

**Concord Public Schools
Special Education Review**

Submitted to:

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Concord Public Schools
Special Education Program Review
Executive Summary

This executive summary presents major findings about the current program practices for students with disabilities and other struggling learners at Concord Public Schools, with a focus on adequacy of the current continuum of services in meeting the needs of students with disabilities and determining the effectiveness of general and special education intervention programming. Findings are based on document and extant data reviews; surveys of school staff; focus group interviews with general education teachers, special educators, tutors, guidance counselors, school psychologists, intervention program staff, and parents; and classroom observations of a purposeful sample of 56 classrooms. WestEd, the external program reviewer, organized the findings and recommendations by the themes that emerged during analysis.

Overall, Concord Public Schools has many intervention programs, a large staff, and engaged students and families. Staff are caring and committed to providing students with the best learning experiences and supports. Nearly all students receive core instruction in the general education classroom with various models of inclusive support from the special education teachers. Case managers and special education tutors provide homework support, general education interventions, and targeted special education supports at both the elementary level in intervention groups and at the middle school in supplemental classes. During some of the elementary focus groups and the observations, the variability of instruction within a grade level became a point of discussion. The issue of the district not having a district adopted English Language Arts curriculum became a theme. This inconsistency across classrooms and the district, with some schools implementing a wide variety of curricula aligned to the MA DESE Model Curriculum Units and others providing more teacher identified curricula contributes to the lack of consistency in instruction across the district. While elementary classroom teachers use their knowledge and pedagogy to teach core content, due to the lack of standards posted or referred to during instruction, it was difficult to identify the connection to the standards or a consistent system of supports for students who struggle with mastery of the standards. At each school, the climate was positive, making it evident that social emotional learning is recognized. The staff was also found to be professional, friendly, and collegial. However, during focus groups and classroom observations, the lack of a defined role for special education teachers and special education tutors was noted as a theme. There is boundless evidence of welcoming all students, including those with disabilities, as valuable members of the school community. WestEd offers commendations and recommendations that acknowledge strengths and areas for improvement across the thematic areas.

COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations

- Staff are professional, very caring, well educated, and extremely student focused.
- Many special education tutors have an education background.
- Special education tutors are offered a variety of training opportunities.
- Special education teachers receive training as requested as well as required and on-demand training opportunities.
- Parents are relatively pleased with staff, instruction, and the outcomes of Concord Public Schools special education programming.
- Staff provide a wide array of services to all students, including those with IEPs, supporting a very strong inclusive environment.
- The schools have a high number of staff members and a small student-to-staff ratio.
- The staff make a concerted effort to help struggling learners in a variety of ways.
- During interviews, staff listed a large number and variety of intervention programs that they implement.
- The direct instruction for students with disabilities that was seen was specially designed, and individualized.
- Efforts are underway to widen the continuum of placements and variety of services that are available in district for students with disabilities.

Concord Public Schools Initial Recommendations

Provide specially designed, direct instruction in special education classes for more students

- There are pockets of instructional opportunities to provide direct special education instruction in the special education programs in Concord Public Schools. Some pull-out at the elementary as part of a school-wide intervention model and core replacement classes in ELA and Math provided at the middle school were identified, but instruction in the learning center model at the middle schools is almost exclusively focused on homework or classroom assignment completion with some of these same expectations at the elementary level. This support is provided by either special educators or tutors on a one-to-one or very small group basis. In many of the special education learning center classrooms, especially at the middle school, tutors and teachers monitor students working on classroom assignments rather than being able to provide direct skills based instruction. . Only students in replacement classes at the middle school, or in a pull-out intervention group receive targeted skills-based instruction in ELA and math. While some schools and some classes were seen providing direct skill instruction, there was a lack of consistency seen across the district. Schools that had a well-defined MTSS or RTI framework were able to provide direct instruction pull-out time that did not interfere with general education core instruction. Schools that did not have a systemic process for providing intervention either attempt to provide the intervention in the general education classroom or pulled students out during their core instructional time.

The district does have a variety of research-based programs that teachers can use, including Wilson Reading, Just Words, Visualizing and Verbalizing, Read Naturally, Empower Writing, Leveled Literacy, Literacy Collaborative, EveryDay Math 4 and Touch Math. A consistent application of these programs was neither observed or identified during teacher focus groups. More opportunities for direct skill instruction are needed using these and other research-based interventions, rather than homework or class work help, so that students with IEPs can become independent learners.

Change scheduling of special education staff

- In many cases the student-to-teacher ratio in learning centers included more staff than students and in other pull-out classes the ratio was lower than 3:1. Direct instruction classes utilizing evidence-based instructional programs and practices can have a much higher student-to-teacher ratio and still result in positive academic skill gains. Increasing student-to-teacher ratio in direct instruction sections will free up special education teachers to be scheduled regularly in co-taught classes to support students with generalization of skills in the general education setting.

Change the cultural expectations of the learning center

- Change the cultural expectation, especially at the middle school that special education for the majority of students is intended for homework completion. General education teachers, students, and parents rely on the special education tutors and teachers to help students with IEPs complete classroom and homework assignments. With this culture in place, special educators do not have the opportunity to directly teach skills that will meet IEP goals and help students become more independent.
- The learning center model at the middle school level may need to be discontinued so that special educators can provide evidence-based instruction to students during time designated as special education. Direct special education instruction should be targeted to develop skills identified in the IEP that will impact student success across the content areas in reading, writing, math and executive function skills.

Improve co-teaching with general and special educators

- Only a few special educators or case managers were observed co-teaching although they are assigned to general education classes for the majority of the day. At the middle school, special educators were sometimes present in the general education classroom, but they were observed only providing assistance to students who were struggling and not truly co-teaching. At the elementary level, while special education teachers are assigned to every grade level, no co-teaching was observed.

- General and special education co-teaching teams need professional development to develop strong co-teaching relationships the development of common expectations and common planning time.
- Infrastructure around scheduling must be developed by site administrators so that general and special education co-teaching teams have time to co-plan instruction providing teachers with the opportunity to provide highly scaffolded instruction for students with IEPs in their general education classrooms.
- Specially designed instruction in a co-taught classroom should be provided most frequently through small-group instruction, with both teachers leading a group, or teaming (i.e., both teachers share instruction to the whole group). Less often, other forms of co-teaching are appropriate (i.e., station teaching, one teach-one observe [this requires follow through on data collected during observation], alternative teaching, or one teach-one assist [roles should switch often]). When instructing in small groups, the instruction should be tailored in flexible groups¹.

Provide clear expectations for tutors under the direction of special education teachers

- Special education tutors are often relied upon to provide classroom supports on the fly to students with IEPs in their general education classrooms, particularly at the middle school level. Middle school tutors report that have little to no instructional planning time with their special education teachers or the general education teachers with whom they work. Some elementary schools have tutors scheduled so that they can plan adaptations or accommodations to support students in their lessons in the general education class, but this is an inconsistent practice across the district tutors at the middle and all the elementary schools need instructional planning time with the teachers with whom they work.
- Although tutors are offered a variety of training opportunities, they frequently are unable to attend. While some do receive training with the teaching staff at the elementary level, middle school tutors reported lack of access to the same training as teaching staff on new curriculum and new technology, making it difficult to support students in their learning in these areas. Middle school tutors should receive training on curriculum and technology to provide in-class supports to students on IEPs.
- In some cases, tutors provide special education supports under the direct supervision of their special education teachers where they are provided opportunities to meet and plan regularly. Where there is a lack of common planning or collaboration time, they are often making decisions about content and instruction without the benefit of special education teachers. Tutors as paraprofessionals should not plan instruction or be solely responsible for implementing a student's special education instruction for long periods of time.

¹ See: <http://www.marilynfriend.com/approaches.htm>.

- Tutors requested training on how to develop curriculum adaptations, support social emotional health and functional skills to support students in the grade-level classroom.

Identify and implement an ELA curriculum district-wide

- Some staff reported using teacher developed English language arts lessons aligned to the standards at both the elementary and middle school. District-wide Wilson Foundations has been implemented as an intervention and at Alcott, it is being used as a core curriculum across grades K-3 in addition to Leveled Literacy instruction aligned to the MA DESE standards in the Model Curriculum Units. Other curricula mentioned was Fountas and Pinnell with Leveled Literacy guided reading groups, the Literacy Collaborative, Reading A-Z, Lexile reading, Wilson Reading, Lucy Caulkins writing curriculum and Empower for writing. While the district has a variety of curricular options available, the lack of common ELA curriculum across the district was identified as a point of concern for staff at several elementary schools. They identified that fact that there is now a common math curriculum with embedded interventions to be a positive move for the district in providing consistency in instruction across the schools.
- Classroom observations were not able to identify evidence of standards alignment of ELA instruction since standards were not posted or referred to during instruction. Due to this inability to identify the standards, the ELA instruction often seemed to be activity focused rather than standards based with a lack of connection between the activities seen in small group or center-based instruction. In some schools few connections were seen between what was taught within a grade level.
- Because special education students need high quality general education instruction, interventions should align with core curriculum, and special education students' goals must address progress in the general education curriculum, to ensure common learning experiences across the schools, especially the elementary schools, investigate and purchase an ELA curriculum aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- Provide ongoing training and coaching on the implementation of the new ELA curriculum for both general and special educators.

General and special education intervention instruction should focus on skills that are aligned to the standards in ELA classes

- Teachers reported using the supplemental intervention materials for instruction in math, in ELA both in general and special education, there seemed to be a lack of connection between activities in intervention and the classroom instruction. A greater connection was seen at the middle school where some general education intervention classes were aligned with the grade level ELA curriculum based on observations of both types of classes. While one elementary school reported using flexible grouping for ELA instruction, where all students are provided instruction and intervention during the ELA block, at two elementary schools, small group

instruction observed did not seem aligned to the instruction observed in the core ELA classroom.

- Once a standards-aligned ELA curriculum is identified and implemented, intervention instruction should become aligned to the core instruction. Utilizing the intervention materials associated with the curriculum is a good place to start.

Implement a district-wide (RTI) MTSS Framework of Instruction and Supports

- There is no district-wide RTI framework and appears to be a lack of understanding of the RTI or MTSS framework. Each school's version of RTI differs with various processes for entering or exiting interventions as well as the interventions that are provided.
- There is lack of clarity on the difference between core curriculum and tiered interventions. Some staff identified small group instruction in their own classes during core instruction as Tier 2, others identified intervention pull-out as Tier 2. A few mentioned that they do RTI in their own classrooms but were unable to articulate what interventions they provided, meaning that some staff consider supplemental intervention.
- While flexible grouping was observed in one elementary school and small group intervention and pull out interventions were seen in the other two schools, differentiation in the core was typically seen to be provided through the pull-out of small groups rather than instructional practices such as small skills-based groups in the core.
- District-wide professional learning is needed beginning at the district and school site leadership level to implement a true system of supports through the MTSS framework across the district.

Develop district-wide policies, practices, and procedures around the intersection of general and special education services

- There is a lack of consistency across the district around the teaching role of special education teachers in each school's special educational programming. Due to local site control, the role of the special educator differs from school to school and is not clear to general education staff or parents. Many parents and general education teachers have an expectation that special educators should help students get work done rather than provide specially designed academic instruction. General educators who have several students with IEPs in their classrooms do not feel supported nor equipped to meet the learning needs of those students without in-class special education supports such as co-teaching. While some have special education tutor support, there is a common practice in the district that principals pull tutors to substitute for absent general educators, so tutors are frequently missing from the general education classes they are intended to support.

- Develop policies on the expected role of special education staff in direct instruction for students with IEPs and in-class supports through co-teaching, and tutor support either in special education direct instruction classes or in general education classes where they serve as in-class supports.

Provide a middle school department chair

- Although CPS has a small student-to-teacher ratio, the middle school lacks onsite special education leadership since there is no department chair for special education. This lack of readily available special education leadership leads to further misinterpretation of special education and the work of case managers since this important avenue of communication and collaboration with other department chairs cannot occur. Parents complain that they are unable to identify who the leader is, identifying lack of clarity on who to go to with their concerns. With no department chair, all case managers must problem solve on their own pulling them away from direct instructional time with students. Bigger issues must be elevated to the district level, taking time and effort from district staff.
- Repurpose a middle school special educator to be the special education department chair. Provide roles and responsibilities as well as training or shadowing of the role of special education department chair from the high school, if willing.

Create district wide professional learning expectations to support data-based instructional planning across grades and departments.

- While some schools have collaborative planning time, or use shared Team Drive to collaboratively plan instruction, due to local site control, there is a lack of consistency of collaboration structures available at each school site. Each school has some level of problem solving teams, where teachers meet to discuss students, only some schools have a structure for data-based instructional planning within grade level teams or departments that include special educators in instructional planning to support instructional adaptations for students with IEPs.
- Develop a district wide expectation that teacher planning time be used for instructional planning through professional learning communities (PLC)s. Provide training on the use of protocols and practices that support the implementation of Universal Design for Learning and differentiated supports in the classroom.

Provide coordinated special education and general education interventions

- Classroom instruction for students with disabilities and other struggling learners especially at the elementary level is fragmented due to numerous regular pull-outs. Due to little co-teaching support, or in-class supports students with IEPs seem to be pulled from general education core instruction for learning center, special education supports, related services, and behavioral interventions. This fragmentation of their instruction is only detrimental to students in closing achievement gaps and leads to greater skill gaps related to lack of core instruction.

- Special education supports should be provided in the general education classroom using a co-teaching model or using school-wide intervention blocks rather than pulling students out of core instruction time.
- Scheduling of related services and other pull-out interventions should be aligned to school-wide intervention times and not during core instruction.

Provide a full array of special education services

- Currently there is a limited array of supports available for students who have IEPs at the elementary level. While there are classes to support student with more significant disabilities like the PreK-8 BCBA class and a few others for more significant disabilities, students with high incidence disabilities do not have a full continuum of options. While it is commendable that the district supports such a strong inclusion program, providing in-class supports from tutors, in-class supports from special educators and pull out intervention supports, students with disabilities in need of greater supports for their academic core content need to have access to specially designed academic instruction from a special educator. Staffing at each site is adequate to provide a half day substantially separate program for students in need of more intensive special education support.
- Continue the commendable initiative of the Thoreau speech and language focused separate placement to provide a full array of special education services at both the elementary and middle school level so that students who need more than pull-out supports can access the specially designed instruction that they need from special educators to support academic, functional, and behavioral IEP goals.
- Begin with small steps, like the Thoreau program, collect data on implementation and what is working, then scale up what works to other grade levels and schools.

