

# Concord Integrated Preschool Special Education Review

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# Introduction

The Concord Public Schools (CPS) contracted with WestEd in November 2018 to conduct a review of the Concord Integrated Preschool Program to provide a review of the district preschool special education program to determine if the current model and programming is adequate to meet the needs of preschool students with disabilities in the district. WestEd worked with the interim preschool director to develop the review tools including the focus group questions and walk through tool. The onsite observation occurred on February 26<sup>th</sup> which included focus groups and classroom walk through observations.

WestEd senior staff, Silvia DeRuvo, directed the project and contributed to the analysis of the data and the written report. The WestEd onsite review was conducted by Ann Marie Dubuque, WestEd consultant. WestEd commends the Concord Integrated Preschool Program for requesting this review to improve their already stellar program for children with disabilities in the district. We appreciated the opportunity to spend time in your classrooms and meet your staff and to observe your “well oiled machine” in action. We especially appreciate the work of Janet O’Shea, interim preschool director for her organizational support for this review, the Superintendent Laurie Hunter for recognizing the importance of improving programming and the staff at the Concord Integrated Preschool for their efforts and expertise in meeting the needs of preschool students with disabilities in the district.

# Methodology

The WestEd evaluation design offered a multi-pronged approach to review the effectiveness of the preschool special education program in the district. This approach was based on several sources of data and the perceptions and contributions of various stakeholder groups including parents and staff to inform the comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the preschool special education services in the Concord Public Schools, resulting in recommendations for program structures and service delivery. Multiple sources of data including interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations were used to inform the review.

The review focused on the following areas:

## **1. Continuum of Services:**

- a. Does the current model of special education services for preschool students provide a full continuum of service delivery options for students with a range of disabilities in Concord Public Schools?
- b. What is the overall method of delivery and quality of the special education preschool program within the district?
- c. To what degree do preschool students with disabilities have access to their non-disabled peers in the preschool program?
- d. To what degree do preschool students with disabilities have access to special education and related services in regular early childhood programs?
- e. What factors may be contributing to placement of students in out-of-district or segregated placement for preschool students?

## **2. Preschool outcomes**

- a. To what degree do preschool children with disabilities in Concord Public schools have improved social emotion skills and relationships compared to the state average?
- b. To what degree do preschool children with disabilities in CPS have improved acquisition and use of knowledge and skills compared to the state average?
- c. To what degree do preschool children with disabilities in CPS have increased the use of appropriate behavior to meet their needs?

**3. Professional Development:**

- a. What are the professional development needs of staff within the district to improve preschool special education programming and services?

# Results

This section reports the results of the evaluation activities. It begins with background and an overview of the program. This section also reports the results of the interviews and focus groups, and classroom observations.

## Background on the Program

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The Concord Integrated Preschool is designed to educate students with disabilities ages 3-5 along with their community peers. It provides services for students who have been found eligible for special education and are on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) designed to meet his or her individual special needs. The preschool houses four classrooms led by certified special education teachers. The preschool classes are offered Monday through Thursday. There are four half-day programs, two running from 9:00 am to 11:30 am and two running from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm. There are also two full day programs that run from 9:00 am to 2:30 pm. The student to teacher ratio is 4 students to one adult in the largest classes.

The preschool program is run by a staff of four full time special education teachers, two speech language pathologists, one full time occupational therapist, one part time physical therapist, one part-time Board-Certified Behavior Analyst, part time contracted occupational therapist and one person who is the full-time school psychologist, preschool team chairperson and interim preschool director.

Concord Integrated Preschool is designed to foster a love of learning through a positive first school experience for preschool students with disabilities and community peers. The school provides the

foundation for kindergarten readiness and future academics by encouraging children to become independent, self-confident, and inquisitive learners. Classes provide an educationally enriched and stimulating environment with developmentally appropriate activities, highly trained staff, and an exceptionally creative curriculum.

The integrated preschool is set in Concord, a historic town, 1 mile west of Boston and was settled in the 1600s. The program is available to residents of Concord and children of Concord Public Schools and the Concord Carlisle High School staff.

## Data Collection Methods and Analysis

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The following methods were employed for collecting data onsite related to the focus areas identified for review included:

- **Interviews:** Phone interview of the preschool chairperson acting as the interim preschool director.
- **Focus Groups:** In-person focus groups with preschool teachers, tutors, other related service providers and parents.
- **School Visit/Observations:** Onsite visit to the preschool to observe the preschool special education program to observe the services and evidence-based practices implemented within the program.
- **Analysis:** Data from interviews, observations and focus groups compiled and analyzed to identify emerging themes, and a final report.

## Additional Analyses

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### Concord Integrated Preschool Handbook

The Concord Integrated Preschool Handbook provides information on the philosophy and curriculum of the program to parents of children with IEPs and potential community peers. The handbook identifies the program as designed to promote the physical, social-emotional, cognitive and language development of children. It informs families that the curriculum is a developmentally appropriate curriculum targeted to individual learning styles driven by the *Guidelines for Preschool Curriculum Experiences* based on the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks*, the *Massachusetts Common Core for Preschoolers* and the approaches recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Families are provided with information on the role of play in their child's preschool experience as a teaching platform for building both academic, social- emotional and physical skills in preparation for kindergarten. The goal of the preschool identified in the handbook focuses on the development of a positive self-image and a love of learning.

The handbook provides information on the programming of a "typical day" and the basic concept of Open Circle as the social emotional curriculum and Handwriting Without Tears for early handwriting skills.

The handbook also provides general information to families on the school staffing, general information, entrance requirements, and other logistics as well as information on the behavior and discipline policies.

