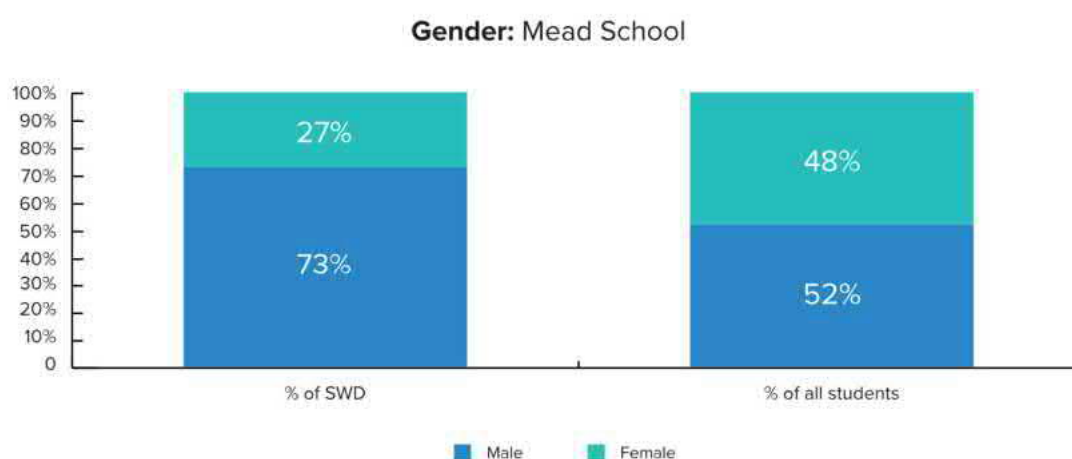
Notes: # of SWDs identified as Two or more races, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Asian were not included due to sample size and data available. # of SWDs provided by school was 129, but EdSight report suggested number was 108 for 2017-18.

Gender: Prendergast School

Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports



Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports



Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports

3.4 Recommendations

- Students with disabilities in ██████ are less likely than other students with disabilities across ██████ to spend 79.1% or more of their time with non-disabled peers. Students with autism, emotional disturbance, and other disabilities are significantly less included than other subgroups of students. Ultimately, it is not possible to comment on the variations between disability categories and their rate of inclusion with non-disabled peers without further analysis and evidence. (Indeed, there is nothing to suggest that students with all types of disabilities require equal degrees of inclusion in general education settings according to their educational needs.) Nonetheless, a combination of statistical analysis and on-site observation strongly support the suggestion that students should have more opportunities to access an inclusive educational setting for most of their school time, so long as this is in accordance with their education plans. The district should further investigate barriers that may be preventing students from accessing more inclusive environments and actively work to mitigate this challenge.

- Support in the resource room should be planned along with general education teachers and be closely aligned with curriculum and assessments according to grade level and the Common Core standards. Master schedules in each school should be adjusted to allow for common planning time where teacher teams can plan, review student work, and analyze assessments and data to improve instruction. Planning time should be supported and monitored by school administration to ensure best use of time. Resource room teachers and para-professionals should be well trained in individualized academic intervention strategies and supported to meet the individual needs of students according to their IEPs. Support for this process would entail close monitoring by school leaders, who provide actionable feedback to instructors after team meetings.
- One way to increase the numbers of students with disabilities served in the regular classroom is to employ an inclusion model. The district should create written guidelines that provide clear expectations to all staff and parents, including student-referral criteria, program description, and roles/responsibilities for co-teaching pairs. The district could first determine if existing special educators could be reallocated to co-teach in classrooms at the elementary level and extend existing co-teaching classrooms to a full day in classrooms where this is a feasibility. The district should allocate appropriate professional learning, instructional coaching, planning time, resources, and administrative oversight to achieve benefits of co-teaching.
- All educators need to believe that all the students are “their” students. The cultural divide between special education and general education allows children to fall through the cracks. All educators must share the resources and responsibility for educating all students. The district must address the “belief gap” so that all students are held to the same high expectations by all staff. Bringing staff together to create a mission, vision, and core values can help to refocus on the expectation that all children can learn and achieve. The lack of belief may be born out of pre-conceived notions about students with special needs or a disparity between the level of responsibility that teachers feel about educating all students. A root cause analysis of why some educators do not believe that all students can succeed will help to open dialog and begin to address these issues.
- Teachers across all schools should engage in cultural responsiveness and behavioral intervention strategies, particularly to address young men and students of color. The learning environment would benefit from better understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the students that they serve and gaining a toolbox filled with culturally relevant academic and behavioral intervention strategies. The following resources may be a useful starting point:

Teaching Tolerance: <http://www.tolerance.org>

- Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity: <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu>
- (Edutopia) Tips for Helping all Learners Succeed: <http://www.edutopia.org/resource/supporting-diverse-learners-download>

4 Domain 2: Leadership & Management

Rating: Low or lack of effectiveness

4.1 Overview

District leadership for special education is very knowledgeable and responsive to the needs of schools and children. However, the central office is understaffed and overstretched. Year on year, the rolls of students with special needs and the number of referrals for testing increases, making it an almost impossible task to keep up with mandated actions. Without central leadership capacity, it is difficult to monitor the quality of services delivered to students with disabilities. Consequently, each school has a different way of going about serving the students and outside services are not well-monitored. Several improvement plans exist, but the actions of individual schools are not aligned toward common goals.

4.2 Factors that support effective leadership and management

School leaders and some teachers spoke very highly of the district leadership. Educators shared that there is an open line of communication between the schools and the district and that they felt comfortable reaching out to the district for additional support. Several teachers shared that they were excited about the positive energy and collegial tone that the new Assistant Superintendent has expressed thus far during his school visits.

There are life skills classrooms in the middle school and high school that are preparing special needs students for life after high school. These classes are taught in classrooms with washing machines, ovens, refrigerators, etc. and allow students the opportunity to build practical life skills. The High School program also includes a component where students spend part of the school day out in the field, engaging in work at local businesses.

There is a district-wide plan for academic improvement that was developed by a committee and presented to the district in 2017. This plan outlines benchmarks for academic improvement through 2023. This plan speaks to financial planning, human resource development, and academic improvement as measured by the STAR assessment.

4.3 Factors that limit effective leadership and management

The leadership across the district does not share a clear and common vision for educating students with special needs. Each school has its own version of the special education referral process, child study team expectations, tiered behavioral and academic interventions, and academic support structures for students. When asked about the vision for special education, leaders at each school provided varied responses with few common threads. One school leader shared that the requirements

in most of the student IEPs, combined with the struggles with programming, require “more bodies in special education” to meet the pullout instruction that is required

School leaders have not fully analyzed and internalized the district-wide strategic plan for improvement. School building leaders could not consistently articulate the academic benchmarks outlined in the district-wide strategic plan. Two of the four building leaders mentioned the plan but could not readily speak to the district goals outlined within the plan or how they planned to meet these expectations over time.

District leaders noted that in the past, there was a clear inclusion model implemented in each building but that had changed over the past few years. When asked why this was no longer the vision, district leaders could not point to a definitive decision that was made, nor could they speak to the reason for this shift to a pullout model.

When investigating the district policies for special education, the page dedicated to the special needs department is blank (as of 6/14/18)

Data is not being used effectively to plan for improved student outcomes. Most teachers in focus groups mentioned that they attend data team meetings once per month. School leaders insisted to reviewers that regular team data meetings were held, and teachers were aware of the processes and expectations to use data to inform instruction. Teachers in focus groups, however, could not articulate how instruction was adjusted for students after examining data.

Due to large numbers of referrals, there are many Special Education PPT meetings scheduled. This often keeps special education staff from completing their daily responsibilities in supporting students. School counselors, social workers, and school psychologists across the district lamented that they cannot complete their daily duties because they are attending many PPT meetings. One school psychologist stated that her “entire job has become scheduling, prepping for and attending PPT meetings. I literally don’t do anything else all day.”

4.4 Recommendations

- The district must develop and maintain a vision and a plan for delivering rigorous, consistent, high-quality support for the special needs population in schools. This vision should include common practices for maintaining high academic expectations, student referral, Child Study Team development, delivery of core instruction, academic and behavioral interventions, and support structures for students with severe needs. This vision must be clearly messaged to all school stakeholders and implemented with fidelity. There should be accountability measures included for school leaders who do not firmly adhere to the vision. Parents and community stakeholders should be included in the messaging to ensure that the entire district is on the same page regarding special education.
- The district should re-visit the referral and testing process for students with special needs. This process would begin by assessing the current practices for students with disabilities and supporting appropriate special education evaluation referrals for all students.

Student Referrals: The district must create a centralized system to track all referral and eligibility data, including the referral source. This information should

be maintained and updated frequently. The Director of Special Services should closely monitor the referrals to determine if schools with a stronger Multi Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) see a reduction in unnecessary referrals.

Eligibility: The district should develop a process to review recent eligibility documentation for students with disabilities. A group of knowledgeable educators could be tasked to audit random files for students with similar characteristics to identify any patterns and trends, including the way students have responded to research-based general education interventions, and their growth after receiving an IEP.

Disproportionality in Identifying Students in Racial/Ethnic Sub-Groups: The district should monitor the identification of students in a racial/ethnic subgroup to ensure that they are not more likely than peers to be identified as having a disability area. The district could examine initial referrals and eligibility determinations by race/ethnicity in the areas of concern. The district could also annually track whether the use of MTSS is reducing racial/ethnic disparities in initial referrals and eligibility determinations in these areas. The district should also monitor teaching practices, school culture and other school-wide procedures that may contribute to the identification of students from minority racial and ethnic groups.

504 Classifications: The district should ensure schools have the necessary systems in place to identify students who may require a 504 plan. The district office should also monitor schools with overly high rates to ensure appropriate identification. The district should provide training to improve staff understanding and enhance the tracking system to ensure 504 data is being appropriately captured.

Tracking Data: The district must closely monitor the activities in the special services departments of each school to determine if they are having a positive impact on the identification of students with concerns and taking the appropriate follow-up actions. Initial evaluations should be reviewed monthly to ensure mandated timelines and student requirements are being met.

- The district should consistently document and communicate special education expectations and policies. This includes a clear, measurable, short and long term vision and plan for improvement with measurable benchmarks, responsible parties, measures, and the expected level of progress for each initiative. The district should craft this vision and plan with all stakeholders to ensure school, family, and community stakeholder buy-in.
- The district should implement a system to share special needs student information. The district should formally document how data is tracked and calculated and develop a plan to review data before state reporting is due and use the data to inform the plan.
- Protocols for student data team meetings must be clearly defined and adhered to across the district. Meetings to discuss student data alone are insufficient, as they must inform our plans for instruction and resource allocation. These meetings should determine how instruction will meet the needs of students and challenge them to reach their optimum academic potential. Meetings and outcomes must be documented and tracked to ensure actions have an impact on student progress.

5 Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Rating: Low or lack of effectiveness

5.1 Overview

The district provides a written curriculum and assistive technology programs for use in classrooms for students with special needs. The level of rigor, pedagogical practice, and settings for providing instruction for students with disabilities varies from school to school. Common planning time is not built into the schedules so that general education teachers and special education teachers can plan for instruction collaboratively.

5.2 Factors that support effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment

The district has a written curriculum, and school leaders have a clear idea of what teachers should be teaching, particularly in ELA. Teachers in multiple focus groups could speak confidently about the curriculum programs that they use and the content that they have taught.

Teachers use assistive technologies to support students in learning reading and mathematics and support school and classroom culture. In multiple special education classes, we observed students using online academic support programs such as Moby Max (a math support program). In multiple classrooms, we observed teachers using the Class Dojo program to reward students for exhibiting appropriate classroom behaviors. While observing classrooms, students were not observed using assistive technologies or supportive communication software.

One student was observed using a motorized wheelchair to navigate the school campus and visit the middle school with classmates. The school ensured the student could safely attend the orientation trip with her peers.

5.3 Factors that limit effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment

Instruction

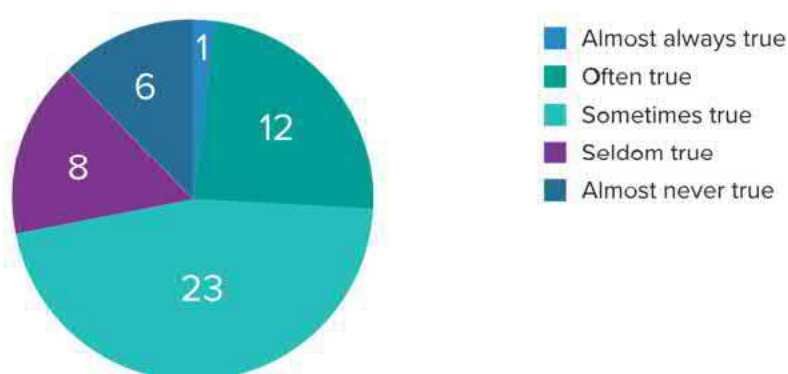
Special education pedagogy lacks consistency across the district. While observing classrooms across the four schools, there were varied levels of rigor in the special education instruction being delivered. In most classes observed, the special education teachers were attempting to assist students with work that came from the general education classrooms. In two lower grade classrooms observed, the special education instructor was delivering instruction from the Foundations textbook. In another classroom, students were completing individual packets of work that had been provided by multiple teachers. Most of the work observed consisted of assignments that students were completing independently without assistance from an instructor.

Students with special needs are frequently served in pullout settings, outside of the general education classroom. It is imperative that students be serviced in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). "The LRE refers to the setting where a child with a disability can receive an appropriate education designed to meet his or her educational needs, alongside peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate." [20 United States Code (U.S.C.) Sec. 1412(a)(5)(A); 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C F R) Sec 300.114] In three of the four schools in the district, most of the special education instruction is delivered in pullout settings. Students who receive their instruction in this fashion are not receiving sufficient instruction of the core curriculum in the general education classrooms. These students are likely to be ill-prepared to perform well on the standardized testing that is primarily based on the core curriculum

Observers in classrooms found that the work for students with disabilities was not always appropriate for their age or grade level. In a high school pullout support class, a special needs student was required to complete an essay that consisted of two paragraphs. In a middle school special education class, students were working on a math program that required them to answer very low-level math computation questions (ex $2 \times 1 = \underline{\quad}$, $8 - 7 = \underline{\quad}$, etc.) During a visit to the general education math classroom, we witnessed students working on solving linear equations and in a History class, students were required to complete three to four-page research papers. The low expectations for special education students will not appropriately prepare them academically and push them to reach their full academic potential

Cambridge Education administered parent, teacher, and student surveys during this review, and these results are analyzed in greater detail in the district wide general report. However, with regard to issues that may be more pertinent to special education, the following results were obtained

Struggling students receive early intervention and remediation to acquire skills (N=50)



School District

Source: Cambridge Education District Report: Staff Survey

The chart shows the responses to the staff survey prompt: "struggling students receive early intervention and remediation to acquire skills." To this question, only 1 person out of 50 said that this almost always true, and an additional 12 said that this was often true. Ultimately, the remaining 37 out of 50 respondents, or 74%, indicated that this

was either sometimes true, seldom true, or almost never true. These data are reflective of observations stemming from the on-site visit, where each school had a differing practice around supporting struggling learners that was not in close alignment with the others.

The student survey conducted for both elementary and secondary school students included 10.5% and 7.8% of respondents receiving special education services, respectively. Amongst all respondents with and without a disability, the following question relates to teachers' responsiveness to student learning difficulties: "my teacher(s) find other ways for me to learn things I find difficult," 67% of elementary-aged students with special needs said that this was almost always true or often true. At the high school level, 48% of students with special needs gave the same response. In the aggregate, a favorable response was 68% at the elementary level, and only 35% for secondary students, suggesting that secondary-aged students with special needs are more likely than their peers to find their teachers adaptive to learning difficulties. There is no significant difference between students with disabilities and all students at the elementary level.

Use of data

There is a practice of conducting data team meetings across the district. These meetings provide general education and special education teachers time to discuss student academic and social/behavioral data. These meetings, however, were not regularly convened, nor did they follow a regular agenda to make them more effective. Teachers could not identify the types of changes that are made to instruction following the examination of data.

Collaborative planning

Teacher schedules for general education teachers and special education teachers do not allow for sufficient collaborative planning time. All special education teachers in focus groups stated that they cannot effectively support student learning without having the opportunity to share lesson plans or develop the plans in concert with the general education teachers.

Professional Development

The district-provided professional development is inconsistent and teachers in multiple focus groups said that it is not always relevant. Multiple teachers in focus groups in all schools stated that the professional development that they receive is not always meaningful to their practice, nor is it consistently delivered to general education teachers, special education teachers, and para-professionals. Teachers mentioned that the district will allow teachers to seek out professional development opportunities on their own, but they are often responsible to pay for it themselves and they may be docked a day of pay if it conflicts with their traditional school schedule. Teachers who are not sufficiently trained will not provide students with the rigorous instruction that they need to be successful.

5.4 Recommendations

- The district should re-establish the vision and purpose for PLCs and develop some guidelines as to how they should be facilitated across the district. Planning time for these PLCs should be allotted for in each building and these meetings should be

closely monitored by school leaders. These meetings must be used to collaboratively plan for the needs of both general education and special education students.

- The district must outline the expectations for special education students across the district. There should be common practices, strategies, and expectations for the instruction of students with special needs. General education and special education teachers must understand that they are responsible for *all* students in the district and not just the ones that attend their classes each day. The district must firmly set the expectations for the quality of instruction that all children in the district are receiving.
- The district must provide interventions for struggling students. While referral and screening for disabilities appears to be taking place for large numbers of students, a response to intervention (RTI) or multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach could provide much needed support to struggling learners in all settings. [REDACTED] should further refine its approach to RTI and ensure that struggling learners receive attention to address their needs at an early stage, and with the appropriate supports.
- The district should move away from recommendations based on disability classification, and focus on needed services (not program), based on each student's present level of academic performance. During focus groups, teachers mentioned that students with certain classifications should all receive the same services.
- The district should create consistent expectations around instruction for students with special needs and clarify the purpose of different programs. The district could continue to ensure that all students receive their federally mandated right to an education in the LRE. Include a broader range of needs in all programs to create more inclusive, diverse learning environments, reduce the current prescriptive practice, and increase the number of students that can be served within the general education environment.
- Assess out-of-district (OOD) placements and build supports and services within [REDACTED] to address these student needs. District leaders stated that the number of outplaced students is increasing. It is important to notice trends and to work to determine the root cause of why certain students are being educated OOD.
- Provide professional development that is relevant and consistent across all schools. Special education teachers, general education teachers, and para-professionals would benefit from being trained in concert, so a common language concerning student supports can be developed. This would also support consistency when teachers are transferred from one school to another.
- The Planning and Placement Team Meeting (PPT) meetings should be scheduled and streamlined for efficiency. The Director of Special Education could develop a common agenda for PPT meetings that would increase their efficiency. The district could also mandate that PPT meetings are held two days a week and emergency meetings could be scheduled before or after school hours. These changes would enable school support staff to complete their daily workloads, while keeping the families of students with disabilities informed.

6 Domain 4: Engagement of Families, the Community and Other Stakeholders

Rating: Limited Effectiveness

6.1 Overview

Although the district communicates with families of individual students who have been referred for special education or are receiving services, very little is communicated or published by the district for all parents to see in terms of districtwide programs and expectations. Parent input and feedback is not formally sought by the district.

Most of the information gathered about family engagement is from focus groups with staff and a statewide survey for parents of students with special needs. No formal focus groups were set up for the onsite review that included parents and community stakeholders. The review team interviewed a handful of individual parents when in [REDACTED]

6.2 Factors that support effective engagement of families, the community, and other stakeholders

Family members in focus groups shared that they are informed of scheduled PPT meetings in a timely fashion and that the communication is friendly and respectful.

District leaders are working to build greater partnerships with local community members and stakeholders. There is currently a partnership with Griffin Hospital, where students are being recruited for internships and one student has been welcomed into the CN (Certified Nurse) program. The district is also developing a program with the local community college that will support students with disabilities to earn Associate's degrees.

6.3 Factors that limit effective engagement of families, the community, and other stakeholders

In focus groups, family members reported that they have few opportunities to provide feedback to the district on issues pertaining to the special education programs. Parents were unaware of any community meetings that would allow them to share their thoughts about the education in the district except for the monthly Board of Education meetings. One mother stated that she would like to have the formal opportunity to provide feedback to the district on "the things that are working well and the things they need to fix."