Leverage funding

- Considering staffing and out-of-district placement costs related to other staffing and intervention findings (i.e., high costs, need for full array of services) reallocate staffing funds to provide a wider continuum of special education placements (e.g., full time general education with special education consultation, co-teaching, pull out for <20% of the day, pull out for <40% of the day, self-contained special education) and a full array of special education services (e.g., specially designed instruction, interventions backed by research to improve results for students with specific disabilities, executive functioning training, compensation skills training).
- Ensure that Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds are spent for the educational benefit of students with disabilities. IDEA requires that funds be used only for “allowable” costs as described in the law (CFR 34 §300.202), except in very narrow

circumstances, such as setting aside federal IDEA funds for Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) (CFR 34 §300.226).

Identify ways to enhance communication with families

- While communication processes between the family and school differ significantly from school to school with frequent lengthy personal communication from some schools and reportedly little communication from others, there is a need for consistent district wide communications expectations and practices. Special education teachers claimed that they spend an inordinate amount of time communicating with parents.
- Since this communication time takes time away from direct student instruction, it may be beneficial to reduce the amount of personal communication with families. Frequent all-family communications along with an out-of-office reply, sharing with parents that teachers are working directly with their students, could be helpful in breaking the habit of expecting immediate communication from teaching staff.
- Teachers can communicate that they will respond to email at a specific time each day, so that parents do not expect immediate responses, and should inform them that it may take more than 24 hours. Due to a culture that expects a high level of school involvement with their children and the multiple services they receive, it would be beneficial to move away from this good practice that is costly to professionals' time.

Provide clarification district-wide on special education eligibility requirements

- The majority of the IEPs reviewed did not appear to provide enough data to indicate a need for special education services. The mismatch of services to identified disabilities suggest that students may be inappropriately identified as needing special education services when they may not truly qualify.
- While there is evidence in some schools of data collection to drive targeted intervention particularly in general education, there is much less evidence of the use of that data to make both intervention special education decisions. Develop a consistent data-based decision-making process across the district that drives interventions in the general education prior to referral to special education services.
- Since some Massachusetts' special education categories, such as "Neurological", could be defined quite broadly, provide teachers, administrators, and psychometrists with clear descriptions and exemplars of qualifying students with disabilities under the various Massachusetts categories.
- Train special education providers on IEP development, specifically regarding matching strengths to evaluation data and matching evaluation data (including tests and data regarding general education performance and achievement toward goals) to the present levels of educational performance, goals, objectives, and accommodations.

- Conduct routine IEP reviews to determine themes or issues with identification, IEP accuracy and completeness, updated present levels of performance, and individualization of programs.

Concord Public Schools Special Education Program Review Full Report

Concord Public Schools contracted with WestEd in January 2018 to conduct a review of the Concord Public Schools Special Education Program and to provide the district with a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of their general education pre-referral interventions within an MTSS or RTI framework, special education programming within the current continuum of services, , cost-effectiveness and efficiency of current programming, as well as student outcomes as seen through varied perspectives. The onsite review occurred on March 20th, 28th and 29th and included 56 classroom observations, 17 focus groups, and 5 interviews to gain a broad perspective of the special education programming in CPS.

This final report provides recommendations for general education pre-referral intervention structures and special education services to meet the needs of all struggling learners. The term “WestEd” will refer to the evaluation team for this project. The terms “general education” and “regular education” will be used interchangeably.

This full report starts with background information about Concord Public Schools and its students and then describes the major evaluation questions and methodology used to collect evidence to answer those questions. Next, the findings section presents summaries of the collected evidence to answer each evaluation question and support recommendations intended to guide CPS special education programming and the district supported general education interventions toward a goal of providing cohesive support structures and interventions to all students including students receiving special education supports and services.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Concord Public Schools (CPS) supports their mission to:

. . . educate all students in becoming lifelong learners, creative thinkers, caring citizens and responsible contributors in a global society, by providing teaching staff and tutors to improve student learning with high quality instruction.

CPS employs 163 teachers in four schools serving students in PK-8 grade schools with an enrollment of 2,113. The teacher to student ratio is 13-1. Educator retention is high (98.6%) with an eight-year average of 97 percent.

CPS serves students from Concord and Boston. During the 2016-2017 school year, 76.6% of the student population were white, 6.7% Asian, 6.1% Hispanic and 4% African American. The multi-race, non-Hispanic population was 6.5%. English language learners comprised 2.6% of CPS's student population, which is much lower than the state average of 10.2 percent. Seventeen percent of CPS students were students with disabilities, which is equal to the state average. Almost 7% of the CPS population is economically disadvantaged compared to the state average of 32 percent.

CPS participates in Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO), a voluntary desegregation program for students who live in Boston and Springfield to attend suburban public schools. CPS enrolled 79 students of color who reside in Boston.

For the 2016-2017 school year, CPS served 69.8% of its students with IEPs in the general education classroom 80% or more of the day. Twenty percent of its students were served in the general education classroom for 40-79% of the day. Seven percent of students with disabilities participated in the general education classroom less than 40% of the day, and 3.4% were educated in out-of-district placements. CPS placement of students in each of these educational environments is lower than the state averages for the same placements with the exception of the inclusion (80% or more of the day) which is higher than the state average of 63.3 percent.

The schools are set in Concord, a historic town, 19 miles west of Boston and was settled in the 1600s. Concord's median household income in 2016 was \$150,180, while all of Massachusetts' was \$75,297.¹

According to the Massachusetts 2017 School Report card, CPS outscored the state average on the MCAS in both English language arts and mathematics for grades three through eight

In English language arts at the elementary level, CPS describes that, "students receive structured, multi-sensory instruction in the building blocks of reading and writing through guided and independent reading across all genres in every grade."

English language arts at the middle school is described as an integrated approach where students use critical and creative thinking skills while reading a variety of fictional and nonfictional texts. The CPS website describes that both grade groups use Levelled Literacy Intervention as an intervention for struggling students.

Mathematics at the elementary level uses *Everyday Mathematics, 4th edition* as their curriculum. The middle school describes their curriculum as designed to match students with their appropriate ability and is based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Mathematics.

2 Income data found at: <http://www.city-data.com/city/Concord-Massachusetts.html> on May 11, 2018.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology utilized in the evaluation study to collect data as evidence to answer the major evaluation questions and support recommendations. A chart of the evaluation questions and data sources is followed by a description of each method for collecting the data.

MAJOR EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND SOURCES OF DATA

The WestEd team addressed the major evaluation questions through a variety of means including document reviews; school and district accountability data including finance, academic achievement data; focus group and interview data; classroom observation data; survey data; and IEP review data. This information was used to provide supportive evidence for findings and recommendations regarding the general education interventions, continuum of special education services, cost efficiencies of special education programming, the effectiveness of general and special education practices in the support of students with disabilities, and professional development in the provision of special education services. The special education program review addressed the following questions.

1. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support:

- a. Is there a multi-tiered system of support in place to meet the academic and social emotional needs of all learners?
- b. Does the multi-tiered system of support have a data-based decision-making structure that uses data and to determine the effectiveness of interventions?
- c. Does the multi-tiered system of support have a means to provide differentiated instruction within the Tier 1 general education classroom?
- d. Does the multi-tiered system of support have criteria for entry and exit of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for academics and behavior?
- e. Does targeted instruction occur during the Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention time?
- f. Is there a clearly defined process for students who do not respond to general education intervention?
- g. Is there a clearly defined process for special education referral?
- h. Do students with disabilities have access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions?

2. Continuum of Services:

- h. What is the current model of special education services in the Concord Public Schools?

- i. Is the current organization of special education services the most effective means for providing services in inclusive settings while maintaining a full continuum of service delivery options for students with disabilities in Concord Public Schools?
- j. What is the continuum of services and support available to students with disabilities?
- k. What is the district's capacity to provide a full continuum of effective programs and services to meet the educational and related services needs of its students with disabilities?
- l. What is the overall method of delivery and quality of specific programs or types of service delivery models within the district?
- m. To what degree do students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs?
- n. What factors may be contributing to placement of students in out-of-district or segregated placements?
- o. To what degree does the district provide support for struggling students who do not have IEPs?

3. Finance:

- a. To what degree are resources being used in a cost-effective and efficient manner?
- b. In what ways might costs be reduced while continuing to maintain high quality programs and services?

4. Student Results/Outcomes:

- a. How are students with disabilities performing on state and/or district-wide assessments?
- b. To what degree are there discrepancies between students with disabilities and nondisabled peers on measures such as student achievement results, behavior and social emotional issues?
- c. Are skill gaps closing for students with disabilities receiving special education services?
- d. To what extent are there achievement level differences among students with disabilities receiving different levels of special education services?

5. Professional Development:

- a. What are the professional development needs of staff within the district?
- b. What should be the district's priorities for professional development for general and special education teachers and staff?

The following chart presents the major evaluation questions and the sources of data that provided supportive evidence for findings. Multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data that produce similar findings build confidence that the findings are accurate.

Major Evaluation Questions and Data Sources by Focus Area	Documents	Assessment Data	Focus Groups	Surveys	Classroom Observations
1. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support					
● Is there a multi-tiered system of support in place to meet the academic and social emotional needs of all learners?			*	*	*
● Does the multi-tiered system of support have a data-based decision-making structure that uses data and to determine the effectiveness of interventions?			*	*	
● Does the multi-tiered system of support have a means to provide differentiated instruction within the Tier 1 general education classroom?					*
● Does the multi-tiered system of support have criteria for entry and exit of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for academics and behavior?			*	*	
● Does targeted instruction occur during the Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention time?			*	*	*
● Is there a clearly defined process for students who do not respond to general education intervention?			*		
● Is there a clearly defined process for special education referral?	*		*		
● Do students with disabilities have access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions?			*		*
2. Continuum of Services					
● What is the current model of special education services in the Concord Public Schools?	*		*	*	*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the current organization of special education services the most effective means for providing services in inclusive settings while maintaining a full continuum of service delivery options for students with disabilities in Concord Public Schools? 	*		*	*	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the continuum of services and support available to students with disabilities? 			*	*	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the district's capacity to provide a full continuum of effective programs and services to meet the educational and related services needs of its students with disabilities? 	*		*		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the overall method of delivery and quality of specific programs or types of service delivery models within the district? 			*		*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what degree do students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs. 			*		*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What factors may be contributing to placement of students in out-of-district or segregated placements? 	*		*	*	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what degree does the district provide support for struggling students who do not have IEPs 			*	*	*
3. Finance					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what degree are resources being used in a cost-effective and efficient manner? 	*		*		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways might costs be reduced while continuing to maintain high quality programs and services? 	*				
4. Student Results/Outcomes					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are students with disabilities performing on state and/or district-wide assessments? 		*			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what degree are there discrepancies between students with disabilities and nondisabled peers on measures such as student achievement results, behavior and social emotional issues? 		*			

● Are skill gaps closing for students with disabilities receiving special education services?		*			
● To what extent are there achievement level differences among students with disabilities receiving different levels of special education services?		*			
5. Professional Development					
● What are the professional development needs of staff within the district?			*	*	
● What should be the district's priorities for professional development for general and special education teachers and staff?			*	*	

Data Collection

Protocols for data collection were developed to address each of the study questions. Some protocols were designed to specifically answer the same questions across various stakeholder groups and through different methods. For instance, most of the protocols sought answers to the use of a cohesive RTI framework based on common core curriculum. This data collection practice is used to triangulate qualitative data to ensure the most valid information on which to make findings and recommendations. Each of the protocols was reviewed by CPS staff for quality, comprehensiveness, and focus on the study questions.

Surveys were sent to 192 elementary staff, 89 middle school staff, 356 parents of special education elementary students, and 210 parents of special education middle schoolers. Survey responses may be somewhat skewed due to self-selection for participation. However high response rates can alleviate this concern to a large degree. Staff survey response rates were relatively high with 60.5% of middle school staff and 44% of elementary staff responding. Parent survey response rates came in at 9.5% for middle school and 11% for elementary parents. A further concern with the parent surveys is that some responses on the elementary parent survey indicated that respondents were middle school parents. Given this information, many parent survey findings should be considered district wide rather than separating by grade levels.

Staff focus groups and individual interviews were well attended with nearly all staff members who principals required to attend in attendance. Parent focus groups may have suffered from self-selection bias, meaning that parents with issues to discuss are typically those who attend focus groups.

FINDINGS

This section presents findings by data source (documents, student achievement data, surveys, focus groups, and observations) and a summary of findings organized by the evaluation questions.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

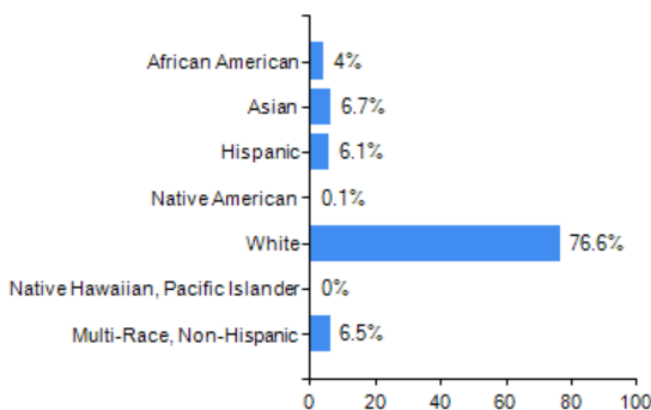
School and District Accountability

Concord Public Schools has an enrollment of 2,113 in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 8, with a student-to-teacher ratio of 13 to 1. One hundred percent of the teachers are highly qualified for the content areas in which they teach. Of the 220 students enrolled in Kindergarten, 39 were considered high needs, 14 economically disadvantaged, 7 limited English proficient, 22 students with disabilities, seven African American, 12 Asian, 18 Hispanic, 19 multi-race non-Hispanic, and 164 white.