## Extant Data Analysis

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### Early Childhood Outcomes Data -SPP/APR Indicator 7

As part of the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) required annual State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR), Massachusetts measures and reports early childhood outcomes to the federal government on an annual basis. To report early childhood outcomes, the state reports the “Percent of preschool children with IEPs who demonstrate improved a) positive social-emotional skills; b) acquisition and use of knowledge and skills; and c) use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.” Due to restructuring in their monitoring system, Concord Public Schools have reported this data in the past, but currently, as a cohort two schools will not be collecting or reporting this data until after spring 2019 to report both entry and exit data for preschool children with IEPs in order to measure positive social-emotional relationships, early learning, and using appropriate behaviors to meet their needs (Indicators 7A and 7B).

Since the Concord Integrated Preschool is part of cohort 2, the data is not currently available to inform this report. The administrative assistant to the director of special education reported that the last submission to DESE was only entry data. She also reported that since the district does not currently have a special education director, that they have been given an extension for their data submissions. She did report that in the past, “the preschool outcomes have been terrific.”

### Classroom Observations

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To address the social emotional, cognition, language development, and school readiness observed in the classrooms, the classroom observation tool was created to reflect the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP). This observational assessment instrument is designed to help teachers reflect on the learning and developmental progress of children from infancy up to kindergarten entry. The observational tool reflects the five domains associated with school readiness.

Recognizing the need for differentiated instruction in the preschool setting, the tool also reflects the Principle of Universal Design to determine if teachers are using multiple means of engagement, representation and expression to meet the diverse learning needs in their classrooms.

Finally, the observer looked for the mode of instructional delivery, the management of student behaviors, how the physical space of the classroom was conducive to learning, and lastly how tutors and other related service providers provided support in the classrooms.

The classroom walk-through data and the summary for each section can be found in the table below:

### Summary of Classroom Observations



<b>Approaches to Learning -Self-Regulation (ATL-REG)</b>	<b>Total # observed</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Engages a child's curiosity and initiative in learning	5	83%
<input type="checkbox"/> Development of strategies for regulating feelings and behavior	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase the child's ability to persist in understanding and mastering activities	3	50%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase the child's ability to share the use of space and materials	6	100%
<b>Observation Summary:</b> Based on the classroom observation, the teachers were observed using approaches to self-regulation most (58%) of the time. All teachers were observed helping children share the use of space and material and almost all were observed engaging children through curiosity in the activities provided them in the centers in their classroom. Half the teachers were observed, motivating students to persist through challenges in their learning.		
<b>Social and Emotional Development (SED)</b>	<b>Total # observed</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase awareness of self as distinct from and also related to others	1	17%
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop understanding of people's behaviors, feelings, thoughts and individual characteristics	2	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase child's ability to be competent and cooperative in interactions with peers; developing friendships with several peers	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase the child's ability to use objects to represent other objects or ideas and engage in symbolic play with others	0	0%
<b>Observation Summary:</b> All teachers were observed supporting children's ability to cooperate with each other by providing support with interactions with their peers. In some rooms, tutors were observed providing direct support to help students interact with each other, encouraging community peers to engage with the students who have IEPs. Through the Circle time that was observed, teachers worked on helping children understand other people's behaviors and feelings in order to improve interactions with each other.		
<b>Language and Literacy Development (LLD)</b>	<b>Total # observed</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase child's understanding of communication and language (receptive)	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage child to communicate or act in response to language (expressive)	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase the use of increasingly complex language	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in back and forth communication	6	100%

<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in books, songs, rhymes, stories and other literacy activities that are age appropriate	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in understanding the conventions of print material and print meaning	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in the awareness of the sounds (elements) that make up language, including the ability to manipulate them in language	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in the awareness of letters in the environment and relationship to sound	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child's interest and ability in writing	0	0%

**Observation Summary:**

Teachers were observed supporting age appropriate language and literacy development in the classrooms observed. Teachers were observed using rich use of language, higher order questioning within an environment rich with visuals including letter walls, labeling and theme related boards. Language and communication were a focus in these classrooms with teachers taking every opportunity including snack times to work on developing and increasing language capacity in their students. More than half (55%) of the time teachers were using specific strategies to engage students both receptive and expressive language, increasing the use of complex language through back and forth conversations and developing early literacy through books, songs, stories and other age appropriate literacy activities.

<b>Cognition, Math &amp; Science (COG)</b>	<b>Total # observed</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in activities that increase ability to compare, match, and sort objects into groups according to their attributes	5	83%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in activities that develop an understanding of number and quantity	2	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in activities that develop the ability to add and subtract small quantities of object <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concepts of more and less when objects are added or taken away</li> </ul>	2	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in activities that develop the concepts of measurable properties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concepts of different size objects, how object differ by measurable property</li> </ul>	2	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in activities that develop the ability to recognize, reproduce and create patterns	1	17%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in activities that develop knowledge of shapes and their characteristics	4	67%