There is limited information concerning special education on the district website or any of the school websites.

In a 2013-2014⁶ [REDACTED] Department of Education Special Education Parent Survey⁷ showed lower levels of agreement to items concerning the provision of secondary transition services and the availability of parent support. Parents were asked if outside agencies had been invited to participate in secondary transition planning 61.1% of parents across [REDACTED] agreed that they had been provided with such support, while only 53.3% of the parents in [REDACTED] agreed. When parents were asked if the PPT discussed an appropriate course of study at the high school, with 89.5% of parents across [REDACTED] agreeing, and only about two-thirds of [REDACTED] were offered this opportunity.

When parents were asked if the PPT introduced planning for their child's transition to adulthood, about three-quarters of families across [REDACTED] agreed, while only two thirds of [REDACTED] parents reported that this was discussed. Lastly, when asked if the PPT developed individualized goals for their child related to employment and postsecondary education, independent living, and community participation, 78.3% of parents in [REDACTED] agreed, while only 50% of [REDACTED] parents agreed.

There is a small gap in relation to available supports for parents, with about 36.6% of parents in [REDACTED] agreeing that opportunities are available in their district for parent training sessions, compared to 31.2% in [REDACTED]. 37.4% of parents across all districts in [REDACTED] agreed that a support network is available for parents of students with disabilities, compared to 25.4% in [REDACTED]. Likewise, when parents were asked about their involvement in training or support networks, statewide agreement was at 26.4% and 28.8% respectively, and [REDACTED] parent agreement was at 21.9% and 25%.

More than 80% of parents in [REDACTED] reported that a regular classroom setting was recommended for their child, which is the same rate across the state. When reviewers were on site, it was observed that most of the services were provided outside of a regular classroom setting.

6.4 Recommendations

- The district should convene regular community meetings that would allow parents to share their questions and concerns. These meetings could take place monthly and be held at a location and time that is convenient to most parents. The district could also facilitate yearly surveys of families to learn what the needs are at each school. Frequent meetings at the school level could be facilitated by parent coordinators or a volunteer. Questions and concerns could then be shared with central office.
- Once the district has developed a plan for district-wide structures for special education instruction, this information could be housed on the district website. This will empower families with information and policies concerning the referral process, intervention strategies, or instruction for special needs students across the district.
- The district should make supports available to parents to understand how to best support their children with disabilities. Providing additional supports would empower

⁶ The survey was also conducted in 2014-2015, but disaggregated responses by district are not available.

⁷ Glen Martin Associates: [REDACTED] Special Education Parent Survey, 2013-2014 https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Special-Education/Parent_Survey_district_report_2014.pdf

families to connect their children to appropriate transition services, education or training, employment, and independent living. Educators can work alongside family members to engage students with disabilities in development of self-determination attitudes and skills that will serve them in college, career, and life.

- By securing additional partnerships in the community, the district can provide social and health services that address student needs. Varied and meaningful partnerships with community businesses and organizations will provide special needs students with opportunities for volunteer work, internships, employment, and recreation programs.

7 Domain 5: Human & Fiscal Resources

Rating: Limited Effectiveness

7.1 Overview

Human resource and special education staff at the district level are limited. With a high percentage of special needs students, adequate staffing is a challenge. [REDACTED] has outsourced a great number of personnel working directly with students—all the Instructional Aides. This group, however, is not well trained or managed and the impact they are having is limited and varied. Instructional practices are varied across the district. General education and special education teachers have few opportunities to collaborate and plan together.

A high percentage of the school district's budget is spent on special education, yet resources are very limited. Many special-needs students are placed out of district, accounting for a great deal of the special education spending. Low salaries in [REDACTED] as compared to other districts reportedly make it difficult to attract and retain the best teachers to serve the needs of the population.

7.2 Factors that support effective use of human and fiscal resources

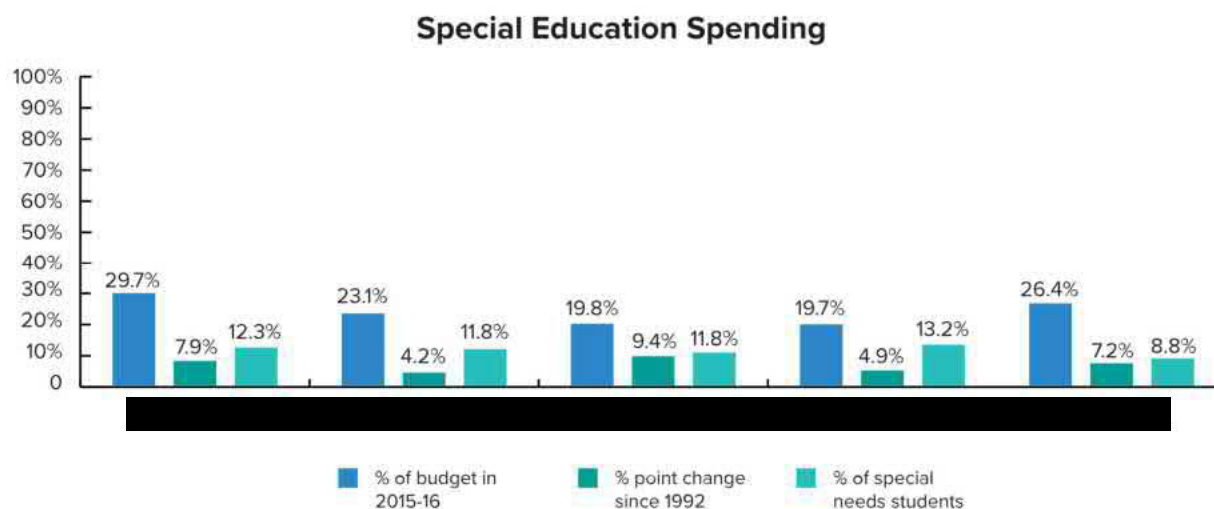
School facilities are clean and safe. There are procedures at each school for security at the front door, displaying identification, signing in and receiving visitor badges. Hallways and classrooms are well kept, and the bathrooms visited for adults during the review are clean. Students in multiple focus groups mentioned that they felt safe in their schools and they were aware of drills and protocols for emergencies.

School grounds, playground equipment, and sports facilities were clean, landscaped and well-maintained. Students and teachers in focus groups said that the clean and welcoming environment was a reason that they felt proud of their schools. Family members also mentioned that the schools were consistently clean and welcoming when they visited.

7.3 Factors that limit effective use of human and fiscal resources

[REDACTED] spends a high proportion of its budget on special education services, at nearly 30%. In 2015-2016, [REDACTED] had the fifth-highest percentage of total budget spent on special needs student services in the state of [REDACTED]. Statewide, the average spending on services for students with disabilities is 23% of district budgets. The number of special needs students and the budget to serve these students has increased year-on-year for more than 25 years.⁸

⁸ Rabe Thomas, Jacqueline, CT Mirror: SPECIAL EDUCATION DRIVING COSTS AND CONTROVERSIES
ctmirror.org/2016/12/14/troubled-schools-on-trial-special-education-driving-costs-and-controversies/



A detailed analysis regarding out of district tuition costs was performed for this audit and is reported below. However, this analysis is based on limited, publicly-available data, and cannot and should not be viewed as a fully comprehensive picture of the costs of out-of-district placements.

Figure 19

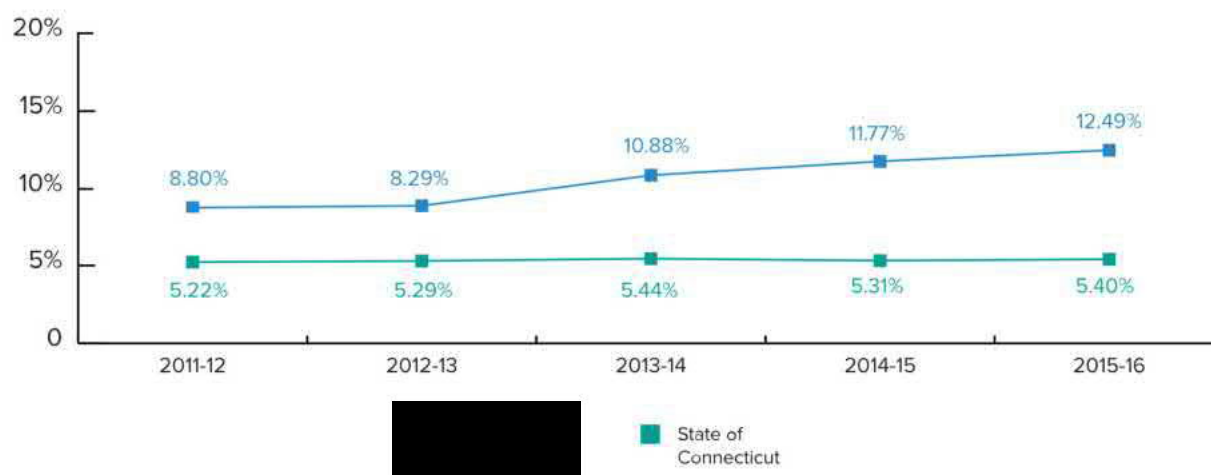
Spending on Students Tuitioned Out as compared to all other categories of spending, Ansonia School District

| | 2011 - 2012 | 2012 - 2013 | 2013 - 2014 | 2014 - 2015 | 2015 - 2016 |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| All other categories of spending | \$28,810,258 | \$ 32,708,641 | \$29,958,298 | \$30,894,517 | \$31,625,947 |
| Students tuitioned out | \$2,781,509 | \$3,204,191 | \$3,656,009 | \$4,120,043 | \$4,512,942 |
| Total expenditures | \$31,591,767 | \$35,912,832 | \$33,614,307 | \$35,014,560 | \$36,138,889 |

Source: Overall expenditures data retrieved from EdSight.ct.gov

As shown in Figure 19, the funds spent on out of-district tuition in 2015-16 were \$4,512,942. The remaining \$31,625,947 of expenditures for the district during the same time included: Instructional Staff and Services, Instructional Supplies and Equipment, Instruction and Educational Media Services, Student Support Services, Administration and Support Services, Plant Operation and Maintenance, Transportation, and Other Expenditures. Ultimately, the funds spent on students tuitioned out have increased by \$1,731,433, or 62%, since the 2011-12 school year. A further representation of this increased spend on out-of-district tuition is reflected below:

Percent of Total Expenditures Spent on Students Tuitioned Out



Source: Overall expenditures data retrieved from EdSight ct.gov

Spending on out-of-district placements has gone up each year from 2011, while the state average remains the same. However, it should be noted that the district's figures would likely include tuitions paid to other districts, while the state's figures would be unlikely to reflect these costs. While these data certainly indicate an increasing amount of money being used for purposes that do not directly support students with disabilities in [REDACTED]'s public schools, this should not be analyzed in isolation. Namely, it is noteworthy that during this same period, both the number of students with a disability as well as the percentage of the student population with a disability has risen significantly, as is indicated in Figures 12 and 13. In other words, the increased spend on out of-district tuition has in fact accompanied an increased population of students with identified disabilities in [REDACTED].

Percent of Students with Disabilities Placed Outside of District (K-12)

| | 2015 - 2016 | 2016 - 2017 | 2017 - 2018 |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Ansonia: Other Public % | 3.1 | 4.4 | 4.3 |
| Statewide: Other Public % | 6.4 | 6.5 | 6.5 |
| Ansonia: Private/Other % | 5.6 | 5.6 | 5.3 |
| Statewide: Private/Other % | 5.4 | 5.3 | 5.2 |

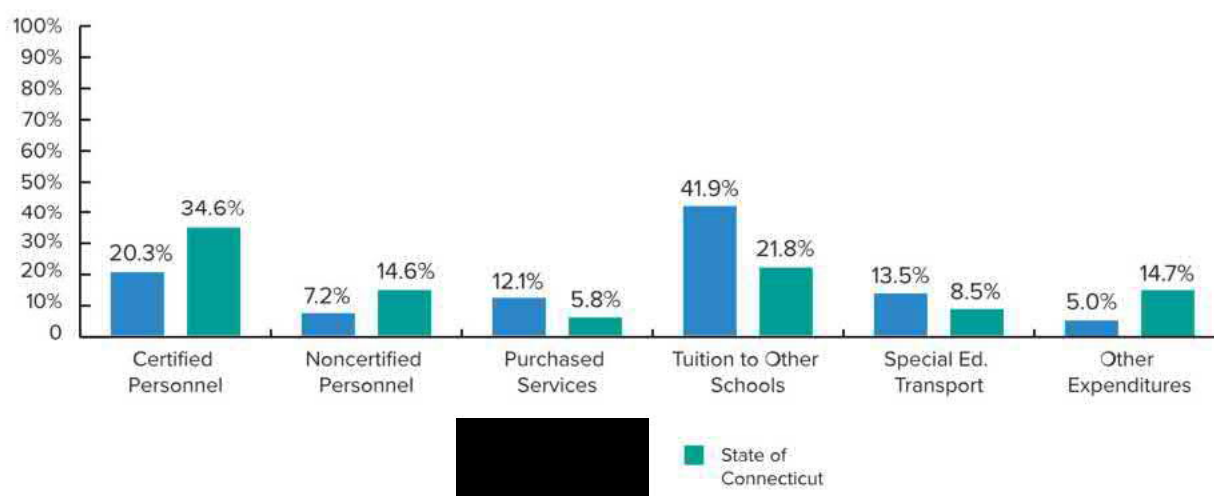
Source: Students with Disabilities Placed Outside of District Report, retrieved from <http://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/PlacedOutsideOfDistrict.pdf>

[REDACTED]'s percentage of students with disabilities placed outside the district, whether in "other public" settings or "private/other" settings, was on par with or lower than the statewide statistics for the past three years.

Noting that the cost of outside placements has risen significantly over the past three years, while the percentage of students with disabilities placed out-of-district has

remained on par with state averages, it is difficult to unpack the reasons for the high out-of-district tuition costs. It is possible that there are groups of students not included, but for whom money is being spent on the “students tuitioned out” section of the budget. One variable that has not been accounted for is the actual cost of the services being paid for out-of-district schooling. It is plausible that the cost per child for these services has increased, and/or the variable costs for the types of placement settings needed for [REDACTED] children may account for the increasing costs.

Special Education Expenditures: 2015 – 2016



Source: District Profile and Performance Report for School Year 2016-2017
http://edsight.ct.gov/Output/District/HighSchool/0020011_201617.pdf

In 2016-17, a total of \$10,758,531 was spent on special education, for which a remarkable 41.9% of the special education budget went to “tuition to other schools.” This value is nearly double the 21.8% of the special education budget that districts across the state spent during the same period. In concert with the data, this supports a consistent assertion that a disproportionate quantity of funds continues to be allocated to the payment of tuition to other schools.

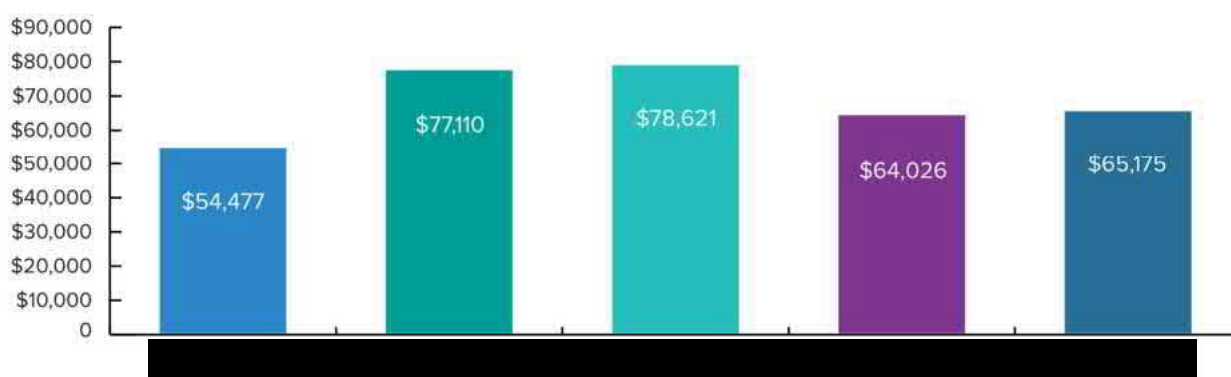
There is a significantly lower percentage of the special education funding allocated to certified and non-certified personnel than for state averages. It is unclear whether the Delta T instructional aides’ costs are included in Noncertified Personnel or in Purchased Services; if they are included in purchased services this could help to explain why noncertified personnel appear lower than state averages. Nonetheless, when examining the costs spent on certified personnel alone, a significantly lower percentage of funding is spent on this category than in state averages. This observation aligns with the feedback that was obtained during onsite visits, including concerns expressed by teachers that their pay was lower than in neighboring districts, and that a low number of certified personnel presented challenges for ensuring instructional quality.

Staffing levels are not adequate to serve the population of students with disabilities. Of the comparison districts, [REDACTED] has the second highest rate of students per counselors, psychologists, and social workers [REDACTED]'s number of disabled students per special education teacher is 18.8:1 which is significantly more students per teacher than any of the comparison districts.⁹

| District | Students per counselors, psychologists, and social workers | Disabled students per special education teachers |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Ansonia School District | 161 | 18.8 |
| Clinton School District | 113.7 | 7.5 |
| New Fairfield School District | 122.1 | 11.1 |
| North Branford School District | 114.5 | 12.4 |
| Oxford School District | 167.7 | 13.1 |

According to the NEA, [REDACTED] has the fifth highest average salary for teachers in the country at \$72,013 in 2016.¹⁰ [REDACTED] teachers are paid below the state average and in the comparison group, [REDACTED]'s special education teachers are paid less than in the comparison districts. Teachers and district leaders reported in focus groups that this discrepancy prevents the district from attracting and retaining the best talent. However, retention data was not provided to back up this claim.

Special Education Teachers' Salaries: 2012 – 2013



7.4 Recommendations

- Further work should be done to analyze the reasons for high costs of out-of-district placements. The district has begun to create programs in the public schools for special needs students who may have been tuitioned out in the past. Accommodating more students in [REDACTED] settings would help to reduce costs.

⁹ Rabe Thomas, Jacqueline, CT Mirror: SPECIAL EDUCATION DRIVING COSTS AND CONTROVERSIES
ctmirror.org/2016/12/14/troubled-schools-on-trial-special-education-driving-costs-and-controversies/

¹⁰ NEA Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the States 2017 and Estimates of School Statistics 2018,
http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/180413-Rankings_And_Estimates_Report_2018.pdf

- Further attention should be afforded to the significantly lower percentage of district budgets than state budgets that are being used for payment to certified personnel, to ensure that neither teacher retention nor instructional quality are at risk of being compromised
- The district must clearly define the district wide vision for special education. Supports need to be similar in each school and reflect high expectations for all students
- The district should implement strategies to recruit and retain high-quality educators in the special education department. In all focus groups, there was an overwhelming sentiment of dedication from the teachers and an incentive program might work to keep teachers in district. A monetary incentive traditionally works well, but some type of formal public district recognition may also serve this purpose. Quality teachers would also benefit from having the opportunity to engage in professional learning and share best practice with other teachers around the district. These strategies might work to retain the good and dedicated teachers

8 Domain 6: Operational Systems

Rating: Low or lack of effectiveness

8.1 Overview

School staff and district leaders have very limited access to the data systems they need to make data-driven decisions. Although students with special needs and/or disabilities have some access to a range of equipment, hardware and software it is not always adapted to meet their individual needs and they do not yet have 100 % access. There is no information for parents on districtwide policies and procedures available on the district's website.

Although milestones are set for the performance of special needs students, there are no effective tracking systems in place to ensure that these are met. Actions to address lags or gaps in performance are not documented or monitored. Stakeholder satisfaction is not routinely checked by the district. The district tracks some performance data in operational/infrastructure systems. Job descriptions and Key Progress Indicators (KPI) for operations are not communicated.

The district policies and processes do not have sufficient focus, and/or they are not consistently implemented to ensure the alignment of external support services (public, community-based, and internal) for struggling students and students with special needs.

8.2 Factors that support operational effectiveness

Teachers integrate technology in lessons across the district. Class Dojo has been implemented to reward students for exhibiting appropriate classroom behaviors. High school students use Chromebook to draft research papers and students in special education classrooms use the Moby Max program to improve their skills in math and ELA.