Most students in CPS are white, 76.6% of the student population, which is greater than the statewide average of 60.1 percent. The next largest group in CPS is Asian with 6.7% which is similar to the statewide average of 6.9 percent. African American students make up 4% of the

population which is smaller than the statewide average of nine percent. Hispanic students make up 6.1% which is much smaller than the statewide average of 20 percent. The multi-race, non-Hispanic population of 6.5 % is larger than the state average of 3.6 percent. This data reflects limited cultural and ethnic diversity at CPS.

Student Race and Ethnicity



Most schools in Massachusetts are assigned a level from 1-5 as part of the statewide accountability system. Those schools meeting their proficiency gap-narrowing goals are assigned Level 1 and the lowest performing schools are assigned to Levels 4 and 5 in the Progress and Performance Index (PPI). A district is typically assigned a level based on the level of its lowest performing school. A small number of schools each year will not be classified into a level: that is, small schools, schools ending in grades 1 or 2, new schools, or schools that were substantially reconfigured. CPS was not classified due to changes in the state assessments used in the last two years.

CPS is a highly proficient district. CPS students met or exceeded expectations at a much higher rate than the state average on all MCAS tests across grade levels. Nearly all students with disabilities participate in all MCAS tests, with participation rates of 100% in most tests and the lowest participation rate of 97 percent. Students with disabilities met or exceeded expectations in CPS at a much higher rate across grade levels in both English and math than the state averages. In grades 3-8 English, 37% of CPS students with disabilities met or exceeded expectations, while only 13% did across the state. In grades 3-8 math, 39% of CPS students with disabilities met or exceeded expectations, while only 14% did across the state.

In reviewing other indicators related to school accountability, the following are findings related to each area.

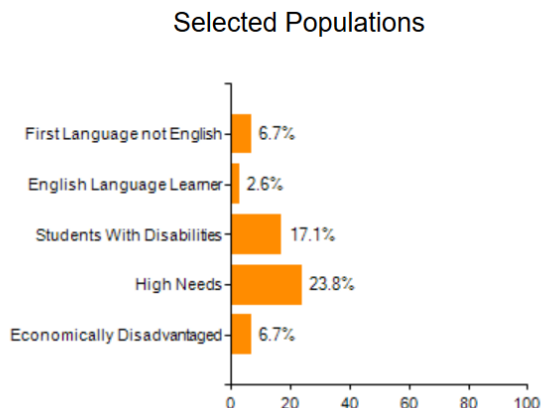
Attendance

The attendance rate at CPS of 96.3 % is higher than the state average of 94.6%. The average numbers of days absent in CPS of 6.5 is lower than the state rate of 9.3 days per year. Chronic absenteeism at CPS is 4.1% while the state rate is 13.5 percent. CPS sees 2.9 unexcused absences average per student while the state sees 15.8.

Selected Populations

Students with disabilities make up 17.1% of the student population at CPS. This is slightly below the state average of 17.7 percent. The high needs population at CPS of 23.8% is much also lower than the state average of 46.6 percent. Statewide the English language learner population is 10.2%, while at CPS the ELL population is 2.6%, and students whose first language is not English at CPS is only 6.7% as opposed to the statewide population of more than 20 percent. CPS also has

a lower percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged at 6.7% compared to the statewide average at 32 percent. Compared to the statewide compilation of special population, except for students with disabilities (SWD), the percentages are considerably lower than the state average in all areas. The SWD population is also lower than the state average, but only slightly. This 17.1% of the student population identified as students with disabilities only reflects students with IEPs and does not include those students who are on 504 plans.



Discipline

Data on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) website reflect that there have been 19 students disciplined across the different subgroups, seven of which were students with disabilities. One and a half percent of the disciplined students with disabilities were given in-school suspension and .9% were given out-of-school suspension. None were expelled, moved to an alternate setting, or reported as an emergency removal.

Summary of Accountability Documentation

The review of documents on the MA DESE School and District Profiles website provided a picture of a successful district on many fronts. The district boasts a highly qualified teaching staff with a low student to teacher ratio. CPS is one of the higher performing schools in the state across grade levels, content areas, and for the students with disabilities subgroup. Between 97 and 100% of the students with disabilities population participated in the statewide assessment. The district reflects higher attendance rates than the state average and high graduation rates for all student populations including students with disabilities and high needs. Based on this document review, Concord Public Schools is a highly successful district, reflecting supports that allow all students to succeed academically.

CONCORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS SPECIAL EDUCATION FISCAL OVERVIEW

The purpose of the financial review was to determine the extent to which Concord Public Schools' funding system supports quality special education programming and to consider potential fiscal efficiencies. Documents reviewed for the financial section of this review include the Superintendent's FY 2018 Proposed Budget book found on the Concord Public Schools website and databases on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) website.

To determine the extent that Concord Public Schools' funding supports quality special education programming, WestEd has included a comparison of Concord's budget, costs, expenditures, and staffing levels to other similarly situated districts in Massachusetts.

COMPARISON DISTRICTS

Given the available data, it is difficult to compare some features of financial systems across districts. Whereas Concord Public Schools breaks out several aspects of special education costs, other districts may not, or may break out different aspects, making some items discussed in the Concord financial overview impossible to compare across districts. However, there are some pertinent areas that all districts report to DESE. Most of these areas will be compared across nine districts including Concord. Note that when comparing across districts, WestEd used the 2016-2017 data because it is the latest data reported on the DESE website for the maximum number of variables to be compared across districts. When discussing CPS only we were able to use 2017-2018 data.

The Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (MA DESE) provides a database that automatically selects comparable districts based on similarity to Concord Public Schools using the criteria of grade span, enrollment, and special populations (economic disadvantage, students with disabilities [SWD], and English language learners [ELL]). DESE's database selected the following comparison districts for Concord: Kingston, Lincoln, Middleton, Norfolk, Northborough, Southborough, Sudbury, and Wrentham.

Figure A describes Concord's and the comparison districts' school year 2016-17 demographics on enrollment, special populations, and English language arts, math, and science proficiency based on the MCAS². Concord had the second highest enrollment, was mid-range in percentage of students who were economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and English language learners. The DESE website did not report MCAS proficiency levels for four of the nine districts, including Concord.

District	Total Enrollment	Economic Disadvantage %	SWD%	ELL%	ELA % proficient or higher	Math % proficient or higher	Science % proficient or higher
Concord	2,108	5.5	16.6	1.9			
Kingston	1,016	16.1	16.5	1.5			
Lincoln	1,200	5.0	17.8	2.7	80	68	65
Middleton	699	7.9	18.9	1.1			
Norfolk	937	6.2	14.5	1.8	83	77	75
Northborough	1,713	9.7	18.2	5.1	77	67	62
Southborough	1,295	3.9	14.1	6.1	87	83	71
Sudbury	2,803	5.0	14.9	1.1			
Wrentham	1,031	9.1	15.0	1.3	78	77	74

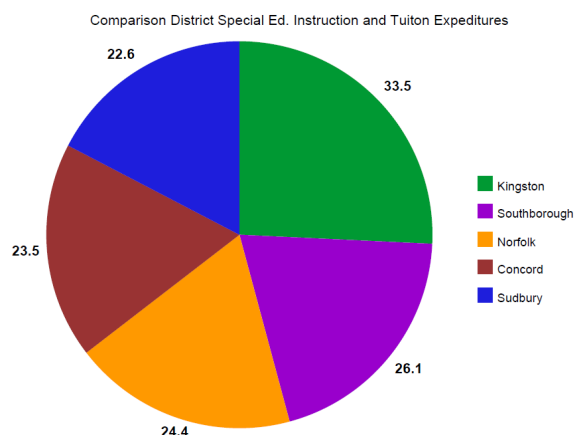
Figure A: Comparison District Demographics

³ School year 2016-17 data is the latest data reported on the DESE website for the maximum number of variables to be compared across districts.

EXPENDITURES

Figure B is based on the latest reported data on the MA DESE website³ and includes the high, low, and mid-range districts. The percentage of total budget Concord Public Schools expended on special education, at 23.5%, is higher than 5 out of the 9 comparison districts and falls in the mid-range.

Figure B



In reviewing past expenditures, Concord Public Schools has increased the percentage of the total school budget spent on special education by two percentage points over the 10 years reported. The percentage has hovered around 20% for the past 10 years.

Figure C shows the span of combined expenditures across the top, middle, and low spending comparison districts. Concord Public Schools expended \$22,486 per student with disabilities out of their combined in-district

special education instructional expenditures and their out-of-district tuition, not counting transportation and personnel benefits. This expenditure also does not include funds that are expended for all students, including students with disabilities, for instance benefits that students with disabilities are afforded through general education. Concord's expenditure is slightly higher than the mid-range districts. The expenditures per student with disabilities across the comparison districts ranged from a high of \$30,020 to a low of \$7,879.

District	2016-17 Child Count	Combined Special Education Expenditures (From Figure B)	Special Education Expenditures Per Student with Disabilities
Southborough	185	5,553,708	\$30,020
Concord	355	7,980,796	\$22,486
Sudbury	419	8,460,429	\$20,191
Lincoln	217	1,709,897	\$7,879

Figure C: Comparison District Per Student with a Disability Expenditure

Not counting special education costs for out-of-district tuition for private and out-of-state placements, Figure D shows that Concord's expenditures for special education are also higher than the mid-range comparison districts. Given these parameters, the expenditures per in-district student with disabilities decrease from \$22,486 to \$17,172.

⁴DESE website, Special Education Expenditure Trends: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/>, Special Education Direct Expenditure Trends

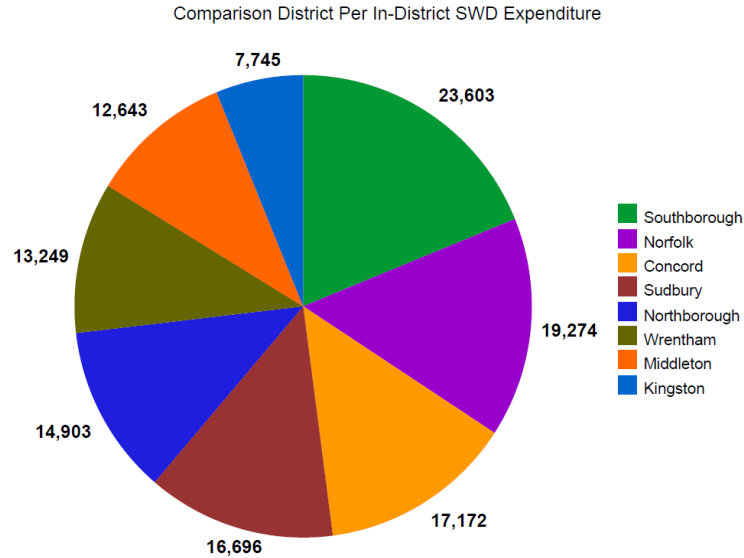


Figure D: Comparison District Per In-District Student with Disability Expenditure in Dollars

STAFFING

MA DESE website provided student to teacher ratio information without disaggregating special education teachers. Figure E shows student to teacher ratios, by district. Out of the nine comparison districts, Concord ranked 5th, mid-range, for student to teacher ratio, with a 13-1 ratio.

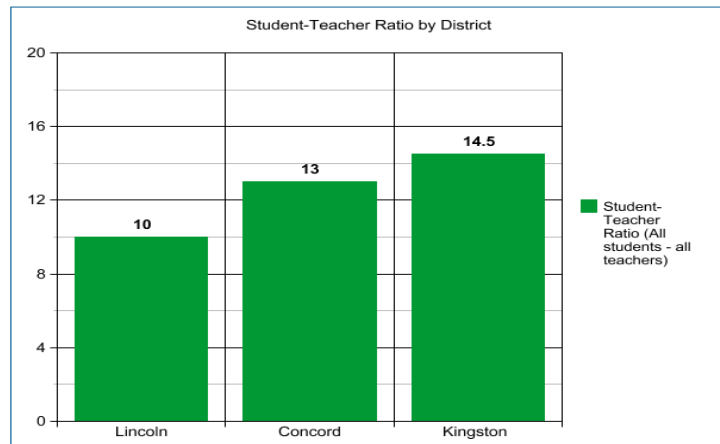


Figure E

Figure F shows the ratio of students with disabilities to special education teachers, extrapolated from MA DESE website information. DESE reports the total child counts (SWD) and the out-of-district child count. This data was used to determine the total number of in-district students with disabilities. DESE also provided the numbers of special education teachers per district. We divided the number of in-district students with disabilities by the number of special education teachers to determine this ratio. Other than the outlier of Sudbury (not shown), Concord has the highest student-with-disability to special-education-teacher ratio, with 15.5-1.

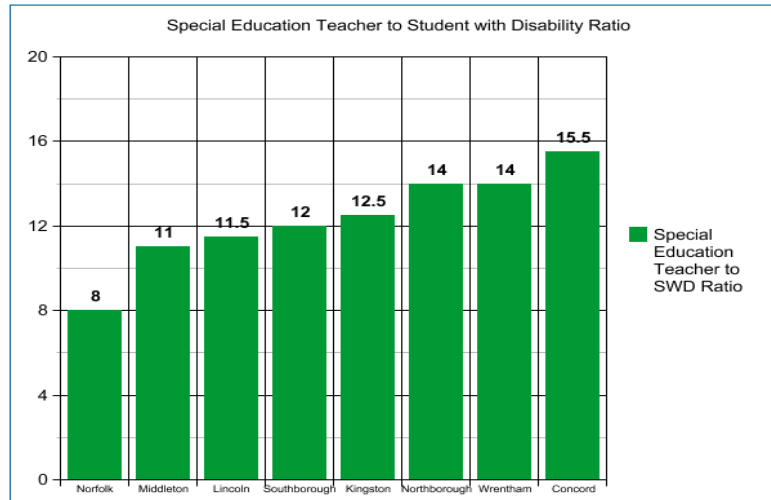


Figure F

The DESE website also provided average teacher salaries across the comparison districts. Figure G shows that Concord has the highest teacher salary by more than \$13,000 than the closest next comparison district. The range of average teacher salary is from a high of Concord's \$95,732 to a low of \$70,237.