**Observation Summary:**

Teachers were observed supporting cognition in math and science nearly half of the time (44%) in the classrooms that were observed. Center activities frequently focused on activities around sorting,

matching working, recognizing patterns and working with shapes. Many activities also centered on the understanding of number quantity and counting. In one class, students were using a tape measure to develop the concepts of different sizes of objects. Classrooms observed with rich materials and manipulatives needed to focus on math concepts.		
English Language Development (ELD) - English Learners ONLY	Total # observed	Percentage
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase the child's progress toward fluency in understanding English (receptive)	3	50%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase the child's progress toward fluency in speaking English (expressive)	2	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage the child in activities that increase the understanding of and response to books, stories, songs and poems presented in English	3	50%
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in activities that increase understanding that print in English carries meaning	0	0%
<b>Observation Summary:</b> In the classrooms observed, a total of six students were identified as being English learners. In half of the classes where ELs were in attendance teachers were observed supporting their receptive and expressing language development through sensory rich environments that included visuals as well as supporting their language development through books, songs, stories and poems in English.		
Multiple ways of engagement ("why" of learning)	Total # observed	Percentage
Recruiting Interest	3	50%
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual choice and autonomy	1	17%
<input type="checkbox"/> Relevance and value to activities	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Distraction free safe environment		
Sustaining Effort and Persistence	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal goals for activities	2	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> Varying demands on skill level	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Frequent feedback		
Self-regulation Age appropriate activities	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> High expectations and beliefs	1	17%
<input type="checkbox"/> Support personal coping skills and strategies	1	17%
<input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities for self-reflection		
<b>Observation Summary:</b> Teachers and tutors were observed utilizing the UDL principles of multiple means of engagement by recruiting interest by providing choice in centers in a safe distraction free environment. The activities in the classrooms were varied to different skill and developmental levels with all staff using frequent feedback to encourage sustaining effort and completing tasks. A few staff were observed helping students develop personal coping skills and using self-reflection to think through next steps to support self-regulation.		

Multiple means of representation (“what” of learning)	Total # observed	Percentage
Perception	2	33%
❑ Customizing display of information	1	17%
❑ Alternatives to auditory information	1	17%
❑ Alternatives to visual information		
Language and Symbols	6	100%
❑ Clarify vocabulary and symbols	0	0%
❑ Clarify language structures	4	67%
❑ Support pre- literacy and pre-math skills	0	0%
❑ Illustrate through multi-media		
Comprehension	5	83%
❑ Activate or supply background knowledge	1	17%
❑ Highlight patterns or critical feature and relationships	2	33%
❑ Guide information processing and visualization	1	17%
❑ Maximize transfer and generalization		
<b>Observation Summary</b> Teachers and tutors were observed utilizing the UDL principles of multiple means of representation by providing options for perception or having access to information. Staff customize the display of information for particular students depending on developmental and skill levels. All staff provided clarification of language and symbols, and a strong support of early literacy and math skills were observed in each classroom. Nearly all staff observed activated or supplied background information related to the concept, theme or task at hand. Staff also encouraged students to identify patterns or other relationships within the themed units of instruction.		
Multiple ways of expression (“how”) of learning	Total # observed	Percentage
Physical Action	4	67%
❑ Vary methods for response	1	17%
❑ Optimize access to tools and assistive technologies		
Expression & Communication	1	17%
❑ Use multiple media for communication	1	17%
❑ Use multiple tools and resources for construction and composition	3	50%
❑ Build skills with graduated levels of support		
Executive Functions	3	50%
❑ Support planning and strategy development	1	17%
❑ Enhance capacity for monitoring own progress		
<b>Observation Summary:</b> Teachers and tutors were observed utilizing the UDL principles of multiple means of expression by providing students with varying options for response, through speech, motion, signaling and one student was observed using a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to respond. Some assistive technology was observed supporting options for response and staff was observed differentiating instruction to build student skill through graduated levels of support. Half the staff also worked with students to help them support planning and strategy development by eliciting ideas for next steps as they worked through tasks.		

Instructional Delivery	Total # observed	Percentage
Whole Class	2	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher talk (lecture, model)	3	50%
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher-led (Q&A)	3	50%
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher modeling/students' practice		
Small Group/Centers	3	50%
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/Adult-led	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Student-led cooperative groupings		
<input type="checkbox"/> Working in pairs	5	83%
<b>Observation Summary:</b> Whole class instruction primarily consists of teacher talk with modeling and teacher led question and answer. In centers or small groups students often work in groups or pairs, with some of these groups being teacher led. Student choice is offered at the table time where some students choose to work in groups and/or can work alone if they prefer.		
Managing Student Behaviors	Total # observed	Percentage
<input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of clear classroom management policies and procedures	4	67%
<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom procedures promote student learning, social development and group responsibility (use of norms, routines, "sponge activities," transitions, systems of recognition, consequences vs. punishment)	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers implement and support the classroom policies	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers response to behavioral errors is appropriate yet reflects dignity	0	0%
<b>Observation Summary:</b> The classrooms observed had very clear evidence of classroom management policies and procedures. Routines and rules were posted in each room. Each room ran like a "well-oiled machine." Students were very clear on the behavioral expectations and the routines of the day allowing for smooth transitions between activities. No behavioral errors were observed since such a proactive approach has been established in the classrooms observed.		
Physical Space	Total # observed	Percentage
<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers use physical space to increase access to learning for all students	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical arrangement encourages engagement in student learning	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical space encourages autonomy and choice	6	100%

**Observation Summary:**

All classrooms observed used the adequate space and materials to support the rich learning that occurred in each classroom. Table time provided students choice in learning and options for group or individual work.

<b>Related Service Providers and Tutors</b>	<b>Total # observed</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Providing direct services in classroom	3	50%
<input type="checkbox"/> Assisting student(s)	6	100%
<input type="checkbox"/> Observing instruction	0	0%
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Instruction	1	17%

**Observation Summary:**

Tutors were observed providing direct support services in the classrooms. They were observed supporting the students in the free play area, helping them with choice, helping them with persistence through tasks and supporting language development through conversations. Tutors were observed helping students pair up between community peers and students with IEPs for tasks that required partners or triads. Related service providers were not observed in the classrooms. Tutors also provide direct ABA instruction, but outside the classroom.