8.3 Factors that limit operational effectiveness

Data and documentation of operational procedures is often not easily available. For this review, school leaders and support staff were unable to quickly provide data concerning: special education sub-groups, teacher schedules, and evidence of data team meetings. In most cases, school leaders shared that they would e-mail the data, or we could come back and collect it the following day. In one case, rather than send electronic copies of schedules, the school representative sent photos of the schedules (attached).

Although milestones have been set in the district-wide strategic plan, they are unrealistic and not consistently based on past student performance. The district plan entitled "Our Roadmap to the Future" was developed by a team of district stakeholders.

and shared during the 2017-18 school year. This plan outlines projected increases in student academic scores, as measured by the STAR assessment. On page six it outlines projected growth in ELA for grades three through eight:

- By 2018, Grade 3 students will meet or exceed 60 percent proficiency as measured by the SBAC Assessment.
- Grade 4 goes from 40% to 60%
- Grade 5 goes from 39% to 56%
- Grade 6 goes from 34% to 52%
- Grade 7 goes from 38% to 55%
- Grade 8 goes from 18% to 40%

These projected growth percentages are unrealistic as evidenced by the Next Generation Accountability reports for school years; 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 (attached), where the ELA scores decreased 2.4% over the three-year period. It is unrealistic to project that students' academic performance would increase at such a rate. It's also difficult to determine how these projected numbers were developed.

The district policies and procedures are unclear or non-existent when it comes to students with disabilities. The policies for special education students have not been developed and/or clearly articulated, as evidenced by each school attempting to address special education in a different way.

The district's special education department does not employ an adequate number of staff to serve all the needs of students and schools. During the on-site portion of this review, the department director was very stretched with end-of-year meetings and was unable to spend much time with the reviewers. Although staff in schools report that central office is very supportive and responsive when needs arise, there is not enough time or personnel to create a department that is proactively planning and providing for the needs of schools and individuals. Often, there is only time to react when acute needs arise.

8.4 Recommendations:

- Student academic and demographic data should be readily available to review or use for analysis. Data concerning attendance, suspension rates, student referrals, and IEPs should also be readily available and easily accessed. The district could create a data dashboard for this information that could be accessed through the internal district website. School leaders could choose staff members to periodically update this information to ensure that it is up to date.
- The district must develop a strategic plan for academic growth of students with disabilities that has achievable, measurable goals. Individual student goals for special education students should be aligned with their IEP goals.
- The district policies and procedures concerning special education must be firmly outlined and messaged to educators across the district. The district must first outline their vision the way students with special needs will receive instruction and then procedures to facilitate this must be implemented with fidelity in all four schools.

- The district should monitor the performance of all staff, as well as provide regular reviews of special education policies and procedures for the district. School leaders and special education staff should be held accountable to district-wide policies. The district websites should provide relevant documentation and information for all staff, including principals, teachers, and support staff.
- The district has well-developed monitoring and evaluation policies and procedures in place to track key performance data and trends in operational/infrastructure systems
- The district should use the data from the monitoring and evaluation process to review and proactively address any issues before they negatively impact school and district instructional staff's ability to focus on their core instructional function.
- The district should forge additional partnerships with organizations in the community that can provide external support and resources for struggling students, students with special needs, and students with significant health and legal issues.

9 Grade Summary

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| District Name: | ████████ School District. ██████████, CT. |
|-----------------------|---|

| Score | Level |
|-------|----------------------------|
| 4 | High Impact |
| 3 | Moderate Impact |
| 2 | Limited Evidence of Impact |
| 1 | Low or Lack of Impact |

- 4. High Impact** The system is consistently providing effective, efficient, and high-quality service and support of schools in this domain meets and/or exceeds the stated benchmarks which are having a positive impact on the experiences of all students. Few if any weaknesses are present and none that would negatively affect student learning. In addition to having provided this level for at least three years, the district continues to proactively improve its performance and serve as a benchmark for other school districts. The district is engaged in cycles of continuous monitoring and improvement and has proactively identified opportunities for improvement which are having a high impact on district performance in this domain.
- 3. Moderate Impact** The system is providing effective service for schools across most components or elements in the domain. Few weaknesses are present, and none have significant negative impact on student learning overall. While much of the components or elements in this domain are strong, there are important areas that need improvement for at least some schools.
- 2. Limited Evidence of Impact** The system has met minimal standards of service and support of schools in this domain; however, there are limits and some weaknesses individually or collectively affect the learning experience of students. There are strengths; however, the system needs specific, targeted action or intervention to reduce the negative effect on student learning experiences. The system may need intervention to engage in proactive cycles of improvement. Targeted intervention and focused performance coaching may be needed for individuals and teams.
- 1. Low or Lack of Impact** The system is characterized by significant dysfunctional practices or gaps in provision of services and supports that negatively impact school quality and diminish the learning experiences of students. Immediate remedial intervention is required if the performance in this domain is to become an asset rather than a liability for overall system performance. Staff responsible for this domain will likely need specific peer coaching and benchmark experience so that staff can see and understand what acceptable performance looks like.

Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 1.1 Academic Achievement | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| 1.1.1 | All schools in the district are showing continual academic growth and meeting high academic standards | X | | | |
| 1.1.2 | The district is meeting and/or exceeding state or national level academic achievement expectations. | X | | | |
| 1.1.3 | Achievement gaps between subgroups of students within the district are closed or closing rapidly. | X | | | |
| 1.1.4 | Students with disabilities and English language learners are well supported to meet/exceed high academic standards | | X | | |
| 1.2 Personal and social achievement | | | | | |
| 1.2.1 | District leaders ensure that all schools provide a learning environment that promotes the personal, social and emotional development of students. | | X | | |
| 1.2.2 | The district has established expectations and support systems in place to ensure all students receive personal and academic advisement at all schools | X | | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 1 | | 1 | | | |

Domain 2: Leadership & Management

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 2.1 Vision and Culture | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| 2.1.1 | District leaders model and promote shared values of high expectations that all students can achieve at high levels. | | X | | |
| 2.1.2 | The district has a clear and well-focused vision, underpinning everything it does, that has been developed collaboratively with stakeholders. | X | | | |
| 2.2 Strategic Planning, Plan Management and Use of Data | | | | | |
| 2.2.1 | District leaders empower leaders at all levels to implement the actions needed to achieve the district's goals. | X | | | |
| 2.2.2 | The district has established challenging but attainable district improvement goals for the short, medium and long term | X | | | |
| 2.2.3 | Data-driven systems are in place that focus the operations of the district to ensure higher levels of student learning and staff effectiveness. | X | | | |
| 2.3 Governance | | | | | |
| 2.3.1 | District leaders, including the School Committee or School Board of Education (BOE), create and adhere to policies, procedures, and budgets that support a shared vision by all stakeholders and promote high expectations for learning and teaching in all schools. | | X | | |
| 2.3.2 | BOE members are well prepared and informed to guide and support the work of the district and work collaboratively with the superintendent, in part by effectively advocating for the district and creating a culture that is conducive to public support for the district. | X | | | |
| 2.4 Accountability | | | | | |
| 2.4.1 | There are clear systems of accountability for all departments, teams and schools. | X | | | |
| 2.5 Professional Capacity of Office Staff | | | | | |
| 2.5.1 | The district has a supportive process in place to hire, develop, select or assign district personnel to the position in which they can be most effective in serving the needs of the schools. | | X | | |
| 2.5.2 | District leadership models respectful and collegial interactions among the district level staff and school level staff | | | X | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 2 | | 1 | | | |

Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 3.1 Learning and Teaching | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| 3.1.1 | The district has a vision for effective learning and teaching and ensures that all students are taught a rigorous and relevant core curriculum, enabling students to achieve high academic standards | | X | |
| 3.1.2 | The district implements practices that ensure the needs of struggling students, students with disabilities and English language learners are met. | | X | |
| 3.2 Curriculum | | | | |
| 3.2.1 | The district has a common, rigorous curriculum, aligned to the state standards, that covers all grades and all subjects | | X | |
| 3.2.2 | The district ensures that the curriculum provides a broad range of relevant experiences to interest, motivate and excite students. | X | | |
| 3.3 Assessment and Use of Data | | | | |
| 3.3.1 | The district has systems in place to ensure that school administrators and teachers receive and can use data in a timely manner | | X | |
| 3.3.2 | The district has systems in place for collecting and using student data and other formative data for the modification of instruction to improve student achievement. | X | | |
| 3.3.3 | The district has systems in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of school programs and assist schools in making modifications where needed. | X | | |
| 3.3.4 | The district ensures schools make effective use of assessment data in the classroom. | X | | |
| 3.4 Instructional Leadership and Capacity | | | | |
| 3.4.1 | The district supports schools in the selection, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of effective strategies, programs, and innovations to improve student learning outcomes. | X | | |
| 3.4.2 | The district provides support systems that develop the capacity of school leaders at all levels. | X | | |
| 3.5 Professional Development | | | | |
| 3.5.1 | The district plans professional development that is sufficiently informed and flexible to align with district goals and meet school-specific needs. | X | | |
| 3.5.2 | The district provides professional learning that is relevant and addresses adult and student needs and assesses the impact on staff practices and student learning to adjust as needed. | X | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 3 | | 1 | | |

Domain 4: Engagement of Families

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 4.1 Families and the Community | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| 4.1.1 | The district establishes and communicates district-wide expectations for schools for the two-way engagement of families and the community in support of learning and teaching | | X | | |
| 4.1.2 | Systems are established that ensure families and community members have feedback and problem-solving opportunities throughout the district. | | X | | |
| 4.1.3 | The district develops and maintains productive partnerships with the business, philanthropic, higher education and non-profit communities. | | X | | |
| 4.2 Political Engagement and Policy Alignment | | | | | |
| 4.2.1 | District leaders monitor state and local political policies and issues to determine the impact on district schools and respond appropriately | | X | | |
| 4.2.2 | District leaders communicate and collaborate with agencies, organizations and other networks to ensure that the goals and focus of the district are known and considered when political decisions are made. | | X | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 4 | | | 2 | | |

Domain 5: Human & Fiscal Resources

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 5.1 Human Resources | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| 5.1.1 | The district has practices in place that ensure the recruitment, selection, hiring, assignment, promotion and retention of high quality district office and school level personnel | X | | | |
| 5.1.2 | The district guides and monitors the use of a state-approved evaluation system (if applicable) to ensure fidelity of implementation and to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of district and school leaders, teachers and staff. | | X | | |
| 5.1.3 | The district clearly defines the roles and responsibilities, skill sets, and expectations of all district staff. | | X | | |
| 5.1.4 | The district has productive partnerships with unions and other employee groups that ensure effective systems to maintain a high-quality work force | X | | | |
| 5.2 Fiscal Resources | | | | | |
| 5.2.1 | The district has effective systems and controls to ensure sound financial management, including responses to audit requirements. | | X | | |
| 5.2.2 | The district is strategic in its allocation and use of financial resources, ensuring equitable and efficient allocation of resources for struggling, special education, English language learners, and students with significant health and legal issues. | | X | | |
| 5.2.3 | The district implements processes to maintain facilities and equipment and ensure an environment that is safe and conducive to learning | | X | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 5 | | | 2 | | |

Domain 6: Operational Systems


1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 6.1 IT and Data Support | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| 6.1.1 | The district ensures that IT and data systems serve schools, district and stakeholder needs effectively and efficiently. | | X | | |
| 6.1.2 | The district builds capacity in schools and the central office for personnel to make effective use of technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness to support students' learning | | X | | |
| 6.1.3 | The district ensures that lead people for IT and data communicate regularly with schools and district staff to ensure effective use of resources. | | X | | |
| 6.2 Communications | | | | | |
| 6.2.1 | The district has effective systems and controls to ensure sound financial management, including responses to audit requirements. | X | | | |
| 6.2.2 | The district is strategic in its allocation and use of financial resources, ensuring equitable and efficient allocation of resources for struggling, special education, English language learners, and students with significant health and legal issues. | X | | | |
| 6.2 Operations | | | | | |
| 6.3.1 | The district ensures that all operational systems align with its values, vision and goals. | X | | | |
| 6.3.2 | The district has a process for regularly checking the effectiveness of its operational and infrastructure systems | X | | | |
| 6.3.3 | The district aligns human and fiscal resources with the needs of student services, facilities, and safety and security systems | | X | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 6 | | 1 | | | |

CONFIDENTIAL

Special Education Quality Review

 School District

July 2018

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Special Education Quality Review Report

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1 District Quality Review Methodology

1.1 Methodology

Cambridge Education's District Quality Review (DQR) process is an enhanced and customized version of our flagship school quality review program which engages districts in a process of reflection and review aimed to set them on the path to continuous improvement. The criteria are modified as required to meet specific demands of individual districts but concentrate on the effectiveness of the district to meet the learning needs of all students and the requirements of all stakeholders.

Cambridge Education's DQR process helps school districts understand how their actions, efforts, culture, structures, systems, and policies impact student learning and school performance. Review reports articulate key findings to inform district priorities, improve plans, and implement key strategies. To provide these insights, reviewers focus on six core domains:

- Promoting Positive Outcomes for Students
- Supports for Student Learning
- Leadership & Management
- Engagement of Families, the Community, and Other Stakeholders
- Human and Fiscal Resources
- Operational Systems

The Scope of Services includes six areas for examination and opportunities for improvement which align with Cambridge Education's DQR Domains. As with all partnerships, we included a phase to review the rubric domains, indicators, and descriptions to ensure consistency in language. Additionally, our review team members have extensive experience and knowledge of CT state which helped to ensure alignment and clarity throughout the process.

It was necessary to employ a variety of data-gathering tools to gather sufficient information on which to base our findings and make meaningful recommendations. Our approach to this work entailed a combination of onsite and offsite collection including a review of relevant documents, interviews with key [REDACTED] school and district personnel, an online survey of stakeholders, observation of instructional delivery and student learning in classrooms, and comparative analysis of progress and achievement in peer school districts.

Our partnership began with a project initiation meeting to confirm a shared understanding of all aspects of the proposed scope of work and provided clarification and confirmation around the following:

- [REDACTED]'s detailed requirements and scope of work
- Identification of the [REDACTED] project liaison and other key personnel on the project

- Roles of Cambridge Education team members and [REDACTED] personnel including the project communication plan
- Project activities, schedule (onsite and offsite), timelines, logistics, and deliverables
- Identify comparison school districts

The Cambridge Education DQR team was comprised of two members whom spent a total of five days onsite in the district and in all four schools to gather information from observations, documents shared, and focus group/individual conversations. We then triangulate findings enclosed in this report based on the indicators and sub-indicators in the agreed upon [REDACTED] DQR Rubric

The on-site portion of the review took place over a five-day period (May 31, June 1, 4, 5 & 6), 2018.

Day one was spent in the district office where we interviewed district level personnel including the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent, the Director of Special Education, the District Instructional Coach for Math and Science, the District Instructional Coach for Social Studies and English Language Arts and the Secretary of Transportation. The day concluded with a check-in meeting with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent

Day two included on-site visits to [REDACTED] High School and [REDACTED] Middle School. These on-site visits included focus group meetings with school leaders, students, special education teachers, general education teachers, school counselors, and special service providers. We also visited multiple classrooms and had the opportunity to sit in on PPT meetings with students and their parents. The day concluded with a check-in meeting with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent.

Day three included on-site visits to Mead School and Prendergast School. These on-site visits included focus group meetings with school leaders, students, special education teachers, general education teachers, school counselors, and special service providers. We also visited multiple classrooms and had impromptu meetings with parents we came across in the building. The day concluded with a check-in meeting with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent

Day four included on-site visits to Mead School and [REDACTED] Middle School. These on-site visits included further classroom observations of pre-kindergarten classrooms, self-contained special education classrooms, and meetings with school leadership. The day concluded with a check-in meeting with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent.

Day five consisted of another meeting with the Director of Special Education and calibration time for the reviewers. The day concluded with a sharing of main findings with the district leaders.

One of our goals is to provide anonymity to all participants in the data gathering phases of the review, as a result, no names of students, staff members, or family members will appear in the report.

Each domain of this report has been organized in the following manner:

- A scoring descriptor for the domain
- Context
- Factors that support district effectiveness
- Factors that limit district effectiveness
- Recommendations

The report also contains comparative data with four other districts, as well as comparisons with the state of [REDACTED]'s aggregates when available.

1.2 Key terms

Child Study Teams: are groups of professionals who provide consultative, evaluative, and prescriptive services to teachers and parents regarding students who are experiencing school related difficulties

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional and academic success.

Delta T Group is a private company which provides paraprofessional support staff to the [REDACTED] School District as a contracted service. Delta-T paraprofessionals in [REDACTED] serve in the role of Instructional Aides (IAs) for students with disabilities. There are approximately 86 Delta-T staff across the district.

STAR Reading Assessment are short tests that provide teachers with learning data. Star tests are computer adaptive, which means they adjust to each answer your child provides. ... Students may take a Star test for early literacy, math, reading, or other subjects of their teacher's choice.

Grade level teacher teams will analyze, monitor and discuss student and grade level growth as measured by the STAR assessment.

Grade level teacher teams will use the STAR assessment to progress monitor student achievement. (Prendergast will use BURST through June 2017)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups of educators that meet regularly, share expertise, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. PLCs are used throughout the district to allow teachers the opportunity to discuss student academic data that will inform future instruction.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a document that creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is the requirement in federal law that students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a four-part (A-D) piece of American legislation that ensures students with a disability are provided with Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that is tailored to their individual needs.

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is an educational right of all children in the United States that is guaranteed by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973[1] and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under Section 504, FAPE is defined as, " the provision of regular or special education and related aids and services that are designed to meet individual needs of handicapped persons as adequately as the needs of nonhandicapped persons are met and are based on adherence to procedures that satisfy the requirements of" the section Under the IDEA, FAPE is defined as an educational program that is individualized to a specific child, that meets that child's unique needs, provides access to the general curriculum, meets the grade-level standards established by the state, and from which the child receives educational benefit.

504 plan is a plan developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives accommodations that will ensure their academic success and access to the learning environment

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.

The Planning and Placement Team Meeting (PPT) a meeting is to initiate and discuss evaluations; determine eligibility for special education services; develop a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP); or to review and/or revise the child's program.

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a systemic, continuous- improvement framework in which data based problem solving and decision making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students.

2 Main Findings

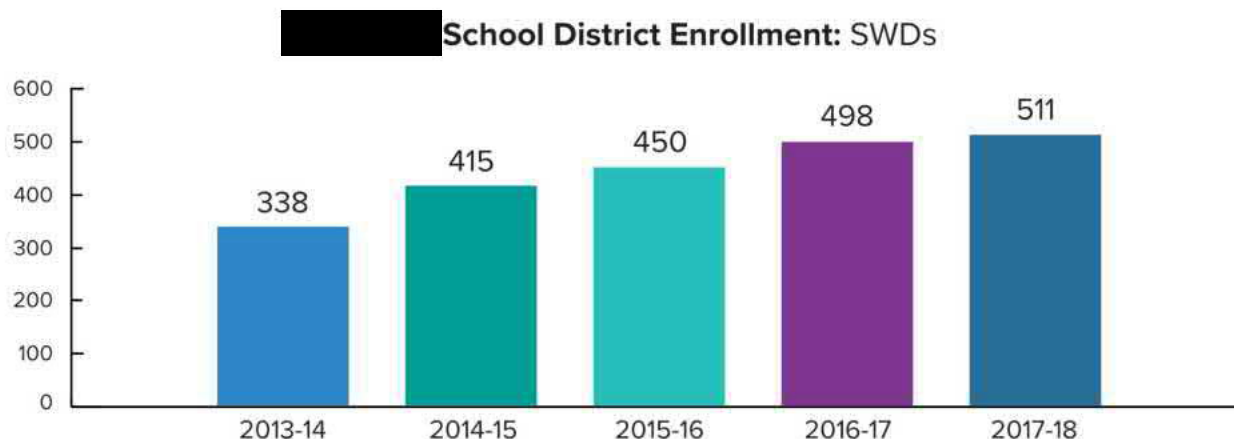
Like many small, urban school districts, [REDACTED] has the challenge of responding to ever-increasing demands for special educational services, with limited or declining funding to support these services. Given greater constraints on resources, it is vital that the district understands which initiatives to prioritize.

[REDACTED] presently has the sixth highest percentage of students with disability across the state of [REDACTED]; when looking at school districts that have at least 200 students with disabilities, [REDACTED] has the highest percentage in the state.