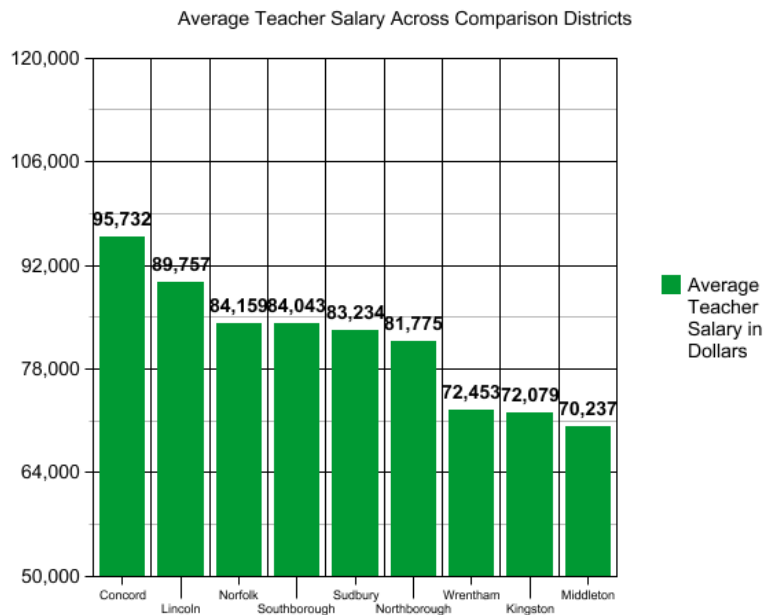


Figure G

BUDGETING

According to the Concord Public Schools Superintendent's FY 2018 Budget book, the 2017 special education budget was comprised of the following:⁴

Code	Program Area	Budgeted Amount
1200	Special Education/Elementary (salaries and non-salaries)	\$4,792,801
1201	Special Education/Middle School (salaries and non-salaries)	\$2,762,628
4670	Special Education Transportation	\$ 474,184
	Total Special Education Budgeted Amount	\$8,029,613

Given the reported fall 2017 child count (SWD) of 367⁵, Concord budgeted \$21,880 per student with a disability from their special education budget. This amount cannot be compared to actual per student with disability expenditures for the prior year because that amount was derived without the special education transportation amount included.

However, the \$8,029,613 amount budgeted for special education can be compared to the amount budgeted for all students in Concord. The regular education budget for 2017, not including operations, administration, or fixed costs, was \$20,411,287, which translates to \$9,660 per pupil given the total Concord enrollment of 2,113 students. Students with disabilities also receive general education services. So, adding the amount budgeted per pupil (\$9,660) to the special education funds budgeted per student with disabilities (\$21,880), equals a total amount budgeted per student with disabilities of \$31,540. Students with disabilities' special education and regular education amount budgeted equals 31% of the total education budget, not including operations, administration, and fixed costs.

FISCAL DRIVERS

As is typically seen in Massachusetts' districts, cost drivers in special education in Concord appear to be teachers/staff salaries and out-of-district placements. According to the DESE website, not counting transportation costs, special education represents 23.5% of the overall expenditures for Concord and a per-student-with-disability cost of \$22,486. Per pupil expenditure for all students is reported at \$18,333.

Another way to look at special education costs is to consider Concord's budget for regular education and special education since students with disabilities also receive general education services. Considering all special education budget items (instructional and transportation) and all regular education items (instructional and transportation), educating students with disabilities accounts for 31% of the total instructional and transportation budget.

⁴ At the date of this report, final expenditures for FY 2017 were not available. Note that this child count is for 2017, not the 2016 child count used in the comparison of districts' expenditure section above.

⁵ http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/selectedpopulations.aspx

The 12 students with disabilities placed in private or out-of-state schools cost \$1,135,078, or an average of \$94,590 per student. We compared this amount to the budgeted \$31,540 per in-district student with disability (again, including both general education and special education costs for students with disabilities) to determine that private and out-of-state students with disabilities cost approximately \$63,050 more than what is budgeted for in-district students with disabilities.

IEP REVIEW

Although WestEd conducted only an abbreviated IEP review of eight IEPs from grades two through eight, some themes were identified. Also, initial insights were gleaned that linked with program review findings.

First, six of the eight IEPs did not appear to provide enough data to indicate a need for special education services. While one IEP provided data regarding low-average cognitive ability, the identification as ‘neurological’ did not appear appropriate given the average reading, writing, communication, and math scores. No other data was provided to support that the student’s cognitive ability affected educational benefit. Similarly, six of the eight IEPs did not appear to consider strengths and evaluation results when developing goals and objectives. For instance, one IEP provided supporting data for strong language skills, above average cognitive ability, and clinically significant or at-risk behavior and social emotional issues. However, the IEP goals were in language, writing and mindfulness through a speech/language delivery model. While mindfulness might be one method to address at-risk behavior or social emotional issues, the only significant issues, no data suggests that special education services in writing is warranted. Another IEP for a “health” disability mentioned ADHD but did not provide data to support this. This same IEP mentioned a visual disability that impacts education, but the rest of the IEP did not address how to provide special education services to address that disability.

Most of the IEPs provided for Extended School Year (ESY) and for the same amount of time, suggesting that it is routinely offered and not individualized. ESY must be based on the unique nature of any specially designed instruction or related services, or if the student is likely to demonstrate substantial regression due to a break. All students regress or lose progress, but ESY is a service provided for students who would require a greater than usual time to recoup skills.

These themes, considered in conjunction with the service delivery models observed in the Concord Public Schools, suggest that students may be inappropriately identified as needing special education services.

SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT REVIEW FINDINGS

The document review reveals that Concord Public Schools are high performing schools with the district above the state average in all areas including academics, attendance and discipline.

Fiscally, CPS compares with like districts in expenditures and per pupil spending. While student to teacher ratios seem low, they are commensurate with comparison districts. Out of the six comparison districts, CPS teachers earn the highest salaries. The fiscal review also revealed that out of district placements are extremely costly to the district.

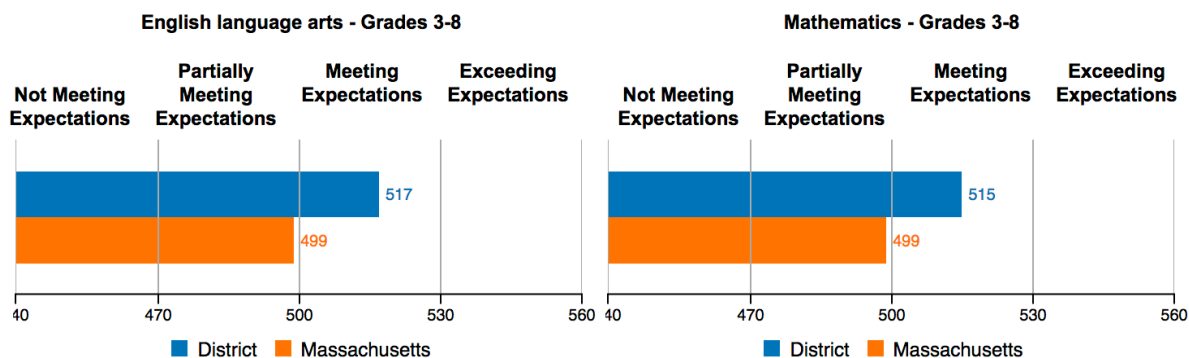
Reviews of a select number of Individualized Education Programs revealed that the majority of students with IEPs reviewed did not seem to meet the eligibility requirements of IDEA. There was a misalignment within the IEPs between the student's current level of performance and the services that were prescribed. In CPS it seems like having an IEP is a privilege that is pursued even if a disability may not exist.

STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A review of the Massachusetts School and District profiles provided the following information regarding the academic achievement on the PARCC assessment for 2015-2016 in grades 3-8 in ELA and math and MCAS for grades 3-8 in science. For 2017 the Next Generation MCAS achievement data was reviewed for grades 3-8 in ELA and math.

In reviewing the most recent data available, the 2017 Next Generation MCAS Student Achievement data, Concord Public Schools (CPS) outperformed the state in each of the two areas assessed. The average scaled score for CPS in ELA, Grades 3-8 was 517, while the state was 499. In math the average scaled score as 515, while the state was 499.

Next Generation MCAS (Average Scaled Score)



Because Concord Public Schools took the Next Generation MCAS in 2017 and the PARCC assessment between 2015-2017 we were not able to compare achievement in ELA and math from previous years to 2017. However, comparisons of achievement across the four levels of

proficiency on the PARCC assessment shown below for the years 2015-2016, show some increase in achievement in grades 3-8 in both ELA and math.

GRADES 3-8- ELA ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL	2015	2016
LEVEL 5	29	34
LEVEL 4	52	49
LEVEL 3	12	12
LEVEL 2	5	4
LEVEL 1	2	1

GRADES 3-8 MATH ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL	2015	2016
LEVEL 5	22	31
LEVEL 4	54	52
LEVEL 3	17	11
LEVEL 2	5	4
LEVEL 1	2	1

CPS students
took the

MCAS in science, technology and engineering in 2017, so comparisons across 2014-2017 can be made for the percentage of students performing at proficiency or above. Though compared to the state levels, CPS did much better, there does appear to be a small decrease in students scoring advanced to proficient in science in grades 3-8 across the years.

Overall achievement for students in grades 3-8 in CPS according to the Next Generation MCAS Tests in 2017 is well above the state average with 79.5% of students assessed Meeting or Exceeding Expectations in ELA and math. Only a small percentage (3.5%) of the student population assessed fell into the Not Meeting Expectations categories compared to an average of 11% statewide.

ALL GRADES- SCIENCE AND TECH/ENG ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL	2014	2015	2016	2017
ADVANCED	29	31	34	23
PROFICIENT	49	50	38	53
NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	18	15	21	21
FAILING	3	4	7	3

Next Generation MCAS Tests 2017

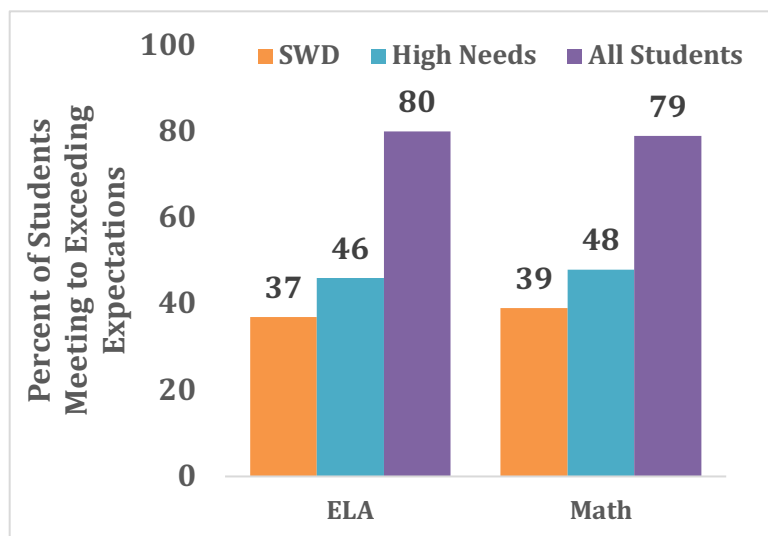
Percent of Students at Each Achievement Level for CPS

Grade and Subject	Meeting or Exceeding Expectations		Exceeding Expectations		Meeting Expectations		Partially Meeting Expectations		Not Meeting Expectations		Included
	District	State	District	State	District	State	District	State	District	State	
GRADES 03 - 08 - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	80	49	25	7	55	42	18	41	2	10	1,451
GRADES 03 - 08 - MATHEMATICS	79	48	22	8	57	40	19	41	2	12	1,450

When reviewing subgroup data, the WestEd team focused on two populations compared to all students enrolled in CPS since the review was focused on meeting the needs of struggling learners. These populations were comprised of the largest subgroups with 254 students included in the students with disabilities (SWD) category and 352 students are included in the

high needs population out of a total of 1,451 students. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) identifies “High Needs” as students who are either low income, economically disadvantaged, English language learners, or students with disabilities.

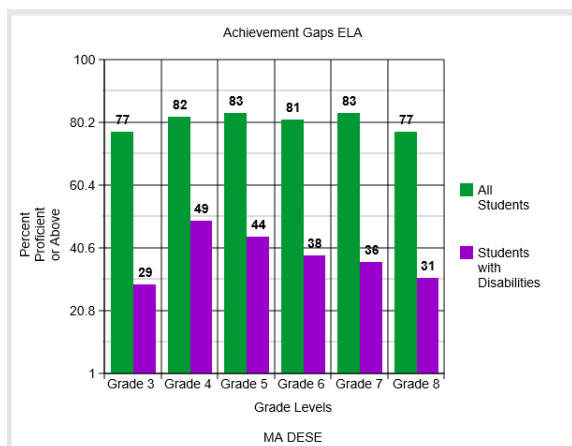
In ELA, 37% of the students with disabilities population met or exceeded expectations, 46% of the high needs group scored in this category while 80% of all students in the district met or exceeded expectations. A 43% gap exists in ELA for SWD, and a gap of 34% for high need students.



In math, 39% of the students with disabilities met or exceeded expectations, 48% of the high need group scored in this range and 79% of all students scored in the district met or exceeded expectations.