**Overall Observation Remarks by Observer:**

The observer reported, "The staff is unbelievable. They use high language, they frequently interact with the students and move around the room encouraging language." She shared that from her observations, everyone works together as a team. Everyone knows what to do to support the students. She shared that there is a very rich climate and culture in each and every classroom. She reported that the work of the teachers and the tutors together is seamless, like a "well-oiled machine" no matter what class.

She also noted that during free play and snack, adults were participating with the students in the lunch or snack table encouraging social skills and language development. She reported that teachers were using instructional strategies in every moment of the school day. Classrooms were rich with resources and each classroom had multiple centers and groups. Tutors often support the students in the centers so that the teacher was able to focus more individually on the students with more intensive needs. During the centers, student were observed inviting other students to work or play with them. In all classrooms, most students were engaged in one way or another.

The classroom instruction exemplifies the principles of Universal Design for Learning with evidence of higher order questioning. During table time, rotations were differentiated to meet specific student needs. Because things were differentiated to student need and interest, all were engaged including all the instructors. During instruction, teachers used higher order questioning to promote higher level thinking skills.

Related service providers provide therapy through pull-out programming, so these programs were not observed.

**Summary of Observational Findings:**

Teachers support students by engaging their curiosity and persistence in learning and ability to share materials. They support competent and cooperative interactions that support friendship with peers as well as provide an environment that supports strong language and literacy development through frequent back and forth communication building both expressive and receptive language skills. Teachers provide strong supports for age appropriate early literacy and early math skills.

Classroom instruction is characterized by Universal Design for Learning principles. Teachers recruit interest through individual choice and promoting autonomy in a safe, trusting learning environment. Students are encouraged through frequent feedback that supports their own self-regulations skills. Classrooms were exemplified by letter walls and other tools that promote the pre-literacy, pre-math and strong vocabulary skills. Teachers create a context for learning by providing background knowledge and allow for varying methods of response using a variety of manipulatives and materials to support learning.

Instruction in the classroom was primarily teacher led with instruction and modeling or students were working in small groups or pairs with the support of tutors. All classrooms were highly organized with routines in place that promote student learning, social development and group responsibility. The classroom environment was conducive to student choice and student to student interaction.

In all classrooms, tutors were working directly with students to assist students, with many providing direct instruction both in the classroom and in ABA training as well as supporting the teacher during instruction. As the observer noted, the tutors are an integral part of the machine that helps create the success in each classroom.

## Interviews and Focus Groups

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### Parent Focus Group

The four parents that participated in the focus group had very positive things to say about the staff and the program. The parents that participated in the focus group were three parents with children with IEPs and one parent of a child that is a community peer. Parents reported that at the Concord Integrated Preschool they are very involved and engaged with the staff and what goes on at the school. They report that the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) is very supportive and even funded their playground last year. They feel that they receive support from each other, as well as the school staff.

Parents report that the school provides a child-centered program and that staff frequently “goes above and beyond” their teaching duties. A community peer parent reported that the staff recognized and identified a speech issue that the family had not noticed and were able to assess and identify the child as a child with an articulation disorder. One parent who currently has one child in the program and one that has moved on to elementary school reported that the transition to kindergarten was superior due to the supports their child have received in the program. She shared that the preschool program met the significant needs of her child, saving the district over \$120,000 in an out of district placement.

Another strength parents identified is the exceptional communication overall, including communication that occurs between private and school-based services. To support transition to kindergarten, staff holds a transition coffee with parents and the elementary school principals so that families can prepare for the kindergarten transition. Overall, parents reported that students who have transitioned from the program have done well in elementary school and have been successful.

When asked specifically about communication with staff and teachers, parents reported that formal conferences are held minimally four times a year consisting of the IEP and three other more formal conferences, but meetings are held as needed throughout the year with many teachers communicating on a daily basis either in person or through email. In the IEP process, parents feel that they have a voice as they receive draft IEPs several days before the IEP meeting so that they have input into the meeting and the goals.

**Strengths:**

The parents reported the strengths of the program include a consistent teaching staff and mentioned many by name as being exceptional. They appreciate the low staff to student ratio of twelve children and three adults in their classrooms and strong family relationships. They feel that the administration and teachers are supportive of the parent organization and this has resulted in strong family relationships. They also feel that the new superintendent is responsive and supportive to their needs.

**Recommendations:**

Parents mentioned that they would like to see an additional full-day program so that more community peers would have access to the program. They think the current four half-day sessions are adequate, but that two full day classes are not adequate. Parents also would like the program to have a full-time preschool director. They want a person available for onsite leadership. They would like to see the staff recognized as part of the Concord Public Schools system. They are not considered a school within the district, but a program within the district, even though they are in an isolated setting.

**Tutors Focus Group**

The five tutors in the focus group reported that they feel like they are treated as equals in the work with students. They have access to the IEPs and know each student's goal. They report data that they collect, during classroom instruction and supports, on a clipboard on the wall as a way to communicate each individual child's progress on their goals. They carry over therapy support into the classroom and are Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) trained and work with students individually on behavior change through ABA outside of the classroom.

The tutors reported that they are included in the instructional planning time which occurs daily after school for all classes as well as from 8:45 am to 12:30 pm each Friday. At these meetings they are able to prepare to support lessons during the week and are able to share progress with the teachers that they have observed in ABA and in the classroom. In the classroom, they provide instructional support in student centers and help students with their controlled choice around play partners with community peers and students with disabilities. The tutors report that they support the interactions so that community peers interact with the students with disabilities.

The tutors meet monthly with the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) to receive training and to review cases and discuss data. This provides an opportunity for the tutors to provide student updates to the BCBA.

**Strengths:**

Differentiated instruction and developmental curriculum are reported as strengths of the program. They also identified that staff collaborate and communicate creating a community of learning. All have access to the IEPs to support student growth with a whole child focus.