Educating students with special needs accounts for nearly 30% of the education budget.¹ Out of-district placements is a significant portion of that budget. In-district resources are constrained due to the lack of funds and resources to meet the increasing demand for services.

[REDACTED] has the tenth highest special education student to-teacher ratio in the state of [REDACTED].² Lower than average salaries in [REDACTED] make it difficult to keep qualified staff. Cost-cutting solutions, such as outsourcing special education aides, have been brought in to fill the gaps in personnel and reduce costs.

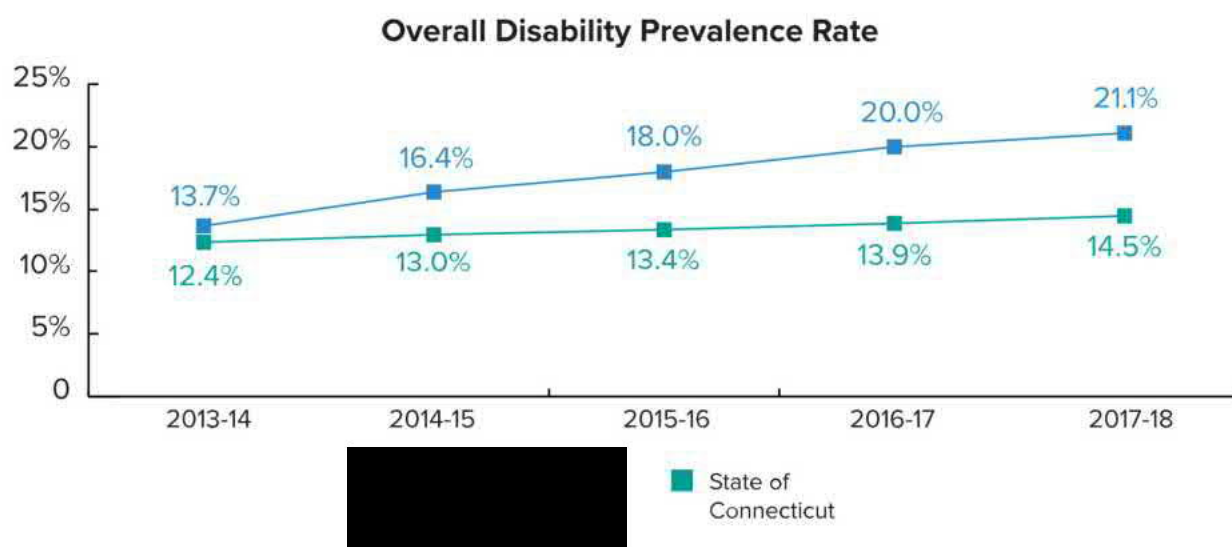
K-12 Students with Disabilities in [REDACTED]



Source: Primary Disability reports. Retrieved from EdSight.ct.gov.

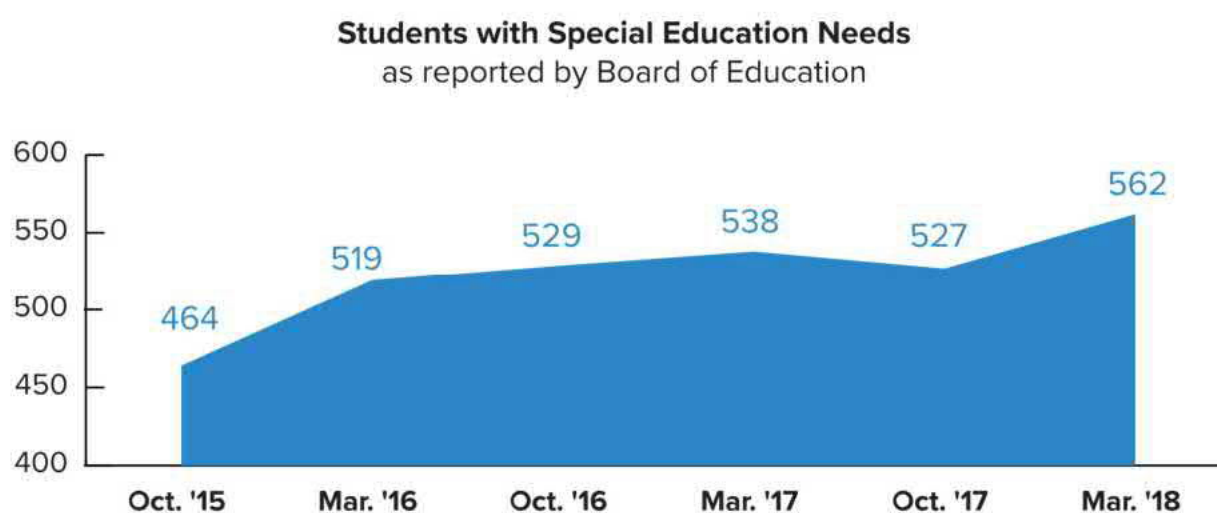
¹ Rabe Thomas, Jacqueline, CT Mirror: SPECIAL EDUCATION DRIVING COSTS AND CONTROVERSIES
ctmirror.org/2016/12/14/troubled-schools-on-trial-special-education-driving-costs-and-controversies/

² IBID



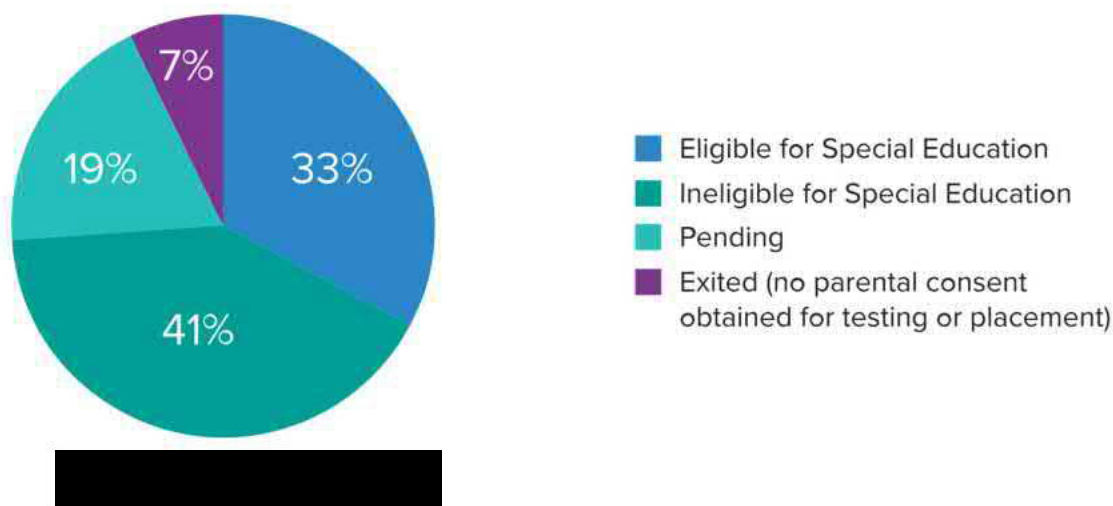
Within special education, the largest populations of students with disabilities in 2017-18 were students with learning disabilities, other health impairment, and speech language impairment. The percentage of students with disabilities classified as having autism has decreased from 11.2% in 2013-14 to 9.2% in 2017-18; there has also been a decrease in the incidence of emotional disturbance and intellectual disability over the same period. While most categories of disability were similar in percentage value to state averages, in 2017-18, there was a larger population of students with other health impairment and speech language impairment than state averages.

The Board of Education's data shows that the population of students with disabilities increased rapidly from 527 in October 2017 to 562 six months later in March 2018.



Over the course of the 2017-18 school year, as reported in the Board of Education's April 2018 minutes, 165 students were referred for special education testing. One third were found to be eligible for special education services, while 41% were ineligible. It is not known to the reviewers what referral or screening process was undertaken to make these determinations.

April 2018 Referrals to Special Education and Their Outcomes



2.1 Factors that support district effectiveness

██████ teachers, within their peer groups of special education, general education, and support services, share strategies and resources to support student learning. Many staff members in special education and general education, when interviewed, exhibited a strong sense of dedication to the ██████ students. District employees shared that they stay here for the children and for each other.

Teachers across all schools, and particularly in special education, express a desire to implement consistent approaches regarding instruction. School leaders and teachers expressed that there are systems that they want to improve in their schools and they are seeking district support to develop these processes.

District leadership team members exhibit a passion for improving outcomes for special education students. The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent are currently working to leverage community partnerships to support the academic and other support needs of students at every grade level.

2.2 Factors that limit district effectiveness

Given these yearly increases in incidence of disability and strains on budgets, insufficient resources have been allocated to provide for special education in ██████. The central office is knowledgeable and responsive, but there are not enough staff to provide clear policies and expectations, planning support, monitoring and supervision of staff, and support to meet anything but compliance-level requirements.

At the school level, educators work hard to meet the daily demands of providing special education services to ever increasing numbers. However, schools are implementing services for students with special needs as budgets and schedules allow. There are no district wide policies for best practice. Most schools have reverted to a pullout model to support students with special needs as it seems to be the easiest way to ensure that all students receive services. Few classrooms follow an inclusion model, which would ensure the least restrictive environment for special needs students. The district employs many Instructional Aides (IAs) through an outside agency. Since they are not district employees, it is difficult for school leaders to monitor and supervise their work. Across schools, master schedules do not allow for common planning time so that general education and special education teachers can collaborate on how to meet the needs of individual students and ensure they are receiving appropriate instruction.

Each school follows its own practice for referrals and testing and a disproportionate number of males and students of color are referred to and placed in special education in [REDACTED]. Once a student is on the rolls of special education, there is a tendency for general education staff to relinquish responsibility for those students' needs. Special education staff are often called away to deal with individual students in crisis, which sometimes prevents them from attending to their caseloads.

There is no clear system designed to provide teachers and support staff with professional development that is aligned with the goals of the district. Para professionals are not mandated to receive the same training as the general education teachers and as a result, they are often ill-equipped to provide students with the academic support services that they need.

2.3 Recommendations

- The district should conduct an internal study to look at the high numbers of referrals for special education. Are these large numbers of referrals due to special needs, or could students be supported in other ways? The numbers of males and students of color that are receiving special education services should also be examined. Ensure that a multi-tiered system of support is firmly in place for students in all settings.
- The district should convene a committee to establish plans and actions that will result in improved outcomes for special needs students. Given the level of resources, it is imperative that [REDACTED] focus on strategies that can be implemented within budgets. Time must be set aside by central office staff to monitor the provision for special education across the district and ensure that agreed best practices and actions for improvement are implemented. All policies and practices that are adopted across the district need to be communicated to schools and parents. Feedback on effectiveness of the practices and policies should be collected from all stakeholders on a regular basis to inform the plans.
- The Director of Special Education should develop a committee of stakeholders from each school and parents of special education students to outline a common referral process. This process should include guidelines for Child Study Teams to put academic and behavioral interventions in place for students before they are classified, using Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks. The referral process

should be approved by the Board of Education and then exist as the standard for all schools throughout the district

- Paraprofessionals that provide many of the front-line services to student with special needs must be trained and monitored. Strategies to provide access to a rigorous curriculum for all students need to be implemented in all settings. Common planning time must be built into the master schedule so that general education and special education staff can plan collaboratively.

3 Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Rating: Low or lack of effectiveness

3.1 Overview

Academic growth and achievement for students with disabilities in [REDACTED] is below the state average. There is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and typical students, and the gap has been widening, year-on-year. Math and English Language Arts (ELA) scores for students with disabilities have decreased over the last two years. Science DPI for students with disabilities has risen slightly in the last year but is still well below the performance of students without disabilities.

3.2 Factors that support district effectiveness

Students with disabilities in all schools exhibited a desire to learn and a desire for structure in their schools. Students openly shared that they enjoyed school and that they had built strong relationships with staff members and peers. Students in focus groups stated that their teachers are willing to provide them with extra support if they are struggling with an academic issue.

In surveys, students who reported that they receive support for special needs responded more favorably to questions about support they receive from their schools and teachers than the average of all students. At the secondary level, 44% of students who receive special education services reported that the school communicates with their parents frequently, versus 25% in the aggregate. 75% of secondary students with special needs report that there is an adult at the school they can go to if they need to talk, which is higher than any other subgroup. At the elementary level, 84% of students who receive special education support reported that their teachers offer multiple ways of learning in class (small groups, computers, etc.). In the aggregate, only 73% report that is happening in their classes. 85% of elementary students receiving support for special needs report that they have caring adults to talk to in their schools. The educators of [REDACTED] have provided a supportive, enriching environment for students with disabilities and the students feel cared for.

Teachers at the elementary level have all been trained in the Wilson Reading program and the Orton-Gillingham Reading Program. This training provides teachers with a wealth of strategies to support struggling readers in the lower grades, as well as a common language amongst the elementary educators that will better align discussion concerning increasing reading levels in kindergarten through sixth grade. The Orton-Gillingham is known as an “approach” to reading intervention versus being a reading intervention “program.” This approach can be used to determine the reading

intervention need for a specific student and then address the need with specific reading strategies. More information can be found at: <https://www.orton-gillingham.com/>

3.3 Factors that limit district effectiveness

Achievement

There is limited growth in the academic proficiency of the special needs students across the district. According to the district report cards, District Performance Index (DPI) for students with disabilities is considerably lower than the students without disabilities, and lower than the state target ³

District Performance Index (DPI)

A District Performance Index (DPI) is the average performance of students in a subject area (i.e., ELA, Mathematics, or Science) on the state summative assessments. The DPI ranges from 0-100. A DPI is reported for all students tested in a district and for students in each individual student groups. Connecticut's ultimate target for a DPI is 75.

| 2015 – 2016 | English Language Arts (ELA) | | Math | | Science | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|-------|------|---------|------|
| | Count | DPI | Count | DPI | Count | DPI |
| Students with Disabilities | 209 | 43.6 | 209 | 40.3 | 93 | 33.0 |
| Students without Disabilities | 925 | 61.2 | 924 | 55.9 | 422 | 47.6 |

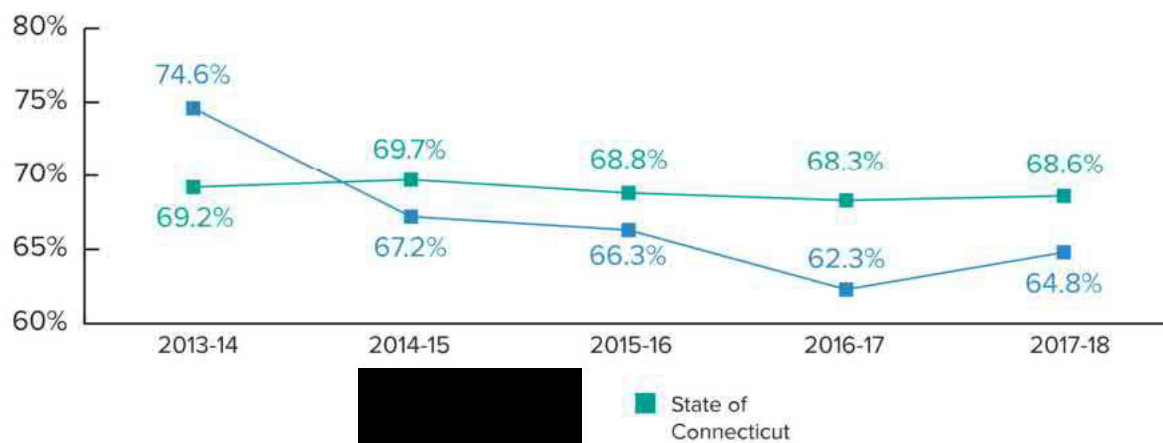
| 2016 – 2017 | English Language Arts (ELA) | | Math | | Science | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|-------|------|---------|------|
| | Count | DPI | Count | DPI | Count | DPI |
| Students with Disabilities | 223 | 42.8 | 221 | 36.9 | 112 | 34.8 |
| Students without Disabilities | 902 | 62.2 | 894 | 55.4 | 391 | 48.8 |

Inclusion

In [REDACTED], fewer students with disabilities spend 79% or more of their time in general education classrooms than the average across [REDACTED]. This number has gone down over the years.

³ State of [REDACTED], District Profile and Performance Report 2016-2017, [REDACTED]
http://edsight.ct.gov/Output/District/HighSchool/0020011_201617.pdf

Students with Disabilities Spending 79.1% – 100% of time with Nondisabled Peers (Ages 6 – 21), all Disabilities

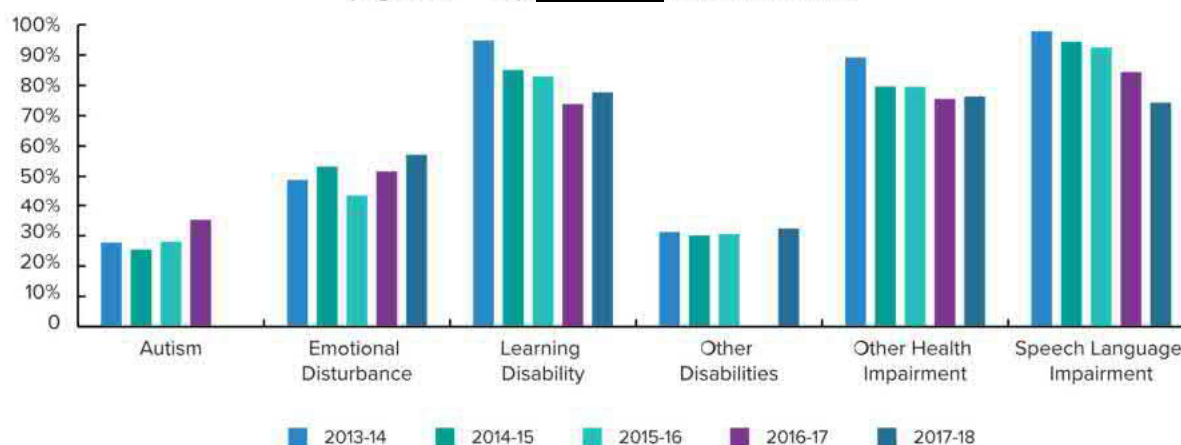


Source: Time with Nondisabled Peers Report. Retrieved from EdSight.ct.gov.

Note: students with intellectual disability are not included due to small sample size, as is the case for autism (2017-18) and other disabilities (2016-17).

While the reported statistics for time spent with nondisabled peers suggest room for improvement, the onsite observations conducted during this review may indicate that the numbers are even less optimal. Classroom visits and focus groups revealed that students with disabilities in [REDACTED] schools are more likely to receive their core instruction in pullout settings than in inclusive classrooms.