Achievement Gaps

A 40% gap exists in math for SWD, and a gap of 31% for the high need population exists. In

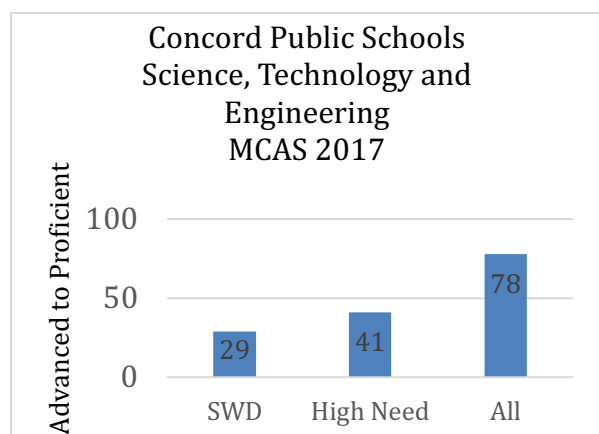
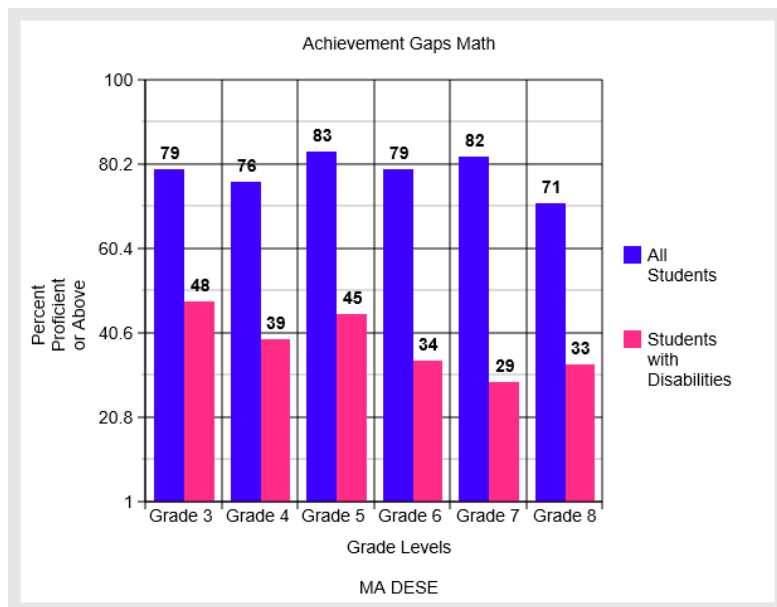


analyzing achievement gaps across the grade levels in ELA, significant gaps persist with some improvement from 3rd to 4th grade, but the gap increases as students move to middle school. While general education achievement takes a slight dip at 8th grade, the gap for students with disabilities also continues to persist. The gap average for ELA across all schools is 43% with the average of 37% of students with disabilities meeting proficiency and 81% of general education students meeting proficiency in ELA.

When school specific gap data was analyzed, the gap analysis revealed that across the elementary schools the ELA gap was consistently around 43% while at the middle school is was 40%.

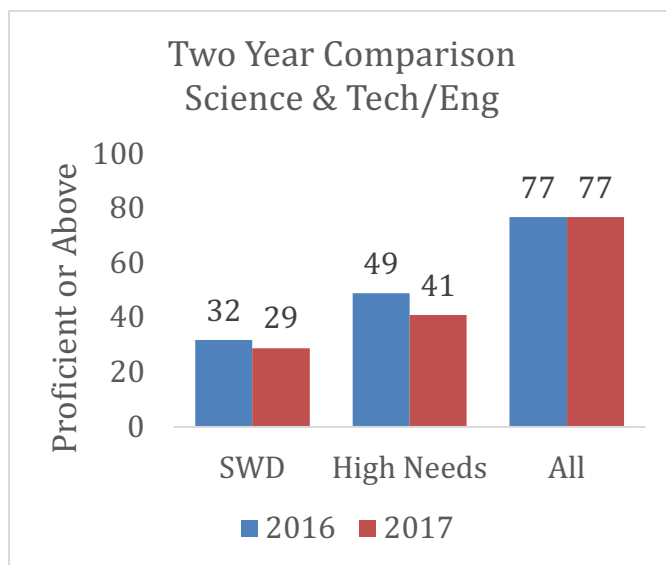
In the analysis of math gap data, gaps persist across the grade levels with the greatest gaps occurring at the middle school with a 53% gap in 7th grade. The average gap in math across all schools is 35% with an average of 38% of students with disabilities scoring proficient or above and 78% of general education students scoring proficiently.

Across school analysis revealed some differences in math gaps. At Alcott the gap for math was only 33% while at Willard it was 50% and at Thoreau it as 57%. At the middle school the gap for math was 35%.



In science, 29% of the students with disabilities population scored at proficient or above, 41% of the high needs students were in this category, while 78% of all students in the district scored proficient or higher. For SWD there exists a gap of 49%, for high need students this gap is 37%.

Gap analysis reveals that across all schools and grade levels significant gaps persist for students with disabilities. This reflects the need for more options for direct evidence-based math and ELA instruction that is specifically intended to narrow achievement gaps. The current model of in class supports and pull-out support for class work does not show that it is narrowing gaps for students with disabilities. The gaps point to the need for more opportunities for specially designed evidence-based instruction opportunities provided by special education teachers in the content areas.



For the 2015 and 2016 school years Concord Public School district used the PARCC assessment for grades 3-8, so it is not possible to examine recent assessment data of subgroups in ELA and math across multiple years. However, achievement data from the MCAS in science, technology and engineering across two years is available. From 2016 to 2017 SWD had a decrease in proficiency by 3%, while students with high needs showed a decrease in proficiency of 8%. However, compared to the 2017 state average of

22% of SWD at proficient or higher and 31% of students with high needs, CPS students scored 7% higher for SWD and 10% higher for students when compared to the state.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Students with disabilities and high needs students are scoring above the state average in all content areas assessed. However, significant achievement gaps for students with disabilities are present in the district, but lower than state average gaps for SWD and students with high needs. The high achievement of all students in CPS, including students with disabilities and high needs reflects the rigor of the instruction and the level of supports provided to struggling learners. In all content areas students are outperforming their peers across the state. Based on the data, general education students are receiving the supports needed to be successful on the state assessment, but the large persistent gaps between subgroups, especially for students with disabilities, needs to be addressed through more options for direct special education instruction across all grade levels in the content areas.

SURVEYS

WestEd administered a web-based survey to both teaching staff and parents at the elementary and middle schools. Staff at each school included general education teachers, special education teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists and other behavioral support staff, academic intervention providers, and tutors. One survey was developed for the elementary school staff and one for the middle school staff. Survey responses collected were anonymous; the only identifier was the respondent's role. The surveys also included many of the items in the classroom observation form. (Surveys can be found in Appendix A)

“Teacher” will be used to refer to all staff who participated in the survey. Staff respondents included teaching staff as described in the chart below, with a total of 84 teaching staff at the middle school and 54 staff from the elementary schools responding.

Staff Survey: Elementary

Section 1: Background Information

Total number of staff who took the survey: 84 out of 192 with a response rate of 44 percent.

Gen Education: 42%

Tutor: 19%

Special Education: 14%

Related Service Provider: 10%

Other (Reading Specialist, ELA Curriculum Specialist, PT): 6%

Mental Health: 5%

Intervention Teacher: 4%

Data shows elementary schools have high numbers of experienced staff, with 65% of the staff who responded to the survey having worked at their school for six or more years.

6+ years: 65%

1-3 years: 16%

4-5 years: 12%

New: 7%

Ninety-nine percent of respondents indicated that they teach or provide intervention to students with IEPs, English learners, or other struggling learners.

Section 2: Instructional Practice

When asked about their teaching practices, a large percent of teachers (73%) indicated that they are mostly providing teacher led direct instruction to both large and small groups, 19% indicated they are doing this with the group/class and only 8% indicated that they provide opportunities for student-led learning where the teacher monitors small groups and assists students as needed.

Teachers spend most of a class period...		
Teacher-led Instruction to Whole Class	Teacher-led Instruction to Small Groups	Monitoring Student-led Learning
19%	73%	8%

Staff indicated that 75% of the time they represent the information (the what of learning) by providing opportunities for students to discuss information supported by using visuals and other means of technology, while 25% indicated that they discuss information supported only by planned visuals.

Discussion	Discussion Planned Visual	Discussion, Planned Visuals Technology
0%	25%	75%

When asked if they incorporate engagement strategies into their instruction, 68% of the staff said “always” and 32% said occasionally/sometimes.

Engagement Strategies		
Never	Occasionally	Always
0%	32%	68%

When asked how often they use different instructional practices that included a range of options, 96% of the staff said they use hints, clues, probing questions *daily to often* and 94% indicated that they use checks for understanding and adjusting the lesson to meet the students’ needs as well as other visuals *daily to often* as well. Twenty-seven percent indicated that they only *occasionally or rarely/never* use graphic organizers.

Sixty-seven percent indicated that they *occasionally/sometimes* have students work or learn in pairs or groups to perform tasks, while 30% said they *always* have students working in groups or pairs. Only 2 staff members indicated that they *rarely to never* have students work or learn in pairs or groups.

Sixty-four staff members responded to the question that asked if staff has specific time to review student data and collaborate with their colleagues to plan instruction. Forty-eight percent indicated they did *occasionally/sometimes*, 31% said *always*, 14% said *rarely* and 6% said *never*.

When asked to describe the types of intervention (n=50) used the following descriptions: Thirty-two staff members indicated they use small groups. The types of groups listed included,

- Friendship groups
- Specialized groups
- Word work groups
- Writing groups
- Small group instruction
- Social thinking groups
- Intervention groups

- RTI in the classroom
- Differentiated Learning Centers
- Pull-out
- Groups based on learning styles
- Centers
- Cooperative learning groups

Implementing different strategies was mentioned by 21 of the respondents. These included: using manipulatives and visuals, re-teaching, magnetic/small chalk boards, games, chunking of text or activities, paired reading, think-alouds, anchor charts, and modeling. Fifteen staff members indicated they use a one to one strategy as an intervention. Specific interventions or programs were cited by four of the respondents and included programs such as iReady, STARS, Foundations, Wilson, and Orton-Gillingham. One respondent said: "We are fortunate to have both regular ed and special education tutors as well as [specialists] who can support in and out of class should I need another adult's support." Another explained: "I have many interventions dependent upon the student's strengths/ difficulties and/or IEP/504 including Leveled Literacy, organizers on google forms, assisted technology, books online, Foundations, Wilson, OG, fluency groups, and comprehension groups."

Referral Process

When asked if there was a clearly defined process for referring struggling students for Tier 2 and 3 Interventions (n=62), 76% said yes, while 24% said no.

When asked if there were clear entry and exit criteria for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions (n=62), 50% said yes, while 50% said no.

Staff were then asked to describe what data is usually used for making intervention decisions. Of the 53 respondents, 31 indicated that they, or the teachers they work with, use multiple measures as criteria for entry and exit for tier 2 and 3 interventions. These included such tools as Teachers College assessments, Track My Progress, DRA, unit assessments and classroom observations. Other sources of data cited included District Determined Measures (DDMs) and MCAS, as well as daily work and other formative assessment. Twelve of the 53 respondents were unable to describe the data used to make intervention decisions. Examples of these responses include: "I have no idea."; "... there are less clear exit criteria for Tier 2 and 3 interventions."; "The I.E.P. students assigned to me are below grade level and have specific retention issues..."; and "We make intervention decisions when a child is struggling to make progress in any area of study."

Staff were asked if students with IEPs have access to general education interventions (n=61). Ninety-eight said yes, while only 2% said no. In addition, staff was asked if there was a clearly defined process for referring students for special education (n=62). Ninety percent said yes, and 10% said no. When asked if they receive IEP information, 92% said yes, and 8% said no.

Section 3: Co-Teaching Practices

When staff was asked if they were part of a co-teaching team just 36 staff members responded. Twenty-eight staff members, or 78% said no, 14% said yes, as a content teacher and 8% said yes, as a special education teacher. Note we did not ask if the tutors considered themselves co-teachers.

Staff was asked how often they plan lessons collaboratively and 27 staff members responded. Thirty-three percent or 9 staff members said *occasionally/sometimes*, or 30% said *never*, 19% said *rarely* and 19% said *always*. When asked to describe this collaborative time (n=19) 13 of the respondents indicated that they regularly collaborate with fellow teachers. Seven of the respondents indicated that they meet informally with their co-teaching partner. This collaborative time was described as happening during lunch, before and after school, during specials or during Open Circle time. A few respondents (n=3) indicated they collaborate to monitor progress of individual students or meet to discuss accommodations and/or modifications. Co-teaching with tutors was cited by two respondents. One respondent said there was no collaboration.

When asked how many different classrooms special educators co-teach during one week, eight individuals responded. Six of them (75%) indicated they co-teach in 1-2 classrooms, and one special education teacher indicated he/she was in 3-4 classrooms, and another one indicated they were in 5-6 classrooms.

Twelve individuals responded to the question, "In what subjects do you co-teach (you may select more than one)?" Eight selected the subject of ELA, 6 chose math, 3 chose SS/History and 2 chose science. Of the 12 who responded, four of them indicated that they co-teach in other subjects and provided such specification as writing (n=2), and social emotional learning. One wrote that they were a tutor and that they "work in and out of a classroom in ELA, writing and math."

Fifteen respondents responded to the question "*During a co-taught lesson, the special educator is usually involved in...*". Four of the respondents indicated the special education teacher is providing academic instruction with students in general, 4 said academic instruction with only special education students and 2 responded that special educators are supporting special education students in other ways (behavior). Five respondents chose "other" as their answer and included responses similar to the options provided above. However, one respondent wrote that the special education teacher is usually involved in.... "*supporting students to complete the tasks, just as a tutor would do.*"

When asked what co-teaching models were implemented in the classrooms, fourteen people chose to answer this question. The most common response for any model was *never/rarely*. This option was selected 36 times. The model of *one teach, one assist* was the model most chosen for "*occasionally/often*" with eight respondents choosing this option, while both *alternative teaching* and *station teaching* were selected seven times each.

Section 4: Professional Learning

Sixty elementary staff members responded to the statement, "*The district's professional development has enhanced my knowledge and skills in integrating instructional supports for all students in my classroom.*" Thirty-six respondents (60%) indicated they felt this happened *occasionally/sometimes*. Twenty-five percent felt it *rarely* or *never* happened, and 15% said it *always* happened.

Sixty-one staff members responded to the statement, "*There are ample opportunities in this school for me to participate in job embedded learning.*" Forty-three respondents indicated they felt this happened *occasionally/sometimes*, 30% responded *always*, 23% said *rarely*, and 5% said *never*.