**Recommendations:**



Tutors would like to have more professional development and more training in ABA. They also would like training on different disabilities as well as ways to address challenging behaviors. Since they do receive ABA training, they would like to have that training lead to certification. They would also like to see the addition of another full day program. They mentioned that it would be helpful if all programs ended at 3:00 pm rather than the current schedule of staggered release times.

### **Therapists and Related Service Providers Focus Group**

This focus group consisted of two speech and language therapists, an occupational therapist (OT), a physical therapist, the psychologist and the school nurse. The two speech and language therapists provide one full time position and one 80% part time position. The OT was a founding member of the integrated preschool program eighteen years ago. The other therapists and related service providers in the group provide services on a part time basis.

These specialists report that the program is viewed as a preparation for kindergarten so the focus of all therapy and services is in preparation for transition to elementary school focusing on pre-academics, readiness and positive social-emotional relationships. These providers primarily provide services in a pull-out model and only push into the classroom at the direction or request from the teacher. They are currently not a part of the daily after-school planning time with the teachers.

Their services with the students are driven by the IEP, but they all also play a role in assessment for eligibility for students identified while in the program through assessment and observations. They report that they do not use a specific assessment process such as the ARENA observational transdisciplinary assessment but do use a process where all involved in the evaluation observe the child inside the classroom and outside the classroom to determine eligibility and placement. If a child is transitioning into the program from Early Intervening (EI) services, they meet with EI services and the parents. They go and observe the child in the EI program to better understand the child's needs. If the child comes into the program with an IEP they may not be assessed. In the assessment process, all the specialists and the teachers do individual assessments and report and then these are combined into a comprehensive report for parents to review several days before the IEP.

### **Strengths**

The therapists and related service providers acknowledge the strong school community including the staff and parents and Janet, the interim director, as strengths of the program. They also recognized the collaboration level and the skill and expertise of the staff including the hard work of the tutors. They report that they are a close community, connected and are all child focused. They see their role as being key collaborators in a well-supported district. They recognize the low teacher to child ratio and the wealth of materials, as well as the strong PAC and strong support staff, including the secretaries, as strengths that support the program's success.

### **Recommendations**

They also see the need for a preschool director for oversight and leadership. They identified the need for more professional learning on autism, supporting medically fragile students including those students with global involvement, students with challenging behaviors, and students with severe language delays. They would also like to learn more about assistive technology.

### **Teacher Focus Group**

The four teachers in the focus group reported that they enjoy their students and their families. Their program is developmental and is aligned to Massachusetts standards for preschool. Support for social-emotional development occurs as part of the classroom instruction through Open Circle work. They report strong relationships with their families but recognized the need for better collaboration with non-English speaking families. They report having forty-five minutes at the end of the day for the full day programs and fifteen minutes at the end of the day for half-day program. Tutors are included in these planning times. They did report that these times often are taken for school meetings or after school activities. They do always have a planning time on Friday mornings from 8:45 am to 12:30 pm to plan as a team. The Friday morning planning sessions include the tutors.

During the instructional day there are a minimum of three adult staff in the room—the teacher and two tutors. When the tutor leaves the room to provide ABA to an individual student, the staff to teacher ratio is changed leaving some students receiving less support.

They discussed the current decision-making model regarding program placement. Student to teacher ratio is one factor while classroom composition is another, but although teachers are consulted when there is opportunity to provide feedback, teachers feel that there is a greater need for a teacher “lens” prior to placement to help determine the best classroom fit for the student.

Teachers would like the kindergarten staff to have a more comprehensive understanding of the program and would like to see data that informs them if their students are better prepared for kindergarten than students from other preschool programs.

### **Strengths**

The teachers reported that the flexibility and respect that they receive from district leadership and each other is a significant strength. They feel respected for their wide range of expertise and appreciate the autonomy in the classroom on how they teach. They feel supported by quality staff, excellent communication across programming and consistent family support.

### **Recommendations**

Teachers reported that they would like professional development focused on pre-kindergarten skills and specific disabilities. They would also like to learn more strategies to support challenging behaviors, English learners and English learners with disabilities and children who have undergone trauma.

They suggested that having an additional tutor that can serve as a full-time floater to support students when the teacher leaves to provide ABA to individual students would be a benefit. This would maintain the staff-to-student ratio throughout the day. They also suggested that tutors receive ABA certification from the training they receive from the BCBA.

Another recommendation was that the transition-to-kindergarten processes allow for collaboration between the preschool and kindergarten teachers so that those teachers are better equipped to support the students when they enter kindergarten. They would also want a voice during the assessment process to see students prior to having them placed in their classrooms since they are not at all involved in the assessment process. They feel that they need to have input prior to placement decisions.

They also suggested more professional development opportunities be provided for tutors and would like a full-time preschool director, as well as an additional full day class.

### **Interim Preschool Director Interview**

The interim preschool director, Janet O'Shea, also plays the role of the school psychologist, and preschool team chair, reported that she is pleased with the successful language based preschool program at the Concord Integrated Preschool. In describing the program, she reported that the structured programming is why it is so successful. The preschool program consists of two morning half-day programs primarily for the younger 3 and 4-year-olds with the two afternoon half-day classes being primarily 4 and 5-year-olds. There are also two full day program with one class being primarily 4 and 5-year-olds and one class with 3 to 5-year-olds. Some younger students are in the full day program because they receive numerous services and the longer day allows for both the preschool programming and the related services required.