Students with Disabilities Spending 79.1% – 100% of time with Nondisabled Peers (Ages 6 – 21), ██████ School District



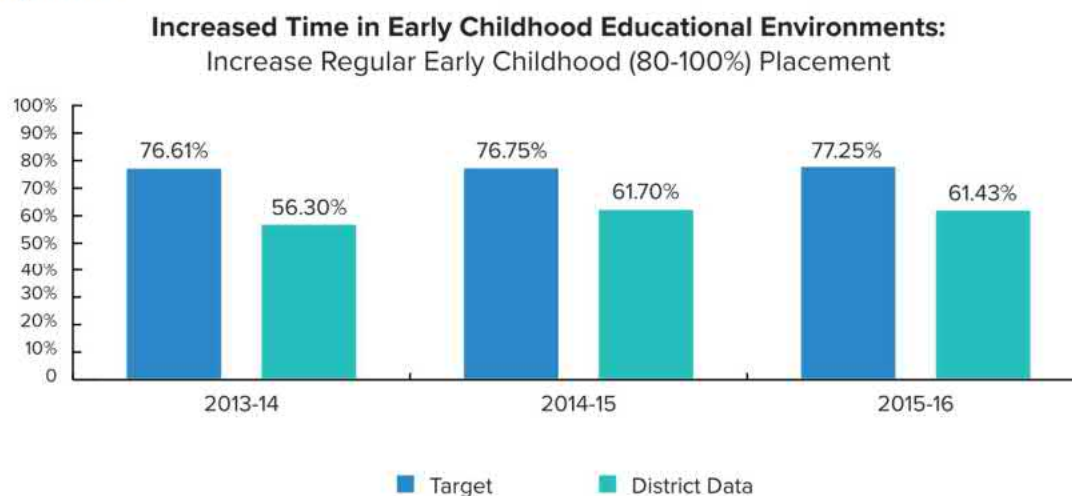
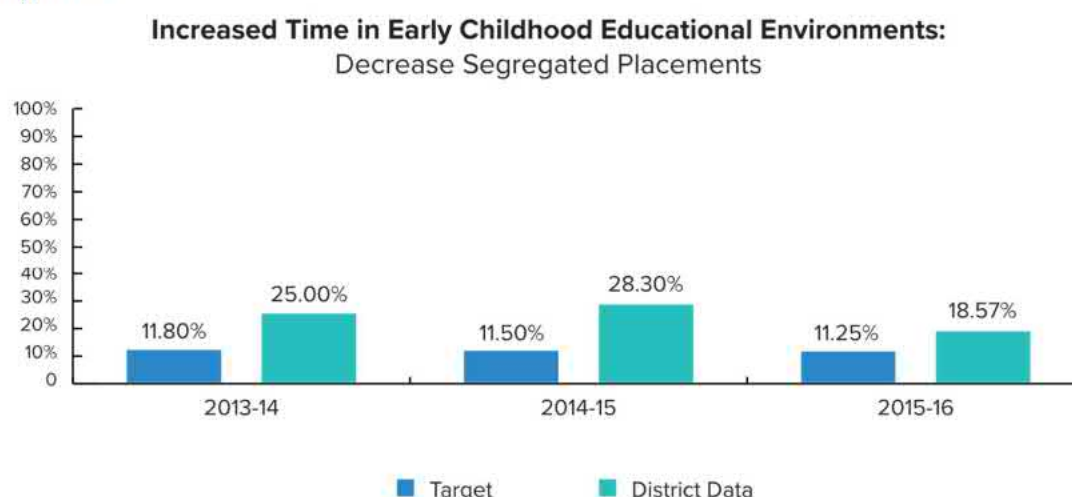
Source: Special Education Annual Performance Report on ██████'s State Performance Plan <http://edsight.ct.gov/specEdAPR/2015-2016/██████.pdf>

Students with autism, emotional disturbance, and other disabilities are often in substantially separate environments. The percentage of children with learning disability, other health impairment, or speech language impairment that are included in general education classrooms has decreased, year on year, since the 2013-14 school year.

While the on-site observations focused on K-12 educational settings, it is worthwhile to note that the pre-Kindergarten, located in ██████ Middle School, also serves students with IEPs. In the 2017-18 school year, there were 23 students with IEPs out of a total 94 students in pre-kindergarten.

██████ has increased regular early childhood placements in a general education setting. While ██████'s special education Annual Performance Reports from 2013-2016 have positively demonstrated that the district "Meets Requirements" according to the IDEA on relevant Compliance Indicators, one area within this annual report that is consistently shown as not meeting indicator goals is the early childhood placement indicated in Figure 3. In fact, the related goal of decreasing segregated placements in early childhood has also consistently lagged below state targets, as demonstrated in Figure 4.⁴

⁴ Source Figure 3 and 4: Special Education Annual Performance Report on ██████'s State Performance Plan <http://edsight.ct.gov/specEdAPR/2015-2016/██████.pdf>

Figure 3**Figure 4**

Several district leaders, school leaders, teachers, and para-professionals reported that the deployment of the Instructional Aides (IAs) through the Delta T group is not providing students with the consistent academic and social assistance that they need to be successful. The IAs are not being adequately trained, and therefore some of the neediest students are not receiving the necessary supports. The review team observed several IAs on their phones, not paying close attention to students, and even absent from the classroom where they were scheduled. At a meeting where teachers were discussing the progress of the IAs in the building, there were multiple complaints from teachers concerning lateness, absences, and lack of training. One district leader said, "The training for IAs was more rigorous in the past but is now rudimentary, at best."

The support for students' mental health is viewed as the responsibility of the special needs staff (i.e. social workers, school psychologist, etc.). In all schools, these staff members are called on an ad hoc basis to address behavioral and mental health issues. Many of these staff members reported that they cannot serve the students on

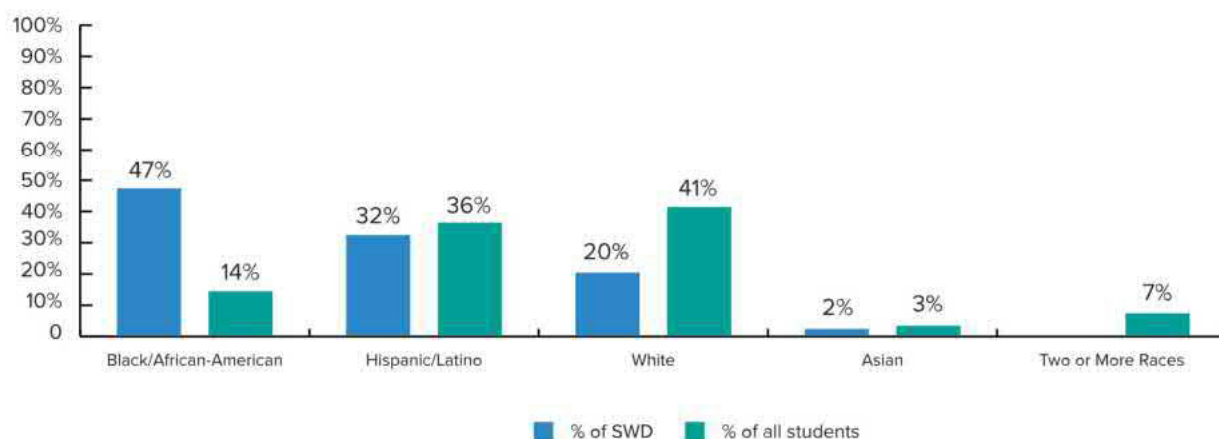
their caseload because they are constantly being called away to address acute issues in their respective buildings. During staff focus groups, several general education teachers mentioned that the special needs students were “their students” when referring to the special needs staff.

There is some disproportionality in the identification of special needs students in the district, with more males and students of color being identified. In one school, there are 134 special education students, 96 of whom are male and 87 of whom are Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. In another school, there are 129 special education students; 94 of whom are male and 88 of whom are African-American or Latino. In performing a demographic analysis of the student population in ██████ Public Schools, the reviewers attempted to analyze whether any trends exist regarding students with disabilities. While data was not provided to the reviewers about the breakdown of this population among racial groups or gender, an attempt has been made in the following pages to perform a rough analysis of these statistics. However, some important caveats must be provided regarding these data.

The breakdown of gender and race/ethnicity for students with disabilities was provided to the reviewers from three schools: Prendergast Elementary, Mead Elementary, and ██████ High School. However, the total number of students with a disability is slightly different to the numbers provided on the EdSight database. Additionally, the EdSight database does not list the exact numbers of students within some racial/ethnic groups when the population in that school is very small, so not all racial groups could be included in this analysis. Therefore, this approximate comparison should be augmented by further analysis by ██████ following this report.

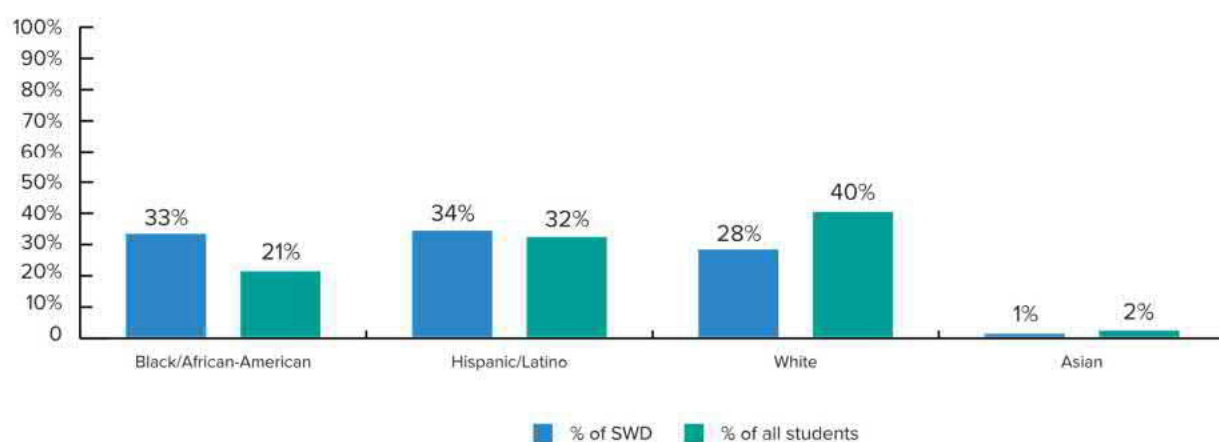
The disproportionality between students of color with and without disabilities is not an issue unique to ██████ and should not be treated as such. The US Department of Education has required that states monitor disproportionality since the 1997 reissuance of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)⁵. Some degree of disproportionality is prevalent in school districts across the United States in both urban and rural settings. Since the inception of such monitoring, ██████ was never identified as a district that needed intervention for “significant disproportionality.” Some self-reflection, however, may be warranted. Often, this process begins with all educators in the district engaging in reflection protocols to examine the data on referrals as well as their own biases regarding race, gender, and educational attainment.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education Programs, “SIGNIFICANT DISPROPORTIONALITY (EQUITY IN IDEA)” September 2016. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/significant-disproportionality-qa-03-08-17.pdf>

Race/Ethnicity: Prendergast School

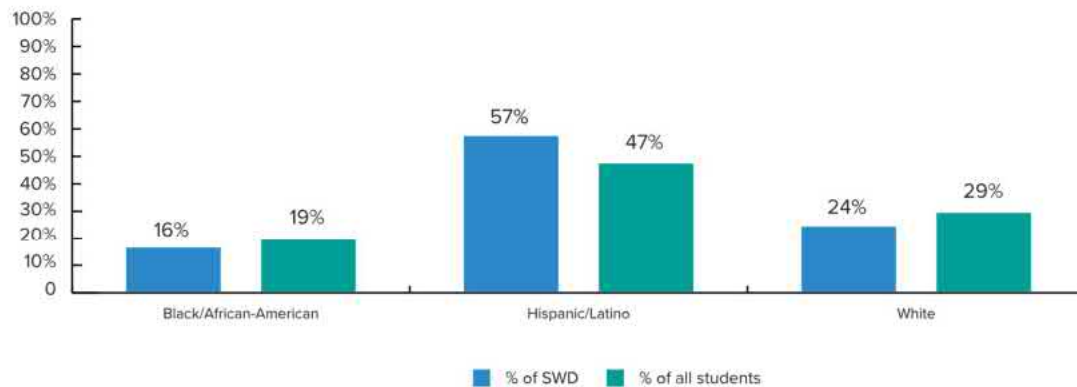
Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports

Notes: there are no Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian, or Alaska Native students.
of SWDs provided by school was 128, but EdSight report suggested number was 110 for 2017-18.

Race/Ethnicity: [REDACTED] High School

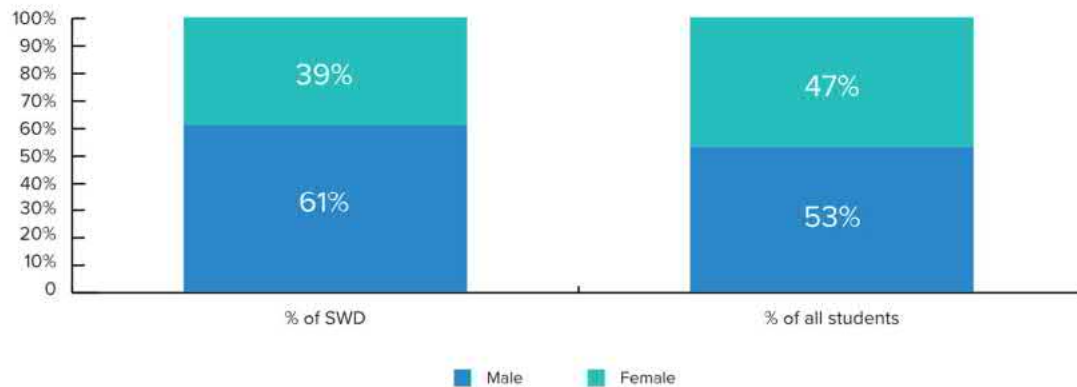
Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports

Notes: # of SWDs identified as Two or more races, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native were not included due to sample size and data available. # of SWDs provided by school was 134, but EdSight report suggested number was 131 for 2017-18.

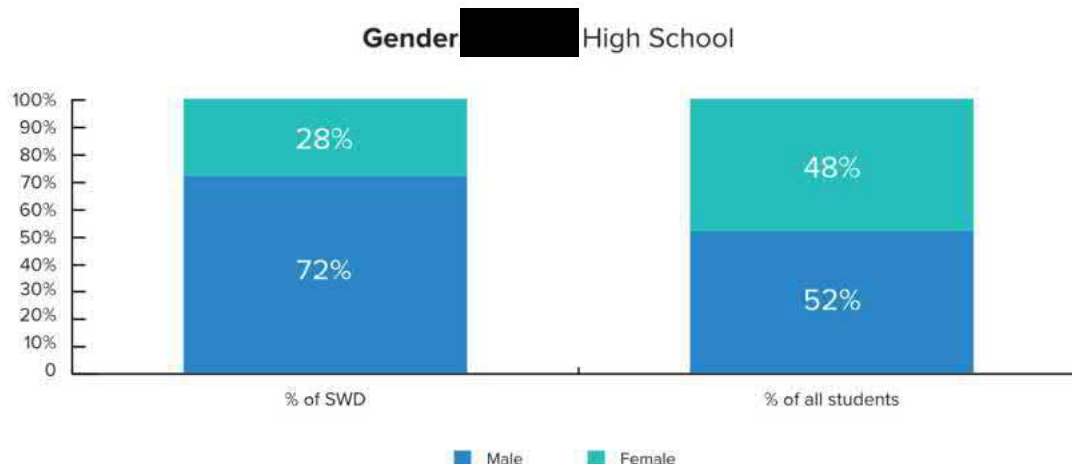
Race/Ethnicity: Mead School

Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports

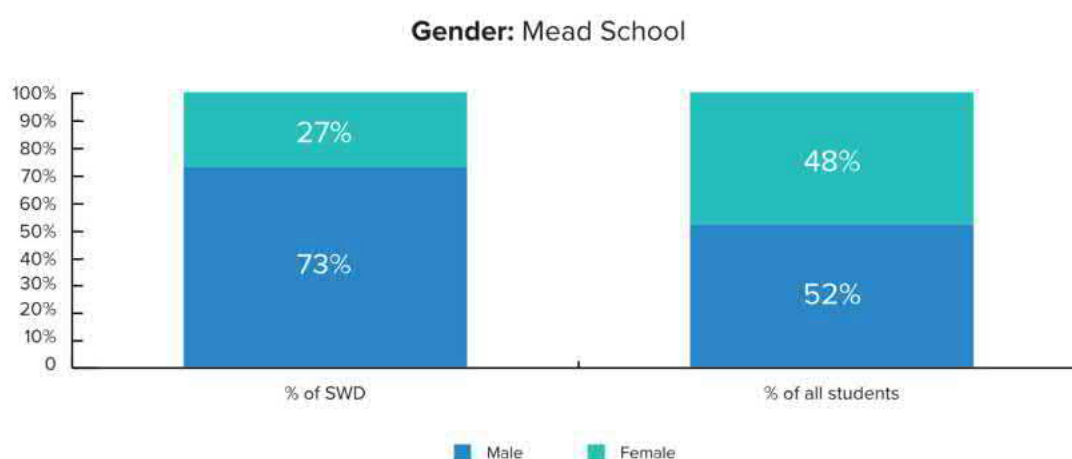
Notes: # of SWDs identified as Two or more races, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Asian were not included due to sample size and data available. # of SWDs provided by school was 129, but EdSight report suggested number was 108 for 2017-18.

Gender: Prendergast School

Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports



Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports



Sources: On-site data provided to reviewers (for SWDs), and EdSight.ct.gov Public School Enrollment reports

3.4 Recommendations

- Students with disabilities in ██████ are less likely than other students with disabilities across ██████ to spend 79.1% or more of their time with non-disabled peers. Students with autism, emotional disturbance, and other disabilities are significantly less included than other subgroups of students. Ultimately, it is not possible to comment on the variations between disability categories and their rate of inclusion with non-disabled peers without further analysis and evidence. (Indeed, there is nothing to suggest that students with all types of disabilities require equal degrees of inclusion in general education settings according to their educational needs.) Nonetheless, a combination of statistical analysis and on-site observation strongly support the suggestion that students should have more opportunities to access an inclusive educational setting for most of their school time, so long as this is in accordance with their education plans. The district should further investigate barriers that may be preventing students from accessing more inclusive environments and actively work to mitigate this challenge.

- Support in the resource room should be planned along with general education teachers and be closely aligned with curriculum and assessments according to grade level and the Common Core standards. Master schedules in each school should be adjusted to allow for common planning time where teacher teams can plan, review student work, and analyze assessments and data to improve instruction. Planning time should be supported and monitored by school administration to ensure best use of time. Resource room teachers and para-professionals should be well trained in individualized academic intervention strategies and supported to meet the individual needs of students according to their IEPs. Support for this process would entail close monitoring by school leaders, who provide actionable feedback to instructors after team meetings.
- One way to increase the numbers of students with disabilities served in the regular classroom is to employ an inclusion model. The district should create written guidelines that provide clear expectations to all staff and parents, including student-referral criteria, program description, and roles/responsibilities for co-teaching pairs. The district could first determine if existing special educators could be reallocated to co-teach in classrooms at the elementary level and extend existing co-teaching classrooms to a full day in classrooms where this is a feasibility. The district should allocate appropriate professional learning, instructional coaching, planning time, resources, and administrative oversight to achieve benefits of co-teaching.
- All educators need to believe that all the students are “their” students. The cultural divide between special education and general education allows children to fall through the cracks. All educators must share the resources and responsibility for educating all students. The district must address the “belief gap” so that all students are held to the same high expectations by all staff. Bringing staff together to create a mission, vision, and core values can help to refocus on the expectation that all children can learn and achieve. The lack of belief may be born out of pre-conceived notions about students with special needs or a disparity between the level of responsibility that teachers feel about educating all students. A root cause analysis of why some educators do not believe that all students can succeed will help to open dialog and begin to address these issues.
- Teachers across all schools should engage in cultural responsiveness and behavioral intervention strategies, particularly to address young men and students of color. The learning environment would benefit from better understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the students that they serve and gaining a toolbox filled with culturally relevant academic and behavioral intervention strategies. The following resources may be a useful starting point:

Teaching Tolerance: <http://www.tolerance.org>

- Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity: <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu>
(Edutopia) Tips for Helping all Learners Succeed:
<http://www.edutopia.org/resource/supporting-diverse-learners-download>

4 Domain 2: Leadership & Management

Rating: Low or lack of effectiveness

4.1 Overview

District leadership for special education is very knowledgeable and responsive to the needs of schools and children. However, the central office is understaffed and overstretched. Year on year, the rolls of students with special needs and the number of referrals for testing increases, making it an almost impossible task to keep up with mandated actions. Without central leadership capacity, it is difficult to monitor the quality of services delivered to students with disabilities. Consequently, each school has a different way of going about serving the students and outside services are not well-monitored. Several improvement plans exist, but the actions of individual schools are not aligned toward common goals.

4.2 Factors that support effective leadership and management

School leaders and some teachers spoke very highly of the district leadership. Educators shared that there is an open line of communication between the schools and the district and that they felt comfortable reaching out to the district for additional support. Several teachers shared that they were excited about the positive energy and collegial tone that the new Assistant Superintendent has expressed thus far during his school visits.

There are life skills classrooms in the middle school and high school that are preparing special needs students for life after high school. These classes are taught in classrooms with washing machines, ovens, refrigerators, etc. and allow students the opportunity to build practical life skills. The High School program also includes a component where students spend part of the school day out in the field, engaging in work at local businesses.

There is a district-wide plan for academic improvement that was developed by a committee and presented to the district in 2017. This plan outlines benchmarks for academic improvement through 2023. This plan speaks to financial planning, human resource development, and academic improvement as measured by the STAR assessment.