	Always	Occasionally/Sometimes	Rarely	Never
There are ample opportunities for me to participate in job-embedded learning.	30%	43%	23%	5%

Section 5: Special Education Teachers

When asked, "What continuum of services are available to support students with disabilities in your school (select all that apply)?" thirty staff members responded. The option for *pull-out to support core classroom assignments and skill development* was selected by 29 staff members, or 97%. *Full inclusion in general education classroom with Tutor support* and *Push in support in the general education classroom either with special educator or tutor* were both selected by 29 staff members or 93%. Co-teaching supports was only chosen by 14 individuals (47%).

When asked to what degree do students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum in the least restrictive environment that is appropriate to their individual needs, 80%, or 24 staff members chose *always*. The other 20% (n=24) chose *occasionally/sometimes*.

Twenty-five staff members provided responses when asked to "*Describe the types of special education service delivery that you provide*". Of the twenty-five responses, *push in/pull out* model was cited 15 times. The specifics of the pull-out support ranged from supporting core classroom assignments, learning centers, and providing instruction in partial-day, substantially separate classrooms. For *push-in* or *inclusion*, staff indicated they are involved in providing mostly small group support in science, social studies, writing and reading. Other staff members indicated they provide specialized services such as speech and language pathology, social/emotional and behavioral support and physical therapy. Co-teaching was mentioned by only one staff member. One classroom teacher described receiving no special education support for special education students in the classroom: "*As a classroom teacher I drive the curriculum completely without any help from a SpEd teacher. Recently I have asked that the*

SpEd teacher grade the writing and math assessments and it is now being done. IEP students are not held accountable for h.w. and it is not adapted for them either."

When asked to identify the supports provided to students in their inclusive classrooms (they could check multiple answers), 30 staff members responded. Out of the responses, 90% chose *push in support*, 87% selected *tutor*, 30% selected *co-teaching* and 17% selected *other*. The "other" responses included doing observations, providing services as a therapeutic aide, and the supervision of tutors.

When asked to respond to the statement, "Tutors supports students with IEPs in their general education classroom", thirty staff members responded in total. Twenty, or 67% said this happens *occasionally/sometimes* and the other 10 or 33% said *always*.

In response to the statement (n=28), "*Special educators provide interventions to non-identified struggling learners*", 68% or 19 staff members indicated this happened *occasionally/sometimes*, 22% said *rarely*, 7% said *never* and 1 person said *always*.

When asked to respond to the question, "*What are the strengths of the special education services in Concord public elementary schools?*" 46 staff members provided answers. Strengths listed by staff members included: the amount and range of services (n=22), highly skilled staff (n=16), opportunities for collaboration and communication between and among staff (n=10), and the variety of resources (n=6).

- *I taught in public schools for over 20 years. This district provides the highest level of special education services to students I have seen. I have taught in Newton, Andover, Somerville, Brookline, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown, MA.*
- *We have strong administrators who hire competent Special Educators. We have had RTI for over 9 years in our building and adhere to the Tiered Model for support. We also are lucky in that we have enough trained support staff to help run small groups*
- *There is a large support staff (including tutors) so that students are almost always supported by a special education teacher, tutor, or assistant to the extent necessary. There is a great system for referral of students to RTI and special education. Students get a lot of support. There is a lot of flexibility in the service delivery model so that student's individual needs are being met.*
- *The resources that are available to educators- tests, materials, etc.*

When asked what the areas are for improvement in the Concord Public Elementary schools, 44 staff members offered ideas. Seventeen respondents suggested offering opportunities for professional development (n=17) in the following areas; 1) more training for tutors (n=7), 2) Differentiated instruction (n=3), 3) Co-teaching (n=2), 4) Professional development in general (3). In addition, it was suggested that more opportunities for collaboration, between teachers and across schools be provided (n=8). It was also suggested that tutors not be pulled for coverage (n=6) as it disrupts the classroom routines and students who are receiving services from tutors do not receive services for that day and staff also recommended providing clearer

criteria for interventions and exit/entry to special education (n= 6). Other responses highlighted issues with parents, including managing the expectations of parents and creating consistency in how the district responds to parent's needs and requests (n=2). Three respondents referred to the quality of the staff.

- *Tutors are not always trained and or knowledgeable about subject or age level. Data on benchmarks are not collected in a systematic way. Special Education tutors are used more like classroom assistant to the teacher - therefore sometimes students on IEPs are not getting as much support as they should.*
- *RTI- we need more information overall from regular ed to special ed on how RTI works - Physical space within our building. We are busting at the seams, they want us to run groups etc., but there is no space -RTI is pushing back the identification of students who could or would be on ed. plans -nonproductive meetings that special ed must attend - paperwork that seems never ending - scheduling against block scheduling -teachers are not all differentiating their lessons and newer staff might not feel they can change it*
- *I think that there is a bit of an inconsistency when it comes to how certain families are dealt with in Concord. There are families who know how to 'play' the system. They often get more supports and even out placements that are not necessary. I do think that is a problem. I have had parents in the past whose child needed more and didn't get more because the parents were so trusting, and Concord won't give unless pushed. Parents who are more powerful and who push, get a lot and often get too much in my opinion. Sometimes parents have too much power. I also think that we could improve our supports for Math. I think that we do a great job supporting all learners, Sped and Regular ed, in literacy. I think that we do a much poorer job in Math.*

Staff Survey: Middle School

Section 1: Background Information

Total number of middle school staff who took the survey: 54 out of 89 with a response rate of 60.5 percent.

General Education: 29

Special Education: 9

Tutor: 10

Mental health provider: 4

Intervention teacher: 3

Other: 2 (Guidance Dept Admin Assistant, Special education, certified teacher with pending SEI endorsement)

Data show the middle schools have high numbers of experienced staff with 57% of the staff who responded to the survey having worked at their school for six or more years.

6+ more years: 57%

4-5 years: 22%

1-3 years: 17%

New: 4%

Ninety-four percent of respondents indicated that they teach or provide interventions to students with IEPs, ELs or other struggling learners, 6% said no.

Section 2: Instructional Practice

When asked about their teaching practices, 44% middle school staff indicated that they are mostly providing teacher-led instruction to both large and small groups, 32% indicated they provide opportunities for students led learning, where the teacher monitors and assists students as needed, and 23% provide teacher-led instruction to the group/class.

Teachers spend most of a class period...		
Teacher-led Instruction to Whole Class	Teacher-led Instruction to Small Groups	Monitoring Student-led Learning
23%	44%	32%

Staff indicated that 76% of the time they represent the information (the what of learning) by providing opportunities for students to discuss information supported by planned visual and other means of technology, while 15% indicated that they discuss information supported by only planned visuals, while 9% said they only discuss information.

When asked how they assess their students, 70% indicated that they provide certain students with modifications as noted on their IEP, while 30% said that all students are provided options for assessment as needed.

Discussion	Discussion Planned Visual	Discussion, Planned Visuals Technology
9%	15%	76%
Same assessment for all students	Some provided options of more time, breaks, etc.	All provided options for assessment & assignments
0%	70%	30%

Seventy-three percent of staff members indicated that they always incorporate engagement strategies into their instruction, while 27% said they do this occasionally/sometimes.

Engagement Strategies		
Never	Occasionally	Always
0%	27%	73%

When asked how often they use different instructional practices that included a range of options, 96% of the middle school staff said they use hints, clues, probing questions *daily* to *often* and 89% indicated that they use checks for understanding as well. 35% indicated that they only *occasionally* or *rarely/never* used graphic organizers.

Sixty-seven percent indicated that they *occasionally/sometimes* have students work or learning pairs or groups to perform tasks, while 31% said they *always* have students working in groups or pairs. Only 1 staff member indicated that they *rarely* have students working in groups/pairs.

When asked if they had specific time to review student data and collaborate with colleagues to plan instruction (n=46). Forty-three percent (n=20) responded that they only *occasionally* or *sometimes* have time, 39% (18) said they *rarely* have time, 11% (n=5) said they *always* have time and 7% (n=3) said they *never* have time.

Forty-four percent (n=45) said occasionally/sometimes provide small group interventions when students are struggling, 40% (n=18) said always, 13% (n=6) said rarely, and 2% (n=1) said never.

When asked to describe the types interventions middle school staff (n=34) used the following descriptions:

Within the classroom, some descriptions included:

Meeting 1:1 with struggling students (n=4)

Meeting with small groups who are struggling, in the back of the classroom, or students are pulled-out (n=6)

Outside the classrooms, descriptions of interventions included:

Meet with struggling students during study blocks (n=2) or lunch (n=1)

Visit learning centers and meet with tutors to communicate needs of students

Many respondents described strategies they use:

Asking students to re-read or reteaching (n=9)

Use of visuals (n=3)

Partner/group work (n=2)

Other strategies included: highlighters, audiobooks, graphic organizers

Respondents described specific interventions:

Leveled Literacy

iReady

Lexia

General: Writing interventions, focused reading groups, extra help sessions

Other descriptions offered:

Discuss with case manager

Use support personnel

Co-Teaching (n=2)

Referral Process

When asked if there was a clearly defined process for referring struggling students for Tier 2 and 3 Interventions (n=43), 67% of the middle school respondents indicated no clearly defined process, while 33% said there was.

When asked if there were clear entry and exit criteria for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, 79% (n=39) of the respondents indicated that they did not feel there were, while 21% felt that there were.

Staff was then asked to describe what data is usually used for making intervention decisions (n=32). Note that many respondents provided more than one answer.

- *I am not sure/ I'm not aware of how this is done/ I'm new and don't know* (n=3)
- *There is no intervention in science.* (n=1)
- Formative assessments: classroom activities (n=6)
- Summative assessments: MCAS, Class tests/quizzes (n=1)
- Benchmark Assessment: STAR, iReady (n=1)
- Anecdotal:
 - Parent input/referral (n=2)
 - Observations: (n=3)
 - Teacher input (n=4)
- Other:
 - Grades (n=8)
 - Homework (n=1)

"Grades, testing, observations"

"I look at performance scores that are significantly below the class average."

"Reading ability. How often they need to be redirected."

"For myself, I "read the room" to determine who looks confused. Building relationships is an important part of my work at the start of the year so that I can tell when a student is showing tells that they are struggling. But I also ask point-blank and insert myself with various groups to work with them, so I can gauge how well they are understanding the concepts. The regular ed teachers also let us know when they have reason for concern and inform us of what particular skills they are worried about, so we can target our interactions."

When asked if student with IEPs have access to general education interventions at the middle school (n=43), 98% said yes. Staff was then asked if there is a clearly defined process for referring students for special education (n=44). Most, eighty percent of the respondents indicated they felt there was a clearly defined process for referring students to special education, while 20% did not. When asked if they receive IEP information including accommodations on every child with an IEP in their classrooms (n=46), the clear majority, 96% of staff members reported that they receive IEP information, while only 4% indicated that they did not.

Section 3: Co-Teaching Practices

When staff was asked if they were a part of a co-teaching team, 73% said no, 19% said yes, as a content teacher, and 8% said yes, as a special education teacher.

Staff was asked how often they plan lessons collaboratively (n=20). Fifty percent said *occasionally/sometimes*, 15% said *always*: 15% said *rarely* and 20% said *never*. When asked to describe their collaboration time describe (n=13) many of the teachers who responded indicated that their planning time was informal, such as meeting before and after school, during class, or communicating via email. Teachers wrote that they have to "make our own time: and that they often have to "catch each other on the fly". Other teachers indicated that they have more formalized time for collaboration that included meeting during grade level meetings. The amount of time teachers collaborate varied from 2-3 hours per week to once per cycle.

"I was given a summer day to plan and an "in-year release day" of 6 hours to plan. On top of that my co-teacher and I meet once a week to plan. We are also taking a course together, so we have opportunity to plan in that class. Finally, we will catch each other "on the fly" fairly frequently."

When asked how many different classrooms the special education co-teach in per week (n=7), 57% percent (n=4) said 1-2 classrooms, 29% (n=2) said 5-6 classrooms, and 1 staff member indicated they co-teach in more than six classrooms per week. Subjects that are co-taught include (n=11): ELA: 9, science: 2, social studies: 1, Other: specialized instruction: 1, math: 0. It was surprising to find no co-teaching in math.

Twelve respondents answered the question: *"During a co-taught lesson, the special educator is usually involved in..."* Six (50%) of the respondents indicated the special education teacher is providing academic instruction with students in general, four said academic instruction with

only special education students, and two responded that special educators are supporting special education students in other ways (behavior).

When asked what co-teaching models co-teachers most use, the following results were provided:

- 91% said they occasionally/often engage in using one teach, one assist
- 83% said they occasionally/often engage in alternative teaching;
- 75% said they occasionally/often engage in using one teach, one observes
- 58% said they occasionally/often engage in using parallel teaching; and
- 50% said they never/rarely engage in station teaching nor team teaching
- One person indicated not being familiar with team teaching.

Section 4: Professional Learning

Forty-three staff members responded to the statement, "*The district's professional development has enhanced my knowledge and skills in integrating instructional supports for all students in my classroom.*" Fifty-six percent (n=24) of respondents indicated they felt this happened *occasionally/sometimes*, 9% (n=4) responded *always*, and 34% (n=15) responded that it *rarely or never* happened.

Forty-three staff members also responded to the statement, "*There are ample opportunities in this school for me to participate in job embedded learning.*" Eighteen respondents (42%) indicated they felt this happened *occasionally/sometimes*, 11 responded *always*, 13 said *rarely*, and one staff member said *never*.

	Always	Occasionally/Sometimes	Rarely	Never
There are ample opportunities for me to participate in job-embedded learning.	11%	42%	13%	1%

Section 5: Special Education Teachers

When asked, "What continuum of services are available to support students with disabilities in your school? (select all that apply)," twenty-five staff members responded.

- 92% chose resource room direct special education instruction support;
- 88% chose full inclusion in general education classroom with special education tutor support;
- 84% chose special classes for core instruction from special educator or behavioral supports;
- 72% chose related services and push-in support in the general education classroom either with special educator or tutor.

When asked to what degree do students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum in the least restrictive environment that is appropriate to their individual needs, 79%, or 19 staff members chose *always*, and the other 21% (n=5) chose *occasionally/sometimes*.

Seventeen middle school staff members provided responses to "Describe the types of special education service delivery that you provide". Eight indicated they provide services in a push-in model, helping to "clarify assignments, stay on task", help to make modifications to the materials as required on the IEP, and general in class support. Four staff members indicated they provide services through learning centers, and two said they offer sub-separate support (ELA and math). Staff also shared specific strategies (n=6) such as audio books, videos, graphic organizers, and extended time. Three staff said they follow what is written on the IEP.