While decisions about classroom placement are made by the IEP team, depending on student need, there is an increasing demand for the full day program. She reported that all classes have two tutors assigned to them making the student to teacher ratio about 4 to 1 in the largest classes. In addition to the certified teachers, the program also provides a full time and a part time speech language pathologist, one full time occupational therapist and one contracted part-time occupational therapist, one contracted physical therapist and a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

In her role as the school psychologist, Janet completes psychological evaluations, compiles and creates the assessment reports and runs social skills groups. As the preschool chair, she leads all initial and reevaluation IEP meetings and coordinated the transition for students coming in from Early Intervention. In her role as interim preschool director, she also completes all staff evaluations.

#### **Strengths:**

She identifies the strengths of the program as the structure that provides students with the services they need to prepare them for kindergarten. She also feels that the daily structure within each classroom supports students with behavioral needs. She reported that some students who struggled behaviorally in other programs and come to the integrated preschool do very well. She also appreciates that the programming is developmentally appropriate with an enriched curriculum provided by highly skilled teachers, tutors and related service providers.

#### **Recommendations:**

She recognizes that currently there are no policies for community peers that support families from low socioeconomic status to access the program. There is a need to investigate income-based programs and develop district policies to encourage access for these families.

Due to changing laws allowing preschool students to be designated as English learners, the district will need to develop policies and practices related to identification and services for ELs aligned to the MA DESE guidance.

She also recognized that while all teachers and administrators have taken the Sheltered English Immersion Endorsement (SEI) courses, some teachers still feel ill equipped to provide English language development support to English learners. Some teachers are requesting specific ELL intervention groups for these students with an EL specialist.

Lastly, she shared that there are currently no guidelines around transportation for preschool students in Concord. Special education transportation is provided, but the parameters are not clear as to eligibility.

#### **Summary:**

Based on the focus groups and interviews reported, the Concord Integrated Preschool Program is strengthened by the commitment of the families of the children who attend the program. The families are

supportive of the program and the consistent exceptional teaching staff. Strong communication allows them a voice in their child's education. Tutors play an integral role in the effectiveness of the preschool program and were identified by various groups as the back bone of the daily instructional practice in the classroom. Teachers are supported through rich resources and supports needed to provide a standards-aligned curriculum that allows them flexibility in how they teach and meet the needs of the whole child.

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# Recommendations

## General Overall Recommendations

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1. Add an additional full day classroom to the program
  - a. All focus groups suggested creating an additional full day program and reducing the half day programming to only two half day programs. This would not impact staffing and would address the waiting list for the full day programs.
  - b. By adding another full day program, the configuration could be a 3-4 class, 4-5 class and a separate class for 5-year-old children. The final decision about placement in these classes would be determined by the IEP team but keeping them somewhat age specific would support teachers in not having to differentiate for such large developmental bands within one classroom.
2. End the school day at 3:00 pm for all classes.
  - a. Most staff said that ending at the same time would lessen confusion with families and would allow for better planning time after school.
3. Provide additional professional development in the following areas
  - a. Characteristics of students with specific disabilities including autism, medically fragile students, students with severe language delays and students with challenging behaviors.
  - b. Applied Behavior Analysis for both teachers and tutors.
  - c. English learners and English learners with disabilities.
  - d. Trauma informed supports.

- e. Pre-kindergarten skills.
- 4. Provide a full-time preschool director to provide onsite leadership
- 5. Provide an additional tutor that can act as a full-time floater to support teachers when tutors leave the room for ABA training
  - a. Allows the student to teacher ratio to remain the same when tutors leave.
- 6. Improve the kindergarten transition process by increasing collaboration between the preschool and kindergarten prior to the transition.
- 7. Recognize the school as its own school rather than a program to improve community understanding of the purpose of the school.
- 8. Create a document explaining the referral and evaluation process and include it in the handbook to increase understanding of the transdisciplinary assessment process.
- 9. As MA DESE develops guidance around the identification of English learners in preschool, develop guidance and programming that is aligned to the DESE guidance.
- 10. Support English learners currently in the preschool by providing teachers with training that uses the WIDA standards, and language levels using a lesson tuning protocol to plan instruction that includes language development standards in daily instruction.
- 11. Investigate transportation policies in other similar districts to develop policies around transportation for preschoolers with disabilities.
- 12. Develop policies that support income eligible families to have access to the preschool program.

# Concluding Comments and Reflections

Based on the initial review questions focused on the continuum of services, the Concord Integrated Preschool does provide a full continuum of service delivery options for its preschool students in the district through the services provided in the preschool. The overall method and delivery based on observations and focus group data are proven to be stellar. The program itself provides for integration with non-disabled peers through the attendance of community peers. Student who exit the program are successful in the kindergarten programs when they transition to the elementary schools in the district.

From this review it is clear that the Concord Integrated Preschool is a very successful program. From parents, to administration, to teachers, tutors and related service providers, everyone works together as a team to meet each child's individual needs through a culture of community and commitment to each and every child.