4.3 Factors that limit effective leadership and management

The leadership across the district does not share a clear and common vision for educating students with special needs. Each school has its own version of the special education referral process, child study team expectations, tiered behavioral and academic interventions, and academic support structures for students. When asked about the vision for special education, leaders at each school provided varied responses with few common threads. One school leader shared that the requirements

in most of the student IEPs, combined with the struggles with programming, require “more bodies in special education” to meet the pullout instruction that is required

School leaders have not fully analyzed and internalized the district-wide strategic plan for improvement. School building leaders could not consistently articulate the academic benchmarks outlined in the district-wide strategic plan. Two of the four building leaders mentioned the plan but could not readily speak to the district goals outlined within the plan or how they planned to meet these expectations over time.

District leaders noted that in the past, there was a clear inclusion model implemented in each building but that had changed over the past few years. When asked why this was no longer the vision, district leaders could not point to a definitive decision that was made, nor could they speak to the reason for this shift to a pullout model.

When investigating the district policies for special education, the page dedicated to the special needs department is blank (as of 6/14/18)

Data is not being used effectively to plan for improved student outcomes. Most teachers in focus groups mentioned that they attend data team meetings once per month. School leaders insisted to reviewers that regular team data meetings were held, and teachers were aware of the processes and expectations to use data to inform instruction. Teachers in focus groups, however, could not articulate how instruction was adjusted for students after examining data.

Due to large numbers of referrals, there are many Special Education PPT meetings scheduled. This often keeps special education staff from completing their daily responsibilities in supporting students. School counselors, social workers, and school psychologists across the district lamented that they cannot complete their daily duties because they are attending many PPT meetings. One school psychologist stated that her “entire job has become scheduling, prepping for and attending PPT meetings. I literally don’t do anything else all day.”

4.4 Recommendations

- The district must develop and maintain a vision and a plan for delivering rigorous, consistent, high-quality support for the special needs population in schools. This vision should include common practices for maintaining high academic expectations, student referral, Child Study Team development, delivery of core instruction, academic and behavioral interventions, and support structures for students with severe needs. This vision must be clearly messaged to all school stakeholders and implemented with fidelity. There should be accountability measures included for school leaders who do not firmly adhere to the vision. Parents and community stakeholders should be included in the messaging to ensure that the entire district is on the same page regarding special education.
- The district should re-visit the referral and testing process for students with special needs. This process would begin by assessing the current practices for students with disabilities and supporting appropriate special education evaluation referrals for all students.

Student Referrals: The district must create a centralized system to track all referral and eligibility data, including the referral source. This information should

be maintained and updated frequently. The Director of Special Services should closely monitor the referrals to determine if schools with a stronger Multi Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) see a reduction in unnecessary referrals.

Eligibility: The district should develop a process to review recent eligibility documentation for students with disabilities. A group of knowledgeable educators could be tasked to audit random files for students with similar characteristics to identify any patterns and trends, including the way students have responded to research-based general education interventions, and their growth after receiving an IEP.

Disproportionality in Identifying Students in Racial/Ethnic Sub-Groups: The district should monitor the identification of students in a racial/ethnic subgroup to ensure that they are not more likely than peers to be identified as having a disability area. The district could examine initial referrals and eligibility determinations by race/ethnicity in the areas of concern. The district could also annually track whether the use of MTSS is reducing racial/ethnic disparities in initial referrals and eligibility determinations in these areas. The district should also monitor teaching practices, school culture and other school-wide procedures that may contribute to the identification of students from minority racial and ethnic groups.

504 Classifications: The district should ensure schools have the necessary systems in place to identify students who may require a 504 plan. The district office should also monitor schools with overly high rates to ensure appropriate identification. The district should provide training to improve staff understanding and enhance the tracking system to ensure 504 data is being appropriately captured.

Tracking Data: The district must closely monitor the activities in the special services departments of each school to determine if they are having a positive impact on the identification of students with concerns and taking the appropriate follow-up actions. Initial evaluations should be reviewed monthly to ensure mandated timelines and student requirements are being met.

- The district should consistently document and communicate special education expectations and policies. This includes a clear, measurable, short and long term vision and plan for improvement with measurable benchmarks, responsible parties, measures, and the expected level of progress for each initiative. The district should craft this vision and plan with all stakeholders to ensure school, family, and community stakeholder buy-in.
- The district should implement a system to share special needs student information. The district should formally document how data is tracked and calculated and develop a plan to review data before state reporting is due and use the data to inform the plan.
- Protocols for student data team meetings must be clearly defined and adhered to across the district. Meetings to discuss student data alone are insufficient, as they must inform our plans for instruction and resource allocation. These meetings should determine how instruction will meet the needs of students and challenge them to reach their optimum academic potential. Meetings and outcomes must be documented and tracked to ensure actions have an impact on student progress.

5 Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Rating: Low or lack of effectiveness

5.1 Overview

The district provides a written curriculum and assistive technology programs for use in classrooms for students with special needs. The level of rigor, pedagogical practice, and settings for providing instruction for students with disabilities varies from school to school. Common planning time is not built into the schedules so that general education teachers and special education teachers can plan for instruction collaboratively.

5.2 Factors that support effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment

The district has a written curriculum, and school leaders have a clear idea of what teachers should be teaching, particularly in ELA. Teachers in multiple focus groups could speak confidently about the curriculum programs that they use and the content that they have taught.

Teachers use assistive technologies to support students in learning reading and mathematics and support school and classroom culture. In multiple special education classes, we observed students using online academic support programs such as Moby Max (a math support program). In multiple classrooms, we observed teachers using the Class Dojo program to reward students for exhibiting appropriate classroom behaviors. While observing classrooms, students were not observed using assistive technologies or supportive communication software.

One student was observed using a motorized wheelchair to navigate the school campus and visit the middle school with classmates. The school ensured the student could safely attend the orientation trip with her peers.

5.3 Factors that limit effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment

Instruction

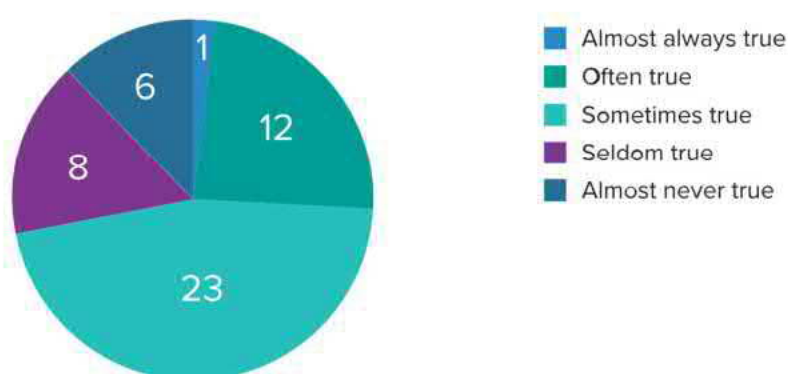
Special education pedagogy lacks consistency across the district. While observing classrooms across the four schools, there were varied levels of rigor in the special education instruction being delivered. In most classes observed, the special education teachers were attempting to assist students with work that came from the general education classrooms. In two lower grade classrooms observed, the special education instructor was delivering instruction from the Foundations textbook. In another classroom, students were completing individual packets of work that had been provided by multiple teachers. Most of the work observed consisted of assignments that students were completing independently without assistance from an instructor.

Students with special needs are frequently served in pullout settings, outside of the general education classroom. It is imperative that students be serviced in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). "The LRE refers to the setting where a child with a disability can receive an appropriate education designed to meet his or her educational needs, alongside peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate." [20 United States Code (U.S.C.) Sec. 1412(a)(5)(A); 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C F R) Sec 300.114] In three of the four schools in the district, most of the special education instruction is delivered in pullout settings. Students who receive their instruction in this fashion are not receiving sufficient instruction of the core curriculum in the general education classrooms. These students are likely to be ill-prepared to perform well on the standardized testing that is primarily based on the core curriculum

Observers in classrooms found that the work for students with disabilities was not always appropriate for their age or grade level. In a high school pullout support class, a special needs student was required to complete an essay that consisted of two paragraphs. In a middle school special education class, students were working on a math program that required them to answer very low-level math computation questions (ex $2 \times 1 =$ __, $8 - 7 =$ __, etc.) During a visit to the general education math classroom, we witnessed students working on solving linear equations and in a History class, students were required to complete three to four-page research papers. The low expectations for special education students will not appropriately prepare them academically and push them to reach their full academic potential

Cambridge Education administered parent, teacher, and student surveys during this review, and these results are analyzed in greater detail in the district wide general report. However, with regard to issues that may be more pertinent to special education, the following results were obtained

Struggling students receive early intervention and remediation to acquire skills (N=50)



██████████ School District

Source: Cambridge Education District Report: Staff Survey

The chart shows the responses to the staff survey prompt: "struggling students receive early intervention and remediation to acquire skills." To this question, only 1 person out of 50 said that this almost always true, and an additional 12 said that this was often true. Ultimately, the remaining 37 out of 50 respondents, or 74%, indicated that this

was either sometimes true, seldom true, or almost never true. These data are reflective of observations stemming from the on-site visit, where each school had a differing practice around supporting struggling learners that was not in close alignment with the others.

The student survey conducted for both elementary and secondary school students included 10.5% and 7.8% of respondents receiving special education services, respectively. Amongst all respondents with and without a disability, the following question relates to teachers' responsiveness to student learning difficulties: "my teacher(s) find other ways for me to learn things I find difficult," 67% of elementary-aged students with special needs said that this was almost always true or often true. At the high school level, 48% of students with special needs gave the same response. In the aggregate, a favorable response was 68% at the elementary level, and only 35% for secondary students, suggesting that secondary-aged students with special needs are more likely than their peers to find their teachers adaptive to learning difficulties. There is no significant difference between students with disabilities and all students at the elementary level.

Use of data

There is a practice of conducting data team meetings across the district. These meetings provide general education and special education teachers time to discuss student academic and social/behavioral data. These meetings, however, were not regularly convened, nor did they follow a regular agenda to make them more effective. Teachers could not identify the types of changes that are made to instruction following the examination of data.

Collaborative planning

Teacher schedules for general education teachers and special education teachers do not allow for sufficient collaborative planning time. All special education teachers in focus groups stated that they cannot effectively support student learning without having the opportunity to share lesson plans or develop the plans in concert with the general education teachers.

Professional Development

The district-provided professional development is inconsistent and teachers in multiple focus groups said that it is not always relevant. Multiple teachers in focus groups in all schools stated that the professional development that they receive is not always meaningful to their practice, nor is it consistently delivered to general education teachers, special education teachers, and para-professionals. Teachers mentioned that the district will allow teachers to seek out professional development opportunities on their own, but they are often responsible to pay for it themselves and they may be docked a day of pay if it conflicts with their traditional school schedule. Teachers who are not sufficiently trained will not provide students with the rigorous instruction that they need to be successful.

5.4 Recommendations

- The district should re-establish the vision and purpose for PLCs and develop some guidelines as to how they should be facilitated across the district. Planning time for these PLCs should be allotted for in each building and these meetings should be

closely monitored by school leaders. These meetings must be used to collaboratively plan for the needs of both general education and special education students.

- The district must outline the expectations for special education students across the district. There should be common practices, strategies, and expectations for the instruction of students with special needs. General education and special education teachers must understand that they are responsible for *all* students in the district and not just the ones that attend their classes each day. The district must firmly set the expectations for the quality of instruction that all children in the district are receiving.
- The district must provide interventions for struggling students. While referral and screening for disabilities appears to be taking place for large numbers of students, a response to intervention (RTI) or multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach could provide much needed support to struggling learners in all settings. [REDACTED] should further refine its approach to RTI and ensure that struggling learners receive attention to address their needs at an early stage, and with the appropriate supports.
- The district should move away from recommendations based on disability classification, and focus on needed services (not program), based on each student's present level of academic performance. During focus groups, teachers mentioned that students with certain classifications should all receive the same services.
- The district should create consistent expectations around instruction for students with special needs and clarify the purpose of different programs. The district could continue to ensure that all students receive their federally mandated right to an education in the LRE. Include a broader range of needs in all programs to create more inclusive, diverse learning environments, reduce the current prescriptive practice, and increase the number of students that can be served within the general education environment.
- Assess out-of-district (OOD) placements and build supports and services within [REDACTED] to address these student needs. District leaders stated that the number of outplaced students is increasing. It is important to notice trends and to work to determine the root cause of why certain students are being educated OOD.
- Provide professional development that is relevant and consistent across all schools. Special education teachers, general education teachers, and para-professionals would benefit from being trained in concert, so a common language concerning student supports can be developed. This would also support consistency when teachers are transferred from one school to another.
- The Planning and Placement Team Meeting (PPT) meetings should be scheduled and streamlined for efficiency. The Director of Special Education could develop a common agenda for PPT meetings that would increase their efficiency. The district could also mandate that PPT meetings are held two days a week and emergency meetings could be scheduled before or after school hours. These changes would enable school support staff to complete their daily workloads, while keeping the families of students with disabilities informed.

6 Domain 4: Engagement of Families, the Community and Other Stakeholders

Rating: Limited Effectiveness

6.1 Overview

Although the district communicates with families of individual students who have been referred for special education or are receiving services, very little is communicated or published by the district for all parents to see in terms of districtwide programs and expectations. Parent input and feedback is not formally sought by the district.

Most of the information gathered about family engagement is from focus groups with staff and a statewide survey for parents of students with special needs. No formal focus groups were set up for the onsite review that included parents and community stakeholders. The review team interviewed a handful of individual parents when in [REDACTED]

6.2 Factors that support effective engagement of families, the community, and other stakeholders

Family members in focus groups shared that they are informed of scheduled PPT meetings in a timely fashion and that the communication is friendly and respectful.

District leaders are working to build greater partnerships with local community members and stakeholders. There is currently a partnership with Griffin Hospital, where students are being recruited for internships and one student has been welcomed into the CN (Certified Nurse) program. The district is also developing a program with the local community college that will support students with disabilities to earn Associate's degrees.

6.3 Factors that limit effective engagement of families, the community, and other stakeholders

In focus groups, family members reported that they have few opportunities to provide feedback to the district on issues pertaining to the special education programs. Parents were unaware of any community meetings that would allow them to share their thoughts about the education in the district except for the monthly Board of Education meetings. One mother stated that she would like to have the formal opportunity to provide feedback to the district on "the things that are working well and the things they need to fix."

There is limited information concerning special education on the district website or any of the school websites.

In a 2013-2014⁶ [REDACTED] Department of Education Special Education Parent Survey⁷ showed lower levels of agreement to items concerning the provision of secondary transition services and the availability of parent support. Parents were asked if outside agencies had been invited to participate in secondary transition planning 61.1% of parents across [REDACTED] agreed that they had been provided with such support, while only 53.3% of the parents in [REDACTED] agreed. When parents were asked if the PPT discussed an appropriate course of study at the high school, with 89.5% of parents across [REDACTED] agreeing, and only about two-thirds of [REDACTED] were offered this opportunity.

When parents were asked if the PPT introduced planning for their child's transition to adulthood, about three-quarters of families across [REDACTED] agreed, while only two thirds of [REDACTED] parents reported that this was discussed. Lastly, when asked if the PPT developed individualized goals for their child related to employment and postsecondary education, independent living, and community participation, 78.3% of parents in [REDACTED] agreed, while only 50% of [REDACTED] parents agreed.

There is a small gap in relation to available supports for parents, with about 36.6% of parents in [REDACTED] agreeing that opportunities are available in their district for parent training sessions, compared to 31.2% in [REDACTED]. 37.4% of parents across all districts in [REDACTED] agreed that a support network is available for parents of students with disabilities, compared to 25.4% in [REDACTED]. Likewise, when parents were asked about their involvement in training or support networks, statewide agreement was at 26.4% and 28.8% respectively, and [REDACTED] parent agreement was at 21.9% and 25%.

More than 80% of parents in [REDACTED] reported that a regular classroom setting was recommended for their child, which is the same rate across the state. When reviewers were on site, it was observed that most of the services were provided outside of a regular classroom setting.

6.4 Recommendations

- The district should convene regular community meetings that would allow parents to share their questions and concerns. These meetings could take place monthly and be held at a location and time that is convenient to most parents. The district could also facilitate yearly surveys of families to learn what the needs are at each school. Frequent meetings at the school level could be facilitated by parent coordinators or a volunteer. Questions and concerns could then be shared with central office.
- Once the district has developed a plan for district-wide structures for special education instruction, this information could be housed on the district website. This will empower families with information and policies concerning the referral process, intervention strategies, or instruction for special needs students across the district.
- The district should make supports available to parents to understand how to best support their children with disabilities. Providing additional supports would empower

⁶ The survey was also conducted in 2014-2015, but disaggregated responses by district are not available.

⁷ Glen Martin Associates: [REDACTED] Special Education Parent Survey, 2013-2014 https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Special-Education/Parent_Survey_district_report_2014.pdf

families to connect their children to appropriate transition services, education or training, employment, and independent living. Educators can work alongside family members to engage students with disabilities in development of self-determination attitudes and skills that will serve them in college, career, and life.

- By securing additional partnerships in the community, the district can provide social and health services that address student needs. Varied and meaningful partnerships with community businesses and organizations will provide special needs students with opportunities for volunteer work, internships, employment, and recreation programs.

7 Domain 5: Human & Fiscal Resources

Rating: Limited Effectiveness

7.1 Overview

Human resource and special education staff at the district level are limited. With a high percentage of special needs students, adequate staffing is a challenge. [REDACTED] has outsourced a great number of personnel working directly with students—all the Instructional Aides. This group, however, is not well trained or managed and the impact they are having is limited and varied. Instructional practices are varied across the district. General education and special education teachers have few opportunities to collaborate and plan together.

A high percentage of the school district's budget is spent on special education, yet resources are very limited. Many special-needs students are placed out of district, accounting for a great deal of the special education spending. Low salaries in [REDACTED] as compared to other districts reportedly make it difficult to attract and retain the best teachers to serve the needs of the population.

7.2 Factors that support effective use of human and fiscal resources

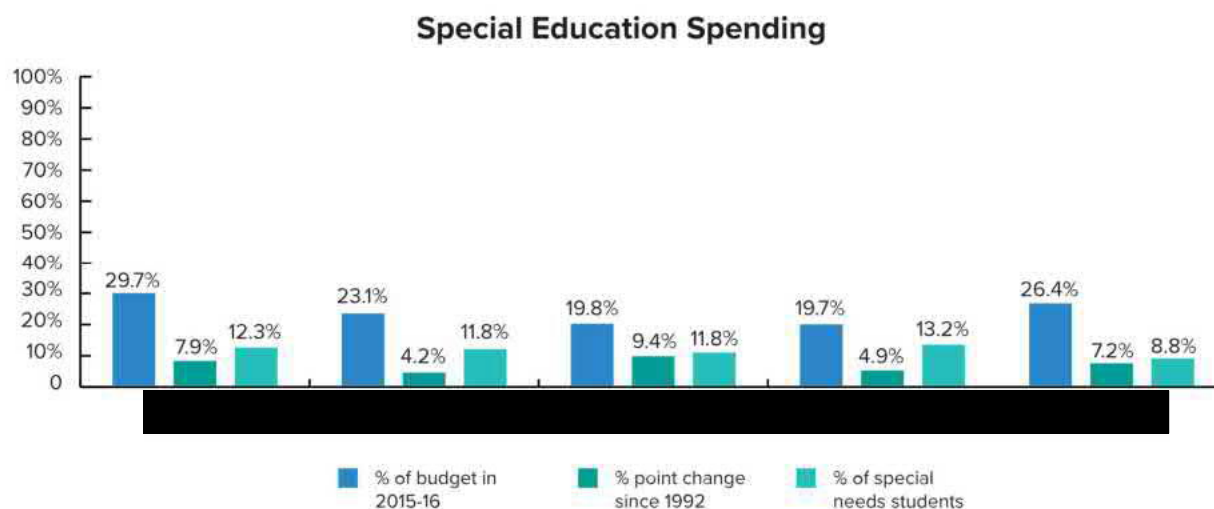
School facilities are clean and safe. There are procedures at each school for security at the front door, displaying identification, signing in and receiving visitor badges. Hallways and classrooms are well kept, and the bathrooms visited for adults during the review are clean. Students in multiple focus groups mentioned that they felt safe in their schools and they were aware of drills and protocols for emergencies.

School grounds, playground equipment, and sports facilities were clean, landscaped and well-maintained. Students and teachers in focus groups said that the clean and welcoming environment was a reason that they felt proud of their schools. Family members also mentioned that the schools were consistently clean and welcoming when they visited.