When asked to identify the supports provided to students in their inclusive classrooms (staff could select all that apply) (n=23), 100% said tutors, 35% said push-in, and 4% (n=1) said co-teaching. When asked if tutors support students with IEPs in the general education classroom, 50% (n=12) said *always*, 46% said *occasionally/sometimes*, and 4% (n=1) said *rarely*.

When asked how often special educators provide interventions to non-identified struggling learners. (n=22), 50% (n=11) said *occasionally/sometimes*, 46% said *rarely* to never, and 5% (n=1) said *always*.

When asked what the strengths of the special education services in the CPS Middle Schools are, 19 staff members provided answers. Strengths listed by staff members include: (note that some staff members provided more than one strength)

- Highly skilled and dedicated staff (n=13)
- Positive use of tutors (n=6)
- Communication and collaboration among staff (n=4)
- Student-centered teaching (n=3)

When asked for areas for improvement 27 staff members responded:

- More time for collaboration/planning time (n=11)
- Clearer process for services (including: criteria for support, referral process, data collection, roles and responsibilities of different staff, information on accommodations) (n=7)
- Need of building leadership for special education, a site-based department chair (n=4)

ELEMENTARY PARENT SURVEY

WestEd administered a web-based survey to the parents at both the elementary and middle schools. Survey responses were anonymous. The district sent emails embedded with a link to the survey to parents. Parents had several weeks to complete the survey. Thirty-nine elementary parents completed the survey. The response rate was 11 percent. Results from the elementary parent survey are below.

When asked how long their child has been receiving special education services in the district, the responses ranged from 3 months to 5 years. The range of time was the same when asked how long their child has been receiving special education services in their current school.

Parents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed to 10 different statements (see table below) pertaining to general education interventions and supports (n=39). Eighty-nine percent of the parents indicated that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* to the statement, “*I understand why my child is receiving an intervention.*” However, only 57% percent of parents indicated that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* when asked to respond to the statement, “*My child is doing better in school (academic performance or behaviorally) as a result of the intervention.*” The statement most parents indicated that they *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the most (28%) was, “*I am frequently informed of my child’s progress.*”

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	N/A	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
My child receives general education interventions in addition to their special education services.	7.69% 3	7.69% 3	12.82% 5	35.90% 14	35.90% 14	0.00% 0	39	3.85
I understand what interventions my child is receiving.	2.56% 1	12.82% 5	7.69% 3	43.59% 17	30.77% 12	2.56% 1	39	3.89
I understand why my child is receiving an intervention.	0.00% 0	2.63% 1	5.26% 2	34.21% 13	55.26% 21	2.63% 1	38	4.46
School staff works collaboratively with me to solve my student's academic challenges.	12.82% 5	10.26% 4	2.56% 1	30.77% 12	43.59% 17	0.00% 0	39	3.82
School staff works collaboratively with me to solve my student's behavioral challenges.	2.56% 1	2.56% 1	12.82% 5	12.82% 5	30.77% 12	38.46% 15	39	4.08
I am frequently informed of my child's progress.	15.38% 6	12.82% 5	7.69% 3	38.46% 15	25.64% 10	0.00% 0	39	3.46
My child is doing better in school (academic performance or behaviorally) as a result of the intervention.	2.56% 1	12.82% 5	23.08% 9	15.38% 6	41.03% 16	5.13% 2	39	3.84
The interventions my child is receiving helps them with grade level content.	2.63% 1	7.89% 3	5.26% 2	50.00% 19	26.32% 10	7.89% 3	38	3.97
The interventions my child is receiving helps their social emotional health.	2.56% 1	12.82% 5	15.38% 6	25.64% 10	28.21% 11	15.38% 6	39	3.76

Parents were also asked to indicate to the degree they agreed to disagreed about 12 statements related to their child’s special education services. Eighty-eight parents indicated that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* to the statement, “*I understand my child’ IEP and how special education services are being provided.*” When responding to the statement, “*The special education services provided meet my child’s needs*”, just 61% indicated that they *agreed*

or strongly agreed, while 25% indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I am considered an equal partner in planning my child's special education.	10.26% 4	12.82% 5	5.13% 2	38.46% 15	33.33% 13	39	3.72
I understand my child's IEP and how special education services are being provided.	0.00% 0	5.13% 2	7.69% 3	48.72% 19	38.46% 15	39	4.21
I play an active role in making decisions around determining Least Restrictive Environment.	2.56% 1	10.26% 4	23.08% 9	33.33% 13	30.77% 12	39	3.79
The special education services provided meet my child's needs.	10.26% 4	15.38% 6	12.82% 5	23.08% 9	38.46% 15	39	3.64
I have a clear understanding of the type of instruction that my child receives from special education teachers and related service providers.	10.26% 4	12.82% 5	10.26% 4	28.21% 11	38.46% 15	39	3.72
My child receives his/her special education services with children without disabilities to the maximum extent possible.	5.13% 2	7.69% 3	17.95% 7	38.46% 15	30.77% 12	39	3.82
My child receives the supports that they need in the inclusive classroom.	2.56% 1	15.38% 6	7.69% 3	38.46% 15	35.90% 14	39	3.90
The accommodations and/or modifications identified in the IEP are being implemented in my child's classrooms.	5.13% 2	5.13% 2	20.51% 8	35.90% 14	33.33% 13	39	3.87
My child's IEP tells me how progress will be measured.	2.56% 1	2.56% 1	12.82% 5	51.28% 20	30.77% 12	39	4.05
I receive regular updates on my child's progress on their IEP goals.	7.69% 3	15.38% 6	23.08% 9	23.08% 9	30.77% 12	39	3.54
The IEP is being implemented as written.	2.63% 1	5.26% 2	23.68% 9	28.95% 11	39.47% 15	38	3.97
In the district, there exists a continuum of special education services and supports that meet my child's needs.	7.69% 3	15.38% 6	23.08% 9	25.64% 10	28.21% 11	39	3.51

Parents were asked to describe what their child's special education services look like. Thirty-eight parents completed this section. From the responses we can conclude that most parents (n=31) are well informed as they were able to articulate the range of services their child was receiving. Only a few (n=7), indicated they did not know or only wrote minimal responses. The WordCloud to the left was created from their responses. From this visual, it is easy to see that parents recognize the support that their students are receiving in the classroom is varied.



Parent were also provided with an opportunity to share what role they understand the special education tutor to play in providing education supports to their child. Thirty-two parents provided answers to this question. While 10 parents indicated that they weren't sure or didn't know what role the tutors play in providing special education supports for their child, the other 22 parents were able to provide some information. For a majority of the responses (n=14) the parents described the activities the tutor did with their child. Some examples included: *getting him to grade level, monitor his progress and help him access the general education curriculum, one to one attention*. Several parents (n=6) indicated they valued the tutor's role. Some of their comments included: *"The education tutor allows him to fully express himself without being limited by his writing challenges"*, and *"A very significant role- we deem these tutors and supports essential for our child."*

Parents were also asked to describe the strengths of the Concord Public Schools in support the needs of their child. Thirty-seven parents provided responses. The WordCloud below was generated using their answers. From the graphic it is clear that parents see CPS as providing the support and services their child needs. Many (n=10) indicated that they felt the schools and staff communicated and collaborated well with parents. What is not well represented in the WordCloud was the praise parents gave to the staff. Terms like understanding, knowledgeable, wonderful, amazing, compassionate, and responsive were some of the words used by parents in their answers. One parent pointed out the special education director in particular:

"Jessica Murphy provided a program for my [child] that has helped keep [my child] in the public school. I am so grateful as I feel being with ... peers is so important. ... The wrap-around supports, which are innovative, have been such a difference. ... I have open communication with the team and I feel we are all working together to support my [child]."

In addition to the strengths, parents were also asked to share the challenges and solutions to improving the outcomes for their child. Thirty-five parents answered this question. Some parents indicated they were unhappy with the services being provided to their child (n=8) and some (n=4) indicated they wanted more information and better communication on their child's progress and the services he/she is receiving. Many parents indicated that there is very little communication with any teachers (general or special). A few of the challenges raised, included parents indicating they were unhappy with both special educators and general education teachers (n=6) and they request more training for "specials" teachers (n=4) in how to better work with students with disabilities. For example, several parents asked that Spanish classes for their students be reviewed.

Below is a quote from one of the parents regarding his/her challenges and solutions:



Certain staff are very closed to working collaboratively with families. Specifically, academic special education teachers in the lower grades. Students are not always seen as individuals. Communication is not clear nor frequent. General education staff (classroom teachers and specials teachers) do not have adequate training in supporting students with disabilities and do not have the tools to support their students... There is a lack of cohesion between the pullout model and how instruction is tied back into what is being taught in the classroom. Instruction is not delivered with fidelity nor sufficient frequency and the most effective programs are not used to teach students with dyslexia. To improve outcomes the district needs to improve special and general education teacher training, adopt strong curriculums that are delivered with the necessary frequency and fidelity to allow students to make progress. Certain K-2 special education staff should receive training in working with families as equal partners at IEP meetings and school principals should receive greater training in special education and not assume they are familiar with a child's disability more so than trained teachers nor families. Special education teachers should work more closely with school counselors to support the students they work with and understand how to encourage and motivate children without using stickers or other methods not devised in the IEP nor appropriate for the child.

Other comments included:

"It was very difficult to get the IEP. Two years were lost."

"Not a lot of communication outside the IEP meeting or brief conference."

"Honestly at [the] current school, Willard, it's almost as if the bare minimum is being done. [The aide] is the only reason [my child] is able to function. ... It's almost as if there's no place for [my child]."

"If several children are having a problem in a particular class, it is disheartening when the principal pins it on the child rather than addressing it."

"My child has missed instruction in the regular classroom in order to receive his special education services."

"No other academic peer groups in the district. Instruction is primarily 1:1. Programming blocks restrict social interaction with other students on IEPs."

"We found one general ed teacher at Willard to be unknowledgeable, inflexible, and punitive. ... We have learned about breaches of confidentiality."

MIDDLE SCHOOL PARENT SURVEY

Twenty-two middle school parents completed the survey, with a 9.5% response rate. When asked how long their child has been receiving special education services in the district, the responses ranged from one year to 10 years. The range of time their child has been receiving special education services in their current school was between .75 and 5 years.

Parents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed to nine different statements (see below) pertaining to general education interventions and supports. Twenty-two parents responded to the statements. Eighty-six percent of the parents indicated that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* to the statement, *“I understand why my child is receiving an intervention”*, while just 55% of parents indicated that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement, *“My child received general education interventions in addition to their special education services.”* Twenty-three percent of parents indicated that they *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the statement, *“I am frequently informed of my child’s progress.”*

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	N/A	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
My child receives general education interventions in addition to their special education services.	9.09% 2	13.64% 3	13.64% 3	50.00% 11	4.55% 1	9.09% 2	22	3.30
I understand what interventions my child is receiving.	9.09% 2	9.09% 2	13.64% 3	50.00% 11	13.64% 3	4.55% 1	22	3.52
I understand why my child is receiving an intervention.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	9.09% 2	36.36% 8	50.00% 11	4.55% 1	22	4.43
School staff works collaboratively with me to solve my student’s academic challenges.	4.55% 1	18.18% 4	4.55% 1	50.00% 11	22.73% 5	0.00% 0	22	3.68
School staff works collaboratively with me to solve my student’s behavioral challenges.	0.00% 0	4.55% 1	18.18% 4	31.82% 7	18.18% 4	27.27% 6	22	3.88
I am frequently informed of my child’s progress.	13.64% 3	9.09% 2	18.18% 4	50.00% 11	9.09% 2	0.00% 0	22	3.32
My child is doing better in school (academic performance or behaviorally) as a result of the intervention.	9.09% 2	13.64% 3	0.00% 0	31.82% 7	36.36% 8	9.09% 2	22	3.80
The interventions my child is receiving helps them with grade level content.	9.09% 2	9.09% 2	4.55% 1	31.82% 7	36.36% 8	9.09% 2	22	3.85
The interventions my child is receiving helps their social emotional health.	4.76% 1	14.29% 3	14.29% 3	19.05% 4	42.86% 9	4.76% 1	21	3.85

Parents were also asked to respond to twelve statements related to special education services (see questions below). Twenty-two parents responded to the statements. When asked to respond to the statement, *“My child receives his/her special education services with children without disabilities to the maximum extent possible”*, 91% of the parents indicated that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with this statement. When asked to respond to the statement, *“I receive regular updates on my child’s progress on their IEP goals”*, 28% indicated that they *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with this statement (of the 6 respondents who chose one of these indicators, 5 of them chose *strongly disagree*).

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I am considered an equal partner in planning my child's special education.	4.55% 1	9.09% 2	18.18% 4	54.55% 12	13.64% 3	22	3.64
I understand my child's IEP and how special education services are being provided.	9.09% 2	9.09% 2	4.55% 1	59.09% 13	18.18% 4	22	3.68
I play an active role in making decisions around determining Least Restrictive Environment.	4.55% 1	18.18% 4	40.91% 9	31.82% 7	4.55% 1	22	3.14
The special education services provided meet my child's needs.	9.09% 2	18.18% 4	4.55% 1	54.55% 12	13.64% 3	22	3.45

Several parents recognized and praised the wealth of resources and staff available to them in the district (n=3). A few parents (n=2) specifically mentioned how helpful a small group intensive math class has been for their child. The WordCloud was generated from their responses. One parent wrote that s/he was unable to come up with a strength at CMS, other than: *"The principal and the special education director became involved after a terrible team meeting and made immediate adjustments."* Another parent also mentioned the special education director as the strength of the middle school, writing simply, *"Jessica Murphy."*

Parents were also asked to share the challenges and solutions to improving outcomes for their child. Twenty-one parents responded to this question. Parents shared their dissatisfaction with the continuum of services provided at the middle school (n=6). These challenges included such things as being better with the identification of the disability, better knowledge of exit criteria, need for better understanding of what services will look like as the student moves through middle school. Other parents shared challenges that included lack of or little communication (n=3), concerns over the middle school schedule (n=2) and provided the suggestion of providing more training for general education teachers (n=2).