## APPENDICES –

## Appendix A – Classroom Walk Through Observation Tool



## Concord Integrated Preschool

## Classroom Observation Record

1. Date:	2. Observer:	3. Start Time	4. End Time	# students with IEPs	# typically developing	5. # of staff	6. # of Tutors
Preschool Fundamental Skill Development							
Approaches to Learning -Self-Regulation (ATL-REG)		Social and Emotional Development (SED)			Language and Literacy Development (LLD)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Engages a child's curiosity and initiative in learning <input type="checkbox"/> Development of strategies for regulating feelings and behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Increase the child's ability to persist in understanding and mastering activities <input type="checkbox"/> Increase the child's ability to share the use of space and materials  Observation notes:		<input type="checkbox"/> Increase awareness of self as distinct from <u>and also</u> related to others <input type="checkbox"/> Develop understanding of people's behaviors, feelings, thoughts and individual characteristics <input type="checkbox"/> Increase child's ability to be competent and cooperative in interactions with peers; developing friendships with several peers <input type="checkbox"/> Increase the child's ability to use objects to represent other objects or ideas and engage in symbolic play with others  Observation notes:			<input type="checkbox"/> Increase child's understanding of communication and language (receptive) <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage child to communicate or act in response to language (expressive) <input type="checkbox"/> Increase the use of increasingly complex language <input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in back and forth communication <input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in books, songs, rhymes, stories and other literacy activities that are age appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in understanding the conventions of print material and print meaning <input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in the awareness of the sounds (elements) that make up language, including the ability to manipulate them in language <input type="checkbox"/> Engage child in the awareness of letters in the environment and relationship to sound <input type="checkbox"/> Engage child's interest and ability in writing  Observation notes:		





Cognition, Math & Science (COG)	English Language Development (ELD) English Learners ONLY	Preschool Fundamental Skills Notes/Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Engage child in activities that increase ability to compare, match, and sort objects into groups according to their attributes</li> <li>❑ Engage child in activities that develop an understanding of number and quantity</li> <li>❑ Engage child in activities that develop the ability to add and subtract small quantities of object <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concepts of more and less when objects are added or taken away</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ Engage child in activities that develop the concepts of measurable properties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concepts of different size objects, how object differ by measurable property</li> </ul> </li> <li>❑ Engage child in activities that develop the ability to recognize, reproduce and create patterns</li> <li>❑ Engage child in activities that develop knowledge of shapes and their characteristics</li> </ul> <p>Observation notes:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Increase the child's progress toward fluency in understanding English (receptive)</li> <li>❑ Increase the child's progress toward fluency in speaking English (expressive)</li> <li>❑ Engage the child in activities that increase the understanding of and response to books, stories, songs and poems presented in English</li> <li>❑ Engage child in activities that increase understanding that print in English carries meaning</li> </ul> <p>Observation notes:</p>	



Effective Instructional Practices- Universal Design for Learning		
Multiple ways of engagement ("why" of learning) Provide options for:	Multiple means of representation ("what" of learning) Provide options for:	Multiple ways of expression ("how" of learning) Provide options for:
<b>Recruiting Interest</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual choice and autonomy</li> <li>Relevance and value to activities</li> <li>Distraction free safe environment</li> </ul> <b>Sustaining Effort and Persistence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal goals for activities</li> <li>Varying demands on skill level</li> <li>Frequent feedback</li> </ul> <b>Self-regulation Age appropriate activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High expectations and beliefs</li> <li>Support personal coping skills and strategies</li> <li>Opportunities for self-reflection</li> </ul>	<b>Perception</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customizing display of information</li> <li>Alternatives to auditory information</li> <li>Alternatives to visual information</li> </ul> <b>Language and Symbols</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify vocabulary and symbols</li> <li>Clarify language structures</li> <li>Support pre-literacy and pre-math skills</li> <li>Illustrate through multi-media</li> </ul> <b>Comprehension</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activate or supply background knowledge</li> <li>Highlight patterns or critical feature and relationships</li> <li>Guide information processing and visualization</li> <li>Maximize transfer and generalization</li> </ul>	<b>Physical Action</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vary methods for response</li> <li>Optimize access to tools and assistive technologies</li> </ul> <b>Expression &amp; Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use multiple media for communication</li> <li>Use multiple tools and resources for construction and composition</li> <li>Build skills with graduated levels of support</li> </ul> <b>Executive Functions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support planning and strategy development</li> <li>Enhance capacity for monitoring own progress</li> </ul>
Notes/Evidence		



Instructional Delivery	Managing Student Behaviors
<b>Whole Class</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher talk (lecture, model)</li> <li>Teacher-led (Q&amp;A)</li> <li>Teacher modeling/<u>students</u> practice</li> <li>Other:</li> </ul> <b>Small Group/Centers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher/Adult-led</li> <li>Student-led cooperative groupings</li> <li>Working in pairs</li> <li>Other:</li> </ul> <b>Notes:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of clear classroom management policies and procedures</li> <li>Classroom procedures promote student learning, social development and group responsibility (use of norms, routines, "sponge activities," transitions, systems of recognition, consequences v. punishment)</li> <li>Teachers implement and support the classroom policies</li> <li>Teachers response to behavioral errors is appropriate yet reflects dignity</li> </ul> <b>Notes:</b>
Physical Space	Related Service Providers and Tutors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers use physical space to increase access to learning for all students</li> <li>Physical arrangement encourages engagement in student learning</li> <li>Physical space encourages autonomy and choice</li> </ul> <b>Notes:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing direct services in classroom</li> <li>Assisting student(s)</li> <li>Observing instruction</li> <li>Supporting instruction</li> <li>Other:</li> </ul> <b>Notes:</b>
Brief description of classroom, lesson and instructional practice:	Brief description of specially designed instruction observed:

## Appendix B- Parent Focus Group Questions



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### Concord Integrated Preschool Special Education Reviews Parent Focus Group Questions

#### Background:

1. How long have you been a parent of a child with a disability in the Concord Integrated Preschool?
2. How long has your child been receiving ECSE services?
3. Did your child receive EI (sometimes referred to by other names, such as Part C) services as an infant or young child?
4. What did those services primarily encompass for your child?