7.3 Factors that limit effective use of human and fiscal resources

[REDACTED] spends a high proportion of its budget on special education services, at nearly 30%. In 2015-2016, [REDACTED] had the fifth-highest percentage of total budget spent on special needs student services in the state of [REDACTED]. Statewide, the average spending on services for students with disabilities is 23% of district budgets. The number of special needs students and the budget to serve these students has increased year-on-year for more than 25 years.⁸

⁸ Rabe Thomas, Jacqueline, CT Mirror: SPECIAL EDUCATION DRIVING COSTS AND CONTROVERSIES
ctmirror.org/2016/12/14/troubled-schools-on-trial-special-education-driving-costs-and-controversies/



A detailed analysis regarding out of district tuition costs was performed for this audit and is reported below. However, this analysis is based on limited, publicly-available data, and cannot and should not be viewed as a fully comprehensive picture of the costs of out-of-district placements.

Figure 19

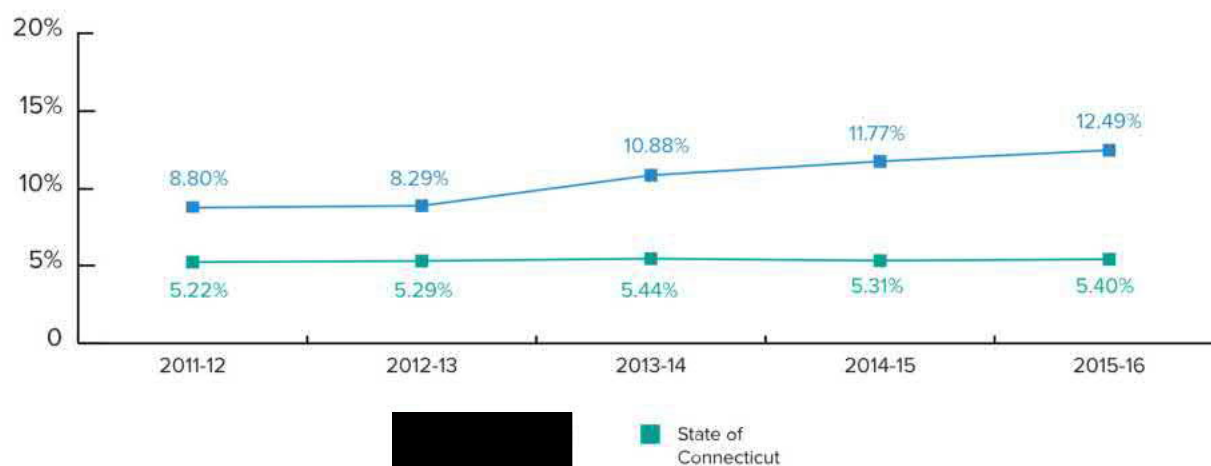
Spending on Students Tuitioned Out as compared to all other categories of spending, Ansonia School District

| | 2011 - 2012 | 2012 - 2013 | 2013 - 2014 | 2014 - 2015 | 2015 - 2016 |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| All other categories of spending | \$28,810,258 | \$ 32,708,641 | \$29,958,298 | \$30,894,517 | \$31,625,947 |
| Students tuitioned out | \$2,781,509 | \$3,204,191 | \$3,656,009 | \$4,120,043 | \$4,512,942 |
| Total expenditures | \$31,591,767 | \$35,912,832 | \$33,614,307 | \$35,014,560 | \$36,138,889 |

Source: Overall expenditures data retrieved from EdSight.ct.gov

As shown in Figure 19, the funds spent on out of-district tuition in 2015-16 were \$4,512,942. The remaining \$31,625,947 of expenditures for the district during the same time included: Instructional Staff and Services, Instructional Supplies and Equipment, Instruction and Educational Media Services, Student Support Services, Administration and Support Services, Plant Operation and Maintenance, Transportation, and Other Expenditures. Ultimately, the funds spent on students tuitioned out have increased by \$1,731,433, or 62%, since the 2011-12 school year. A further representation of this increased spend on out-of-district tuition is reflected below:

Percent of Total Expenditures Spent on Students Tuitioned Out



Source: Overall expenditures data retrieved from EdSight ct.gov

Spending on out-of-district placements has gone up each year from 2011, while the state average remains the same. However, it should be noted that the district's figures would likely include tuitions paid to other districts, while the state's figures would be unlikely to reflect these costs. While these data certainly indicate an increasing amount of money being used for purposes that do not directly support students with disabilities in [REDACTED]'s public schools, this should not be analyzed in isolation. Namely, it is noteworthy that during this same period, both the number of students with a disability as well as the percentage of the student population with a disability has risen significantly, as is indicated in Figures 12 and 13. In other words, the increased spend on out of-district tuition has in fact accompanied an increased population of students with identified disabilities in [REDACTED].

Percent of Students with Disabilities Placed Outside of District (K-12)

| | 2015 - 2016 | 2016 - 2017 | 2017 - 2018 |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Ansonia: Other Public % | 3.1 | 4.4 | 4.3 |
| Statewide: Other Public % | 6.4 | 6.5 | 6.5 |
| Ansonia: Private/Other % | 5.6 | 5.6 | 5.3 |
| Statewide: Private/Other % | 5.4 | 5.3 | 5.2 |

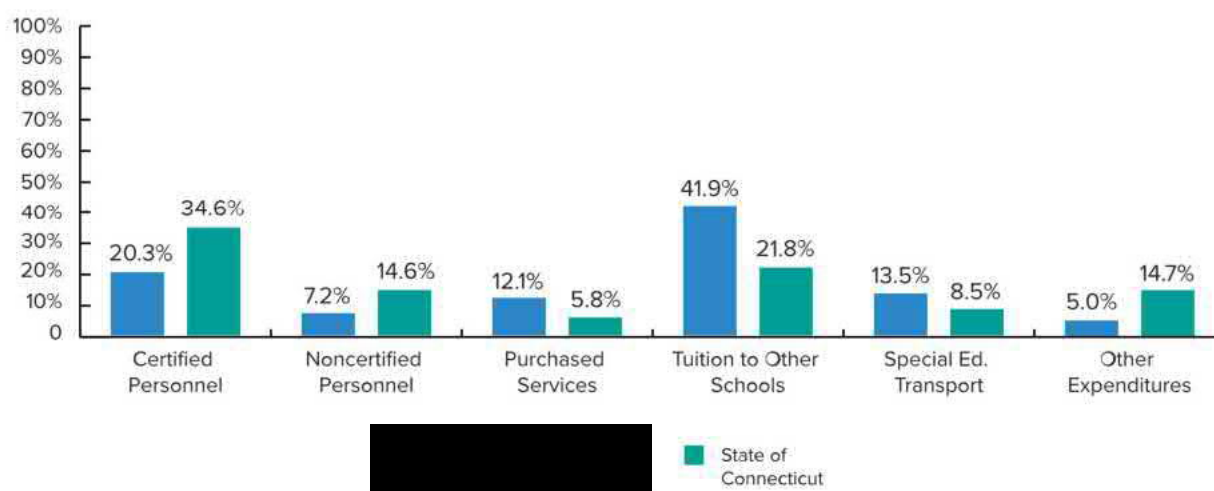
Source: Students with Disabilities Placed Outside of District Report, retrieved from <http://edsight.ct.gov/relatedreports/PlacedOutsideOfDistrict.pdf>

[REDACTED]'s percentage of students with disabilities placed outside the district, whether in "other public" settings or "private/other" settings, was on par with or lower than the statewide statistics for the past three years.

Noting that the cost of outside placements has risen significantly over the past three years, while the percentage of students with disabilities placed out-of-district has

remained on par with state averages, it is difficult to unpack the reasons for the high out-of-district tuition costs. It is possible that there are groups of students not included, but for whom money is being spent on the “students tuitioned out” section of the budget. One variable that has not been accounted for is the actual cost of the services being paid for out-of-district schooling. It is plausible that the cost per child for these services has increased, and/or the variable costs for the types of placement settings needed for [REDACTED] children may account for the increasing costs.

Special Education Expenditures: 2015 – 2016



Source: District Profile and Performance Report for School Year 2016-2017
http://edsight.ct.gov/Output/District/HighSchool/0020011_201617.pdf

In 2016-17, a total of \$10,758,531 was spent on special education, for which a remarkable 41.9% of the special education budget went to “tuition to other schools.” This value is nearly double the 21.8% of the special education budget that districts across the state spent during the same period. In concert with the data, this supports a consistent assertion that a disproportionate quantity of funds continues to be allocated to the payment of tuition to other schools.

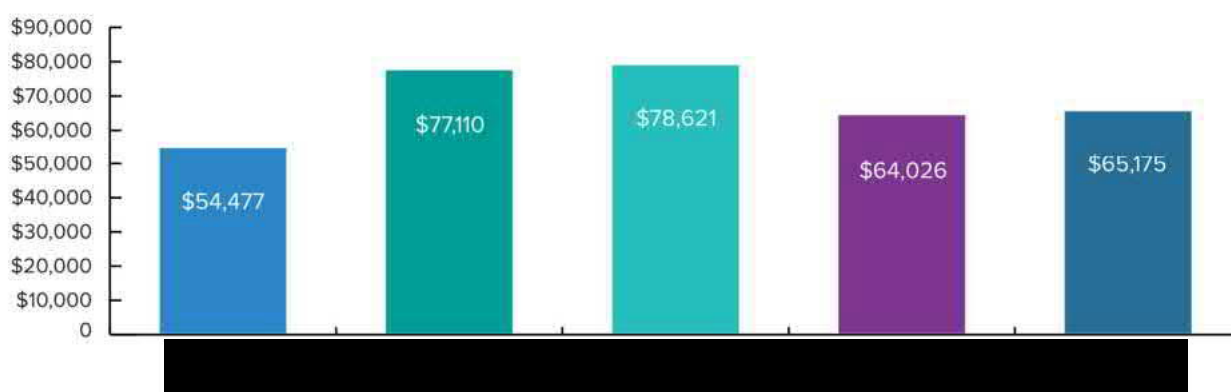
There is a significantly lower percentage of the special education funding allocated to certified and non-certified personnel than for state averages. It is unclear whether the Delta T instructional aides’ costs are included in Noncertified Personnel or in Purchased Services; if they are included in purchased services this could help to explain why noncertified personnel appear lower than state averages. Nonetheless, when examining the costs spent on certified personnel alone, a significantly lower percentage of funding is spent on this category than in state averages. This observation aligns with the feedback that was obtained during onsite visits, including concerns expressed by teachers that their pay was lower than in neighboring districts, and that a low number of certified personnel presented challenges for ensuring instructional quality.

Staffing levels are not adequate to serve the population of students with disabilities. Of the comparison districts, [REDACTED] has the second highest rate of students per counselors, psychologists, and social workers [REDACTED]'s number of disabled students per special education teacher is 18.8:1 which is significantly more students per teacher than any of the comparison districts.⁹

| District | Students per counselors, psychologists, and social workers | Disabled students per special education teachers |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Ansonia School District | 161 | 18.8 |
| Clinton School District | 113.7 | 7.5 |
| New Fairfield School District | 122.1 | 11.1 |
| North Branford School District | 114.5 | 12.4 |
| Oxford School District | 167.7 | 13.1 |

According to the NEA, [REDACTED] has the fifth highest average salary for teachers in the country at \$72,013 in 2016.¹⁰ [REDACTED] teachers are paid below the state average and in the comparison group, [REDACTED]'s special education teachers are paid less than in the comparison districts. Teachers and district leaders reported in focus groups that this discrepancy prevents the district from attracting and retaining the best talent. However, retention data was not provided to back up this claim.

Special Education Teachers' Salaries: 2012 – 2013



7.4 Recommendations

- Further work should be done to analyze the reasons for high costs of out-of-district placements. The district has begun to create programs in the public schools for special needs students who may have been tuitioned out in the past. Accommodating more students in [REDACTED] settings would help to reduce costs.

⁹ Rabe Thomas, Jacqueline, CT Mirror: SPECIAL EDUCATION DRIVING COSTS AND CONTROVERSIES
ctmirror.org/2016/12/14/troubled-schools-on-trial-special-education-driving-costs-and-controversies/

¹⁰ NEA Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the States 2017 and Estimates of School Statistics 2018,
http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/180413-Rankings_And_Estimates_Report_2018.pdf

- Further attention should be afforded to the significantly lower percentage of district budgets than state budgets that are being used for payment to certified personnel, to ensure that neither teacher retention nor instructional quality are at risk of being compromised
- The district must clearly define the district wide vision for special education. Supports need to be similar in each school and reflect high expectations for all students
- The district should implement strategies to recruit and retain high-quality educators in the special education department. In all focus groups, there was an overwhelming sentiment of dedication from the teachers and an incentive program might work to keep teachers in district. A monetary incentive traditionally works well, but some type of formal public district recognition may also serve this purpose. Quality teachers would also benefit from having the opportunity to engage in professional learning and share best practice with other teachers around the district. These strategies might work to retain the good and dedicated teachers

8 Domain 6: Operational Systems

Rating: Low or lack of effectiveness

8.1 Overview

School staff and district leaders have very limited access to the data systems they need to make data-driven decisions. Although students with special needs and/or disabilities have some access to a range of equipment, hardware and software it is not always adapted to meet their individual needs and they do not yet have 100 % access. There is no information for parents on districtwide policies and procedures available on the district's website.

Although milestones are set for the performance of special needs students, there are no effective tracking systems in place to ensure that these are met. Actions to address lags or gaps in performance are not documented or monitored. Stakeholder satisfaction is not routinely checked by the district. The district tracks some performance data in operational/infrastructure systems. Job descriptions and Key Progress Indicators (KPI) for operations are not communicated.

The district policies and processes do not have sufficient focus, and/or they are not consistently implemented to ensure the alignment of external support services (public, community-based, and internal) for struggling students and students with special needs.

8.2 Factors that support operational effectiveness

Teachers integrate technology in lessons across the district. Class Dojo has been implemented to reward students for exhibiting appropriate classroom behaviors. High school students use Chromebook to draft research papers and students in special education classrooms use the Moby Max program to improve their skills in math and ELA.

8.3 Factors that limit operational effectiveness

Data and documentation of operational procedures is often not easily available. For this review, school leaders and support staff were unable to quickly provide data concerning: special education sub-groups, teacher schedules, and evidence of data team meetings. In most cases, school leaders shared that they would e-mail the data, or we could come back and collect it the following day. In one case, rather than send electronic copies of schedules, the school representative sent photos of the schedules (attached).

Although milestones have been set in the district-wide strategic plan, they are unrealistic and not consistently based on past student performance. The district plan entitled "Our Roadmap to the Future" was developed by a team of district stakeholders.

and shared during the 2017-18 school year. This plan outlines projected increases in student academic scores, as measured by the STAR assessment. On page six it outlines projected growth in ELA for grades three through eight:

- By 2018, Grade 3 students will meet or exceed 60 percent proficiency as measured by the SBAC Assessment.
- Grade 4 goes from 40% to 60%
- Grade 5 goes from 39% to 56%
- Grade 6 goes from 34% to 52%
- Grade 7 goes from 38% to 55%
- Grade 8 goes from 18% to 40%

These projected growth percentages are unrealistic as evidenced by the Next Generation Accountability reports for school years; 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 (attached), where the ELA scores decreased 2.4% over the three-year period. It is unrealistic to project that students' academic performance would increase at such a rate. It's also difficult to determine how these projected numbers were developed.

The district policies and procedures are unclear or non-existent when it comes to students with disabilities. The policies for special education students have not been developed and/or clearly articulated, as evidenced by each school attempting to address special education in a different way.

The district's special education department does not employ an adequate number of staff to serve all the needs of students and schools. During the on-site portion of this review, the department director was very stretched with end-of-year meetings and was unable to spend much time with the reviewers. Although staff in schools report that central office is very supportive and responsive when needs arise, there is not enough time or personnel to create a department that is proactively planning and providing for the needs of schools and individuals. Often, there is only time to react when acute needs arise.

8.4 Recommendations:

- Student academic and demographic data should be readily available to review or use for analysis. Data concerning attendance, suspension rates, student referrals, and IEPs should also be readily available and easily accessed. The district could create a data dashboard for this information that could be accessed through the internal district website. School leaders could choose staff members to periodically update this information to ensure that it is up to date.
- The district must develop a strategic plan for academic growth of students with disabilities that has achievable, measurable goals. Individual student goals for special education students should be aligned with their IEP goals.
- The district policies and procedures concerning special education must be firmly outlined and messaged to educators across the district. The district must first outline their vision the way students with special needs will receive instruction and then procedures to facilitate this must be implemented with fidelity in all four schools.

- The district should monitor the performance of all staff, as well as provide regular reviews of special education policies and procedures for the district. School leaders and special education staff should be held accountable to district-wide policies. The district websites should provide relevant documentation and information for all staff, including principals, teachers, and support staff.
- The district has well-developed monitoring and evaluation policies and procedures in place to track key performance data and trends in operational/infrastructure systems
- The district should use the data from the monitoring and evaluation process to review and proactively address any issues before they negatively impact school and district instructional staff's ability to focus on their core instructional function.
- The district should forge additional partnerships with organizations in the community that can provide external support and resources for struggling students, students with special needs, and students with significant health and legal issues.

9 Grade Summary

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| District Name: | ████████ School District. ██████████, CT. |
|-----------------------|---|

| Score | Level |
|-------|----------------------------|
| 4 | High Impact |
| 3 | Moderate Impact |
| 2 | Limited Evidence of Impact |
| 1 | Low or Lack of Impact |

- 4. High Impact** The system is consistently providing effective, efficient, and high-quality service and support of schools in this domain meets and/or exceeds the stated benchmarks which are having a positive impact on the experiences of all students. Few if any weaknesses are present and none that would negatively affect student learning. In addition to having provided this level for at least three years, the district continues to proactively improve its performance and serve as a benchmark for other school districts. The district is engaged in cycles of continuous monitoring and improvement and has proactively identified opportunities for improvement which are having a high impact on district performance in this domain.
- 3. Moderate Impact** The system is providing effective service for schools across most components or elements in the domain. Few weaknesses are present, and none have significant negative impact on student learning overall. While much of the components or elements in this domain are strong, there are important areas that need improvement for at least some schools.
- 2. Limited Evidence of Impact** The system has met minimal standards of service and support of schools in this domain; however, there are limits and some weaknesses individually or collectively affect the learning experience of students. There are strengths; however, the system needs specific, targeted action or intervention to reduce the negative effect on student learning experiences. The system may need intervention to engage in proactive cycles of improvement. Targeted intervention and focused performance coaching may be needed for individuals and teams.
- 1. Low or Lack of Impact** The system is characterized by significant dysfunctional practices or gaps in provision of services and supports that negatively impact school quality and diminish the learning experiences of students. Immediate remedial intervention is required if the performance in this domain is to become an asset rather than a liability for overall system performance. Staff responsible for this domain will likely need specific peer coaching and benchmark experience so that staff can see and understand what acceptable performance looks like.

Domain 1: Student Learning and Development Outcomes**1 2 3 4****The extent to which...**

| 1.1 Academic Achievement | | | | | |
|--|---|----------|---|--|--|
| 1.1.1 | All schools in the district are showing continual academic growth and meeting high academic standards | X | | | |
| 1.1.2 | The district is meeting and/or exceeding state or national level academic achievement expectations. | X | | | |
| 1.1.3 | Achievement gaps between subgroups of students within the district are closed or closing rapidly. | X | | | |
| 1.1.4 | Students with disabilities and English language learners are well supported to meet/exceed high academic standards | | X | | |
| 1.2 Personal and social achievement | | | | | |
| 1.2.1 | District leaders ensure that all schools provide a learning environment that promotes the personal, social and emotional development of students. | | X | | |
| 1.2.2 | The district has established expectations and support systems in place to ensure all students receive personal and academic advisement at all schools | X | | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 1 | | 1 | | | |

Domain 2: Leadership & Management

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 2.1 Vision and Culture | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| 2.1.1 | District leaders model and promote shared values of high expectations that all students can achieve at high levels. | | X | | |
| 2.1.2 | The district has a clear and well-focused vision, underpinning everything it does, that has been developed collaboratively with stakeholders. | X | | | |
| 2.2 Strategic Planning, Plan Management and Use of Data | | | | | |
| 2.2.1 | District leaders empower leaders at all levels to implement the actions needed to achieve the district's goals. | X | | | |
| 2.2.2 | The district has established challenging but attainable district improvement goals for the short, medium and long term | X | | | |
| 2.2.3 | Data-driven systems are in place that focus the operations of the district to ensure higher levels of student learning and staff effectiveness. | X | | | |
| 2.3 Governance | | | | | |
| 2.3.1 | District leaders, including the School Committee or School Board of Education (BOE), create and adhere to policies, procedures, and budgets that support a shared vision by all stakeholders and promote high expectations for learning and teaching in all schools. | | X | | |
| 2.3.2 | BOE members are well prepared and informed to guide and support the work of the district and work collaboratively with the superintendent, in part by effectively advocating for the district and creating a culture that is conducive to public support for the district. | X | | | |
| 2.4 Accountability | | | | | |
| 2.4.1 | There are clear systems of accountability for all departments, teams and schools. | X | | | |
| 2.5 Professional Capacity of Office Staff | | | | | |
| 2.5.1 | The district has a supportive process in place to hire, develop, select or assign district personnel to the position in which they can be most effective in serving the needs of the schools. | | X | | |
| 2.5.2 | District leadership models respectful and collegial interactions among the district level staff and school level staff | | | X | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 2 | | 1 | | | |

Domain 3: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 3.1 Learning and Teaching | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| 3.1.1 | The district has a vision for effective learning and teaching and ensures that all students are taught a rigorous and relevant core curriculum, enabling students to achieve high academic standards | | X | |
| 3.1.2 | The district implements practices that ensure the needs of struggling students, students with disabilities and English language learners are met. | | X | |
| 3.2 Curriculum | | | | |
| 3.2.1 | The district has a common, rigorous curriculum, aligned to the state standards, that covers all grades and all subjects | | X | |
| 3.2.2 | The district ensures that the curriculum provides a broad range of relevant experiences to interest, motivate and excite students. | X | | |
| 3.3 Assessment and Use of Data | | | | |
| 3.3.1 | The district has systems in place to ensure that school administrators and teachers receive and can use data in a timely manner | | X | |
| 3.3.2 | The district has systems in place for collecting and using student data and other formative data for the modification of instruction to improve student achievement. | X | | |
| 3.3.3 | The district has systems in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of school programs and assist schools in making modifications where needed. | X | | |
| 3.3.4 | The district ensures schools make effective use of assessment data in the classroom. | X | | |
| 3.4 Instructional Leadership and Capacity | | | | |
| 3.4.1 | The district supports schools in the selection, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of effective strategies, programs, and innovations to improve student learning outcomes. | X | | |
| 3.4.2 | The district provides support systems that develop the capacity of school leaders at all levels. | X | | |
| 3.5 Professional Development | | | | |
| 3.5.1 | The district plans professional development that is sufficiently informed and flexible to align with district goals and meet school-specific needs. | X | | |
| 3.5.2 | The district provides professional learning that is relevant and addresses adult and student needs and assesses the impact on staff practices and student learning to adjust as needed. | X | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 3 | | 1 | | |

Domain 4: Engagement of Families

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 4.1 Families and the Community | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| 4.1.1 | The district establishes and communicates district-wide expectations for schools for the two-way engagement of families and the community in support of learning and teaching | | X | | |
| 4.1.2 | Systems are established that ensure families and community members have feedback and problem-solving opportunities throughout the district. | | X | | |
| 4.1.3 | The district develops and maintains productive partnerships with the business, philanthropic, higher education and non-profit communities. | | X | | |
| 4.2 Political Engagement and Policy Alignment | | | | | |
| 4.2.1 | District leaders monitor state and local political policies and issues to determine the impact on district schools and respond appropriately | | X | | |
| 4.2.2 | District leaders communicate and collaborate with agencies, organizations and other networks to ensure that the goals and focus of the district are known and considered when political decisions are made. | | X | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 4 | | | 2 | | |

Domain 5: Human & Fiscal Resources

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 5.1 Human Resources | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| 5.1.1 | The district has practices in place that ensure the recruitment, selection, hiring, assignment, promotion and retention of high quality district office and school level personnel | X | | | |
| 5.1.2 | The district guides and monitors the use of a state-approved evaluation system (if applicable) to ensure fidelity of implementation and to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of district and school leaders, teachers and staff. | | X | | |
| 5.1.3 | The district clearly defines the roles and responsibilities, skill sets, and expectations of all district staff. | | X | | |
| 5.1.4 | The district has productive partnerships with unions and other employee groups that ensure effective systems to maintain a high-quality work force | X | | | |
| 5.2 Fiscal Resources | | | | | |
| 5.2.1 | The district has effective systems and controls to ensure sound financial management, including responses to audit requirements. | | X | | |
| 5.2.2 | The district is strategic in its allocation and use of financial resources, ensuring equitable and efficient allocation of resources for struggling, special education, English language learners, and students with significant health and legal issues. | | X | | |
| 5.2.3 | The district implements processes to maintain facilities and equipment and ensure an environment that is safe and conducive to learning | | X | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 5 | | | 2 | | |

Domain 6: Operational Systems

1 2 3 4

The extent to which...

| 6.1 IT and Data Support | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| 6.1.1 | The district ensures that IT and data systems serve schools, district and stakeholder needs effectively and efficiently. | | X | | |
| 6.1.2 | The district builds capacity in schools and the central office for personnel to make effective use of technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness to support students' learning | | X | | |
| 6.1.3 | The district ensures that lead people for IT and data communicate regularly with schools and district staff to ensure effective use of resources. | | X | | |
| 6.2 Communications | | | | | |
| 6.2.1 | The district has effective systems and controls to ensure sound financial management, including responses to audit requirements. | X | | | |
| 6.2.2 | The district is strategic in its allocation and use of financial resources, ensuring equitable and efficient allocation of resources for struggling, special education, English language learners, and students with significant health and legal issues. | X | | | |
| 6.2 Operations | | | | | |
| 6.3.1 | The district ensures that all operational systems align with its values, vision and goals. | X | | | |
| 6.3.2 | The district has a process for regularly checking the effectiveness of its operational and infrastructure systems | X | | | |
| 6.3.3 | The district aligns human and fiscal resources with the needs of student services, facilities, and safety and security systems | | X | | |
| Overall outcome of Domain 6 | | 1 | | | |

B. Select list of public-school clients

Table 1: Cambridge Education's experience

| State and Districts | Services provided |
|---|---|
| California Public School Districts: Oakland, Pomona, Sacramento City, Santa Ana, Inglewood and Charter School organizations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided strategic planning and development as School improvement partner to a number of districts. • Designed and implemented Charter School Site Visit Program for California State Department of Education and California Charter School Association. • Provided leadership training and development and curriculum audits for Sacramento USD and The Alliance of College-Ready Public Schools. • Conducted a facilities review and led Middle School consultation process for Pomona USD. |
| Colorado: State Department of Education, Denver Public Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Served as a Learning Environment Lead Partner for the state Department of Education. • Served as support partner to a range of School Improvement Grant (SIG) Schools including strategic planning and implementation. • Statewide working conditions survey provider |
| Connecticut: Stamford, Bridgeport, Hartford, Ansonia, New Haven Public School districts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning and implementation as School and District Improvement Lead in 18 districts and over 150 schools. • Designed and implemented teacher evaluation systems in a number of districts. • Strategic leadership training and development in Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven. • Designed and implemented director and supervisor training program in New Haven. • Served as thought partner to the Mayor's education reform team. • Designed and implemented executive coaching program for Connecticut State Department of Education and EASTCON. |
| Georgia: Georgia State Department of Education, Fulton County and Atlanta Public Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided technical assistance and support to Georgia State Department with the design and implementation of a statewide district review process. This included a weeklong face-to-face training and support to design and develop the process, procures and detailed support documents including standards and evidence-based rubrics. • Provided services for strategic planning, School Quality Reviews (SQR), learning and teaching reviews, accelerated improvement planning and Assessment for Learning (AfL) in Fulton. • Comprehensive School Partner to 2 schools. • Conducted approximately 125 SQRs in Fulton since 2011. |
| Florida: Pasco County Schools, Brevard County Schools, Miami-Dade County, Hillsborough County Schools; Polk County, Orange County Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided PD and leadership training on teacher evaluation to over 1,500 teacher evaluators in 300+ schools in five counties including; Hillsborough, Polk and Brevard. • Calculus Project implementation support • Student perceptions surveys |
| Illinois: Chicago Public Schools, Illinois State Department of Education, Cahokia, Bellwood, Hazelcrest, Elgin, Brooklyn School District | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Served as Learning Improvement Lead Partner for the state Department of Education. • Served as LTP for Cahokia High School and collaboratively worked with the district and school to secure SIG funding from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). • Currently serving as the Lead Partner Provider for 2 schools and worked collaboratively with these schools to write the SIG application. • Developed the standards and rubric for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) school diagnostic process and provided training. • Conducted 36 SQR for CCPS in collaboration with the Office of Strategic School Support Services. • Calculus Project implementation support |
| Kentucky: Fayette County Public Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive audit of comprehensive intervention schools • Stakeholder surveys • Strategic planning support • Improvement support: Instructional improvement coaching, creating culturally responsive, safe and supportive schools, leadership coaching |
| Massachusetts: Boston Public Schools, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Worcester, Lynn, | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted school and district quality reviews across the state. • Served as PD provider for Common Priorities Program – supporting teaching and learning. • Designed and implemented a number of statewide policies, processes and procedures for the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education including: Level 4 Strategic Management Planning, Professional Learning Communities and Learning Teams –Collaborating for student success. |

| State and Districts | Services provided |
|--|--|
| Somerville, Chelsea Public School districts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided strategic technical assistance in aligning ELA and math curricula to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) across all district schools in Springfield and Worcester. • Implemented educator evaluation in a number of districts across the state. • Provide intensive PD on curriculum design to coaches throughout the district and follow-up with additional trainings. • Calculus Project implementation support |
| Michigan: Grand Rapids Public Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District wide survey services • Served as the LTP for 2 schools in Grand Rapids. • Provided district reform support and currently serving as a partner in Grand Rapids, including strategic planning, instructional coaching, leadership mentoring and designing and implementing teacher evaluation calibration session for district and school administrators. |
| New Jersey: Newark Public Schools, Jersey City Public Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted strategic planning and SQRs across all Newark schools. • Supported SIG needs assessment and application process for 8 schools. • Served as Improvement Partner to Peshine ES Newark Lincoln High School (Jersey City) and to the Perth Amboy Public School District. |
| New York City Department of Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Served as an LTP, where our work has included: the development of a comprehensive SQR program; school improvement programs for low-performing elementary schools; embedded leadership program for school administrators; charter schools; curriculum mapping, and curriculum and technology integration. • Implemented a robust SQR system and performed SQRs in all 1,400+ schools and 1,200 Early Years settings. • Providing Tripod Student Surveys throughout New York City for grades 3-12 in every classroom (which equates to 55,000 teachers) • Supported professional learning for more than 100 school leaders and individual schools on social and emotional supports for learning, improving school culture, promoting equitable practices and antiracism in schools. |
| Virginia: Richmond City Schools, Halifax County, Hamden County | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Served as LTP for 13 priority schools in 9 school divisions . We currently serve as LTP for 9 schools. • We have worked with schools in SIG Cohorts I, III and IV. • By the end of SIG cohort 1, 2 of the 6 schools we served were fully accredited and the remaining 4 schools all moved out of priority status |

C. Requested documents

Milton Public Schools will provide documents and documentation including and pertaining to the following. The steering group will determine what is available for review for the purposes of the audit. The required documentation includes, but is not limited to:

- A completed Self-Evaluation Form (SEF)
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Plans for district and schools
- Mission, Vision, Values, and Priorities statements
- Staff and student handbooks (district and each school)
- Institutional strategies and resources currently dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Board engagement with diversity and compositional diversity of Board
- Teachers/Staff Development related to equity and diversity topics
- Diversity-related workshops for students
- Hiring and retention rates of staff
- List of equity and diversity related programs
- Peer and mentoring programs for students, teachers, and staff
- Teacher reports on changes to pedagogy
- Efforts to increase curricular diversity
- Code of Conduct documents
- School discipline and safety data
- School/System Awards
- Institutional history of diversity issues, incidents, and complaints
- Reports of hate crimes and grievances
- Student enrollment and retention data
- Attainment rates
- Graduation rates
- Course catalog and sample syllabi
- School Life: groups, activities, and resources
- Salary/Compensation analysis by role, gender, and race
- Promotional patterns of staff and teachers
- Underrepresented Minorities (URM) Teachers and Staff Turnover
- Diversity recruiting and retention statistics: leaders, staff, and teachers
- Social Media postings; web site
- Any additional documentation agreed with the steering group and Cambridge Education and L&P Education Services

D. Resources and selected bibliography

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[Emdin](#), Christopher / January 3, 2017, *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education (Race, Education, and Democracy)*

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[Bettina Love](#) / February 4, 2020, *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*

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[Monique W. Morris](#) / January 28, 2014, *Black Stats: African Americans by the Numbers in the Twenty-first Century*

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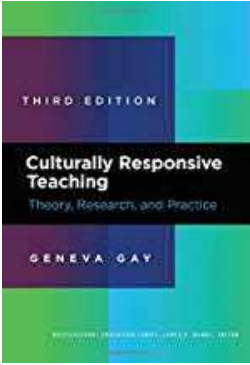
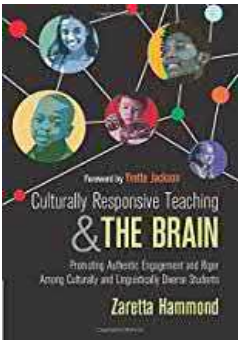
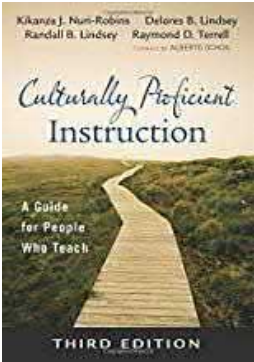
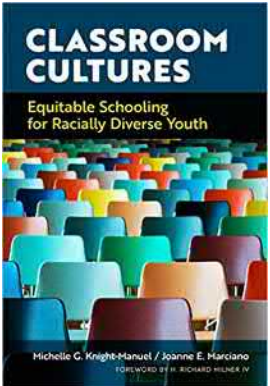
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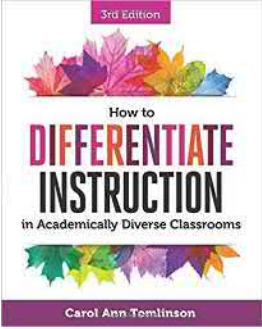
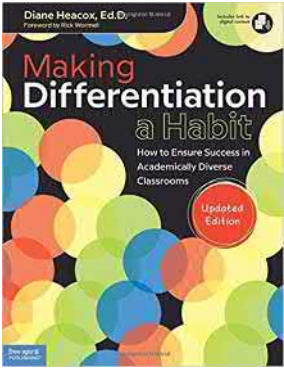
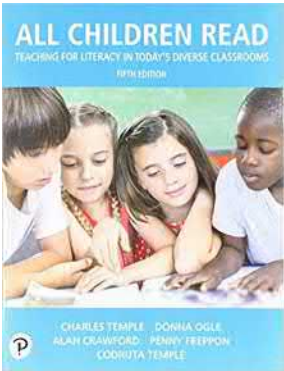
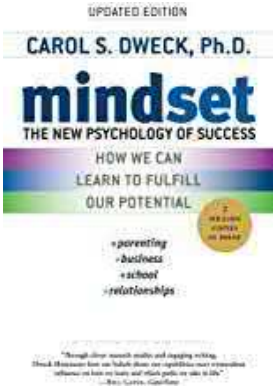
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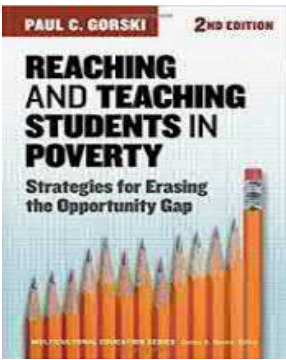
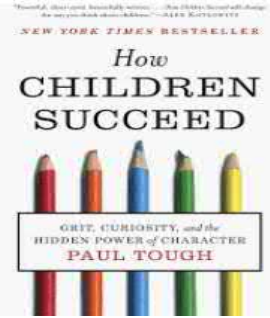
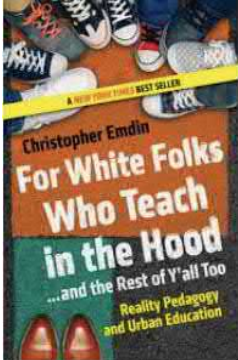

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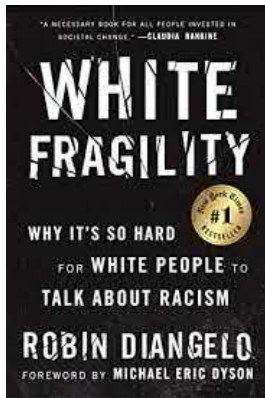
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Research Base Resource List

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|---|--|
|  | <p>Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice</p> <p>by Geneva Gay</p> |
|  | <p>Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students</p> <p>by Zaretta Hammond</p> |
|  | <p>Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach</p> <p>by Kikanza Nuri-Robins, Delores B. Lindsey, Randall B. Lindsey, Raymond D. Terrell</p> |
|  | <p>Classroom Cultures: Equitable Schooling for Racially Diverse Youth</p> <p>by Michelle G. Knight-Manuel, Joanne E. Marciano</p> |

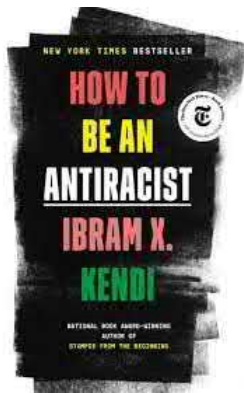
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|  | <p>How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms (3rd Edition)</p> <p>by Carol Ann Tomlinson</p> |
|  | <p>Making Differentiation a Habit: How to Ensure Success in Academically Diverse Classrooms</p> <p>by Diane Heacox Ed.D.</p> |
|  | <p>All Children Read: Teaching for Literacy in Today's Diverse Classrooms (5th Edition)</p> <p>by Charles A. Temple, Donna Ogle, Alan N. Crawford, Penny Freppon</p> |
|  | <p>Mindset: The New Psychology of Success</p> <p>by Carol S. Dweck</p> |

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|  | <p>Reaching and Teaching Students In Poverty - Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap</p> <p>by Paul C. Gorski</p> |
|  | <p>How Children Succeed - Grit, Curiosity, and the hidden power of character</p> <p>by Paul Tough</p> |
|  | <p>For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood and the rest of y'all too.</p> <p>by Chris Emdin</p> |
|  | <p>Whistling Vivaldi - how stereotypes affect us and what we can do.</p> <p>by Claude M. Steele</p> |



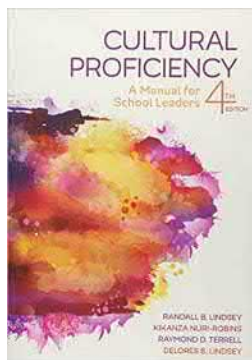
White Fragility - Why It's So Hard For White People To Talk About Racism

by [Robin Diangelo](#)



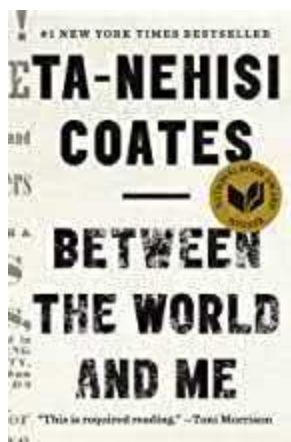
How to Be an Antiracist

by [Ibram X. Kendi](#)



Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders Fourth Edition

by [Randall B. Lindsey](#), [Kikanza Nuri-Robins](#), [Raymond D. Terrell](#), [Delores B. Lindsey](#)

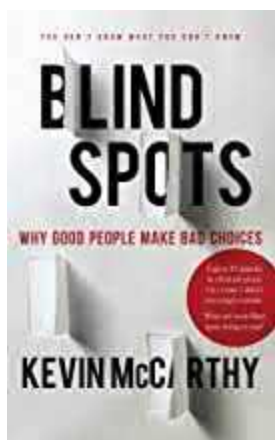


Between the World and Me

by [Ta-Nehisi Coates](#)



Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education
by Paul C. Gorski



BlindSpots: Why Good People Make Bad Choices
by Kevin McCarthy