#### Preschool Programming

1. What do your child's special education preschool services look like?
  - a. Do you feel that these services meet your child's needs? Explain.
  - b. What input did you have in making decisions about your child's special education supports and services?
  - c. What role did you play in the development of the IEP?
    - i. What factors were considered when determining placement in this integrated preschool?
    - ii. Have you been made aware of you rights and responsibilities as a parent of a child with a disability?
  - d. How would you describe family engagement in this preschool program?
2. What data is shared with you to inform you on your child's progress
  - a. On their IEP goals?
  - b. On preschool outcomes associated with:
    - i. Building positive social relationships
    - ii. Use of knowledge and skills
    - iii. Use of appropriate actions to meet their needs
  - c. Other data?
3. Are teachers using any specific instructional strategies or practices that support your child's specific needs in their learning? Can you describe any of the strategies or practices that help your child?
4. Do you feel that the current district services are adequate to meet your child's pre-academic and social emotional needs?
5. What role do tutors (paraprofessionals) play in helping your child?
6. What are the strengths of the Concord Integrated Preschool in supporting the needs of your child?
7. What are the challenges and solutions to improving outcomes for your child?

## Appendix C- Special Education Tutor Focus Group Questions



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**Concord Integrated Preschool  
Special Education Review  
Special Education Tutors**

**Background:**

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been a tutor at this school?
3. What other roles have you had in your career?

**Programming**

- 1) Please tell us how you support children in the Concord Integrated Preschool program.
  - a. What is your role?
  - b. What do you do in a typical instructional day?
- 2) What training have to support instruction in the integrated program?
- 3) What is your role/contribution in the IEP process?
- 4) How do you learn about the instructional and behavioral needs of the children with whom you work?
- 5) What data do you have access to and/or use to inform you about how to best support the children with whom you work?
- 6) How do you become aware of the individualized child needs in order to best work with them in the classroom?
- 7) How do special education teachers and the tutors collaborate in order to provide instructional support in the classrooms?
- 8) From your perspective, what strategies or practices are teachers using in their classrooms that are the most effective?
- 9) What do you think is working well at Concord Integrated Preschool?
- 10) What are some challenges and solutions to improving the Concord Integrated Preschool program?

**Appendix D- Therapist & Related Service Providers Focus Group Questions**



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## **Concord Integrated Preschool Special Education Review Therapists & Related Service Providers**

### **Background:**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your role at the Concord Integrated Preschool?
3. How long have you been working at the Integrated Preschool?
4. How long in your particular role?
5. What other roles have you had in your career?

### **Programming**

- 1) 1) What are your primary roles as a therapist or related service provider?
  - a. How do you support children's language needs?
  - b. How do you support the children's social emotional needs?
  - c. How do you support the children's pre-academic needs?
- 2) Please describe some of the individualized supports that you provide to children who struggle with the language development, social emotional development and pre-academic skill development.
  - a. What strategies or programming is available to support individualized student needs?
  - b. How do you determine if these supports are effective?
- 3) What is your role in transitional IEP development?
- 4) What is the current decision-making model for determining special education services and/or classes at the integrated preschool?
  - a. How are program placement decisions made to meet individual student needs?
- 5) How do you know that the program being implemented is effective?
- 6) What do you think is working well at Concord Integrated Preschool?
- 7) What are some challenges and solutions to improving the Concord Integrated Preschool program?

## Appendix F- Teacher Focus Group Questions

### Concord Integrated Preschool

### Special Education Review

### Teaching Staff

#### Background:

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been teaching at Concord Integrated Preschool?
3. What other jobs/roles have you had prior to teaching in the Integrated Preschool?

#### Programming:

1. Please tell us about the current programming at the Concord Integrated Preschool.
  - a. What do services for preschoolers with IEPs look like?
  - b. What is your role in providing special education services?
  - c. How are services individualized to meet specific students' needs?
2. What does the instructional practice look like across the program?
  - a. What drives your instructional planning?
  - b. How is instruction and programming differentiated to address
    - i. Language needs
    - ii. Social emotional needs
    - iii. Pre-academic needs
4. How are you measuring progress and the effectiveness of your program in the following areas?
  - a. Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships)
  - b. Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (language and literacy)
  - c. Use of appropriate behaviors to meet needs
5. What tools or processes do you use to monitor and measure progress?
  - a. How frequently do you report progress to parents?
6. How would you describe family engagement at Concord Integrated Preschool?
  - a. How are you engaging effectively with families?
  - b. What challenges do you encounter when engaging families?
7. What is your role in the transitional IEP development?
8. What is the current decision-making model for determining special education services and/or classes at the integrated preschool?
  - a. How are program placement decisions made to meet individual student needs?
9. What type of support (professional development opportunities and/or job embedded support (PLC team, grade/subject team, coaching/mentoring) do you receive to support your professional learning?
10. What do you think is working well at Concord Integrated Preschool?
11. What are some challenges and solutions to improving the Concord Integrated Preschool program?



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**Appendix G- Special Education Review Schedule**  
**Concord Integrated Preschool**  
**Special Education Review Schedule**  
**February 27, 2019**

<b>Wed., February 27th</b>	<b>Program/Group</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Other</b>
8:30-9:00 (30 min)	Orientation to school		
9:00-10:00 (60min)	Parent Focus Group		
10:00-11:00 (60 min)	AM Classes (2 classes) 10:00 Jen 10:30 Carla		
11:00-11:30 (30 min)	Full Day Class (2 classes) Nancy		
11:45-12:15 (30 min)	Focus Group Tutors		
12:15-12:45 (30 min)	Lunch		
12:45 1:30 (45 min)	PM class (2 classes) Jen Carla		
1:30-2:00 (30 min)	Full Day Class (2 classes) Christine		
2:00-3:00 (60 min)	Related Service Providers Focus Group		
3:00-4:00 (60 min)	Teachers Focus Group		
4:00-4:15 (15 min)	Debrief		