One parent quote touches on some of the challenges faced in CPS:

"I fear that there is not enough time to make the necessary programmatic adjustments at CMS for it to make a difference for my child. The service delivery model is definitely broken at CMS and immediate changes need to be made. Students need to be serviced based on their individual needs, classroom teachers need better training on how to help students in their classrooms, collaboration between special educators, tutor, classroom teachers and parents is essential in fixing the problems at CMS. There also needs to be an executive function class or a plan to do more strategy instruction so our children are better able to be successful, independent learners. The approach at CMS tends to be reactive (i.e. finishing assignments, doing homework) and not proactive. I believe the only way to do this is to have an outside firm and consultants come in and train our special educators and tutors as to how to develop a cohesive program at CMS."

SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Elementary Staff Survey

According to the elementary staff survey on instructional practice, most teachers report leading whole group instruction supported by small group instruction. Teachers report that they are using Universal Design for Learning strategies and provide engaging lessons. They identify numerous interventions that include pull-out and specific programs such as iReady, STAR, Foundations, Wilson and Orten-Gillingham. They report a clearly defined process for accessing interventions within the RTI framework but did identify that there were not clear entry and exit criteria. They report using multiple data sources for making intervention decisions.

They reported very little co-teaching, and for those who did, they identified ELA as the most frequently co-taught class. The special educators and tutors identified their role in the “co-taught” classroom as helping students and primarily use the “one-teach, one-assist” model. They identify the continuum of services to be primarily pull-out support with full inclusion with tutor or special educator support. They report that pull-out primarily consists of supporting core assignments.

The elementary staff identified the strengths of CPS as a high level of special education supports, competent special education staff and a large support staff. They identified the need for professional development in the areas of tutor training, training in UDL and differentiated instruction as well as co-teaching. They also identified a need for collaboration time and requested that tutors not be pulled out to serve as substitutes as it disrupts special education supports in the classroom.

Middle School Staff Survey

According to the middle school staff survey, teachers primarily provide large group and small group instruction in their classrooms. They utilize Universal Design for Learning principles such as supporting instruction using visuals and technology and differentiate instruction as needed. They report providing highly engaging lessons using evidence-based practices including frequent checks for understanding, hints, cues and probing questions. They occasionally review data and do provide some small group instruction in their classrooms. They identify interventions to consist of 1:1 instruction or small group in the classroom or pull-out support in the learning center. The interventions identified include, Leveled Literacy, iReady, and Lexia. They report that there is not a clear process for identification for interventions nor is there a clear entry or exit criteria. The data they most frequently use for making decisions about interventions includes classroom assessments, grades, iReady and STAR.

Special education co-teachers report that they do instruction planning on the fly and that they most often use the, “one teach, one assist” model of co-teaching. The push-in model is the most frequently used special education support; providing students with clarifications, modifications and supports to stay on task. Teachers and tutors provide these services both in the learning center and the substantially separate classes.

Middle school teachers identify the strengths of CPS as highly skilled and dedicated staff, the effective use of tutors, and the communication and collaboration between staff. They identified areas of improvement as needing more collaboration time, a clearer process for accessing services for students and the need for special education leadership in the building.

Elementary Parent Survey

Parents participating in the survey strongly agree that their children are doing better in their classes due to the special education interventions that are being provided. They also felt strongly that there was a greater need for frequent communication on their child's progress as they feel ill informed. Most shared that they have a clear understanding of their child's IEP and how the services delivered meet their child's needs. Parents identified numerous services as supporting their children with this support occurring primarily in the classroom. They recognized that special education tutors are a key to providing support in the general education setting. They identified the strengths of the special education programming in CPS as being very child centered by a variety of supports and staff. They identified challenges as needing more information and better communication from the district as well as more training for teachers on how to work with their students.

Middle School Parent Survey

Middle school parents reported that they have a clear understanding of why their children are receiving the supports that they receive, but only slightly over half seemed to understand the difference between general education interventions and special education supports. They strongly felt that they are not being informed of their child's progress.

They recognize that there is a strong inclusive environment and that their children have access to the general education environment. They don't feel like they receive frequent enough feedback on their child's progress on their IEP goals.

Parents are well informed of what special education services their child receives and overall are pleased with the teachers and the tutors and the support that they are providing. They appreciate the child centered focus, but also realize that there are many factors at the middle school that play into the programming including teachers, schedules and time. They appreciate tutor help in classrooms identified the strengths as the tutor and teacher support in the classrooms. They feel that the staff have a wealth of knowledge, positively impacting their child. The challenges that they identified include, a dissatisfaction with the continuum of services at the middle school, lack of communication on their child's progress and the need for training of general education teachers on how to meet the needs of their children.

FOCUS GROUPS

WestEd conducted five interviews and 17 focus groups with school and district administrators, other school staff, and parents during the site visit on March 19th, March 28th and 29th. (Focus Group Questions can be found in Appendix B).

Specifically, focus groups and interviews were held with:

- Special Education teachers/Case Managers, including teachers, school psychologists and an Occupational Therapist;
- Special Education Tutors;
- General Education Teachers;
- Parents of students with disabilities;
- Administrators, including principals and the Superintendent; and
- General Education intervention staff.

Interview and focus group questions were specifically tailored to the group in question, however, there were several questions in common across the groups. Many themes appeared across all focus groups and interviews. These include:

- Inconsistency in use of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework including Tier 1 instruction;
- Lack of a defined structure of special education services and the role of the special educator;
- Lack of a structured model of collaboration.

Inconsistency of a MTSS Framework Including Tier 1 Instruction

General education teachers reported there is a wide range and various processes for providing interventions. This appears to stem from a lack of consistent, structured system of supports across all schools in the district. In all schools, meetings to discuss students in need of interventions, whether through the House structure or Child Study Team meetings, are in place but not used for data informed intervention and instructional planning. The middle school buildings use a House structure where they discuss non-special education students and the elementary schools that have a structure in place use a Child Study Team process. Middle School teachers report that the process for when, where, and length of academic interventions is not consistent and is done on a case-by-case basis. Schools have varying processes for identification in place throughout the district. Middle School general education teachers also report a frequent practice of going directly to the counselor to discuss behavior concerns. Then the counselor decides if an intervention is needed and typically provides the intervention. General education teachers at the Middle School reported that students are discussed at team meetings but there is not consistent follow-up or a clear understanding of the interventions or of whose responsibility it is to provide the interventions.

Comments voiced about the MTSS or Response to Intervention (RTI) process include:

Middle School

- “RTI is not really done here, we hear the acronym. We don’t know what classifies as RTI.”
- “Counselors are responsible for deciding on and implementing behavior interventions.”

Elementary

- “RTI is where they go”.
- “In my grade, RTI is left to us . . . teachers plan it with different RTI people. RTI used to be structured differently. Used to have an RTI block but now it is up to teachers.”
- “Reading teachers have been brought in to do reading RTI, they leave at certain times, so it has continued to be fragmented.”
- “RTI is different at each grade level.”

District

- “I don’t think teachers know what different tiers of support should look like.”
- “Every building is in a different place, especially between the Elementary and Middle School.

There is not a clear understanding of Tier 1 interventions by the general education teachers. They report using some strategies in their classroom but do not believe they have the skills in differentiation, Universal Design for Learning, or co-teaching strategies. Teachers have requested further PD in these areas. They stated:

- “We can do a better job if we had more effective general education interventions.”
- “Interventions consist of Foundations.”

The Middle School teachers described an English language arts (ELA) intervention course that they developed in-house for 8th graders. Developmental Language Arts is a place for students who struggle but are not receiving special education services. Students enroll in this year-long, skills-based class in place of an elective. Sixth and 7th graders who struggle will have an ELA intervention for four days in the six-day cycle during a 14-week trimester. If there is room, special education students can join.

Special education teachers and related service providers describe the system of supports as “not a cut and dry process”. In some schools, special education teachers voiced that they often “don’t know what is happening with interventions”, while in other schools, they are part of the general education intervention process. One point that was shared among special educators is that they “would like more input into the intervention process.” Elementary special educators also voiced: Don’t think that teachers know what different tiers of support should look like.”

Parents felt that RTI is more structured at the elementary level than at the middle school. They were pleased that even though their child is on an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the schools provide support for their child that go beyond the services required on their IEP. Parents explained that sometimes they may need to ask for these extra supports.

Administrators, mental health providers, and interventionists described the MTSS as “informal and needing more structure,”. One shared, “The ‘system’ is not working. They [students] are

not typically going to CST [child study team]. Teachers talk to the principal, or change, or do a different type of group. It's not a real system."

Administrators, mental health providers, and interventionists described Tier 1 instruction in the following ways:

- "General education doesn't know what they don't know regarding research-based reading instruction, the core piece.
- "We have a general lack of strategies."
"Teachers are not taking advantage of Tier 1 interventions. Tier 1 needs to happen in the classroom."
- "In ELA, every person is doing their own thing. Really, it is completely teacher driven."

These beliefs may stem from the lack of a structured, district adopted ELA curriculum.

Co-teaching models also vary across the district. Sometimes co-teaching partnerships consist of general and special education teachers; other times the partnership is the general education teacher and the special education tutor. There was not a clear articulation of the model of co-teaching or the purpose of co-teaching in individual schools or across the district.

All focus groups articulated that there are not consistent policies and procedures for a system of supports in the district. For example, focus group members stated:

- "There is a difference between building processes."
- "There is a lack of a defined process."
- "There needs to be a clear process for documentation."
- "Everyone would benefit from knowing what Tier 1 should look like, what are you doing before you send to Tier 2."

Lack of a Defined Structure of Special Education Services and the Role of the Special Education Teacher

Special education teachers describe several different service delivery models they may engage in. Depending on the school and the grade level, they may engage in all or one of these service delivery models:

- Learning center Model;
- Push In;
- Pull Out; and
- Co-Teaching.

Focus group members were not able to clearly describe these various models.

In addition, special educators' roles may include:

- Case Management, which was described as testing, writing IEPs, conducting meetings, and communicating with parents;
- Consultation
- Collaboration with general education teachers
- Guiding and supervising tutors

At the middle school level, special education teachers, described as case managers, mostly describe their role as classroom support in the learning center model. Direct support in the learning center most often consists of helping students with homework. Case managers explain that, “What the student gets for assignments in the regular class dictates what we are doing in learning center.” With a rigorous general education curriculum, case managers try to balance this with working on IEP goals and objectives. They further state, “If we don’t help them, it [homework] won’t get done. This reflects poorly on us; like we are not giving them the support they need. General education teachers have an expectation that special education case managers will help them get it done.”

At the middle school, general education teachers reported that case managers work hard but are put in a “reactive” mode due to the parents and the number of students on their caseload. They believe that, due to the workload of case managers, there is no time for collaboration. Middle school general education teachers voiced that the school needs a special education chairperson to support case managers.

Rather than expecting classroom support, general education teachers in the elementary schools articulated that they are unsure of the role of the special education teacher. They reported that sometimes the special education teacher is in the room to work with the students, and sometimes they function solely as a case manager, checking in with the general educator, or they provide small group pull-out instruction either during school-wide intervention block or other times throughout the school day. The wide range of elementary special educator roles is not consistent within the buildings across grade levels or among the schools. Furthermore, general education teachers explained that co-teaching and supports by the special education teacher vary because they have to share the special education teacher with other grade level classroom teachers.

The tutors articulated that they provide much of the special education services, oftentimes as the co-teacher in the room. As the special education provider, tutors are the ones implementing the IEP and monitoring progress. Some tutors reported they provide modifications, accommodations, and/or general education intervention groups. All the tutors expressed that due to a lack of substitutes, they are often pulled from their regular work to substitute for teachers. This leaves special education students without services.

Parents report that different schools offer different supports. In addition, supports vary from elementary to middle school. Special education services are provided by the tutor. One parent explained that her child works with the “tutor 90% of the time and the special ed teacher once.” Parents also expressed that services are not consistent since the tutor is not always there.

Mental health providers described their role a crisis prevention and counseling. Yet, the mental health providers support not only behavior and social emotional skills, but also academics, and at some schools run the Child Study Team meetings. They report that counselors and mental

health providers run the lunch groups and behavior interventions for elementary general education stating:

“For behavior, we run behavior plans. Also, we do push in for kids with self-monitoring plans. We do observations and self-reflections with students. With younger kids, we provide direct classroom support.”

In terms of out-of-district placements, mental health professionals are usually involved. They report that the criteria for this placement is related to the level of support they can provide in the school. “It is often about safety concerns for students struggling and for the other students. If we see frequent restraining, that means the student likely needs an out-of-district placement.” Administrators, mental health providers and interventionists stated that there are a lot of people (i.e., the mental health team, teacher, other staff member, and the Director of Special Education) included in the placement decision-making process. The current out of district placements reflect the significant needs of students with social emotional concerns.

Lack of a Structured Model of Collaboration

General education teachers articulated that some schools have Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and others do not. Those that have PLCs state that they are valuable but could be used more effectively. According to the focus groups, PLCs are places to talk about students, but some felt that the PLCs do not offer solutions or a path for teachers to get support for their students. At some schools, the general education teachers felt that PLCs would be the appropriate time to review student data and discuss students’ needs, but they are currently do not function in that manner. The middle school teachers report that House, if structured differently, would be an ideal time for cross- professional communication. Some teachers report they use Google Classroom to inform each their grade-level peers of information they think they need to know. They report, “There is not a formal collaboration/planning time built into the schedule.”

Elementary general education teachers stated that they and special education teachers try to find time to collaborate informally and sometimes formally. They check in through email and the special education teacher visits classrooms on a rotating basis.

Parents state that in several cases, there is no communication between the special education staff and the parents. One middle school parent stated, “I did not know my child was failing until we got a progress report at the end of the quarter.” Parents believe there is not enough communication between the special and the general education staff. In addition, parents report that the opinions of outside experts are not considered by the school staff.

At the elementary schools, parents report that they are part of the IEP process because of the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. Unfortunately, the report that the feedback is not typically documented in the IEP. Parents explained that the quality of communication depends on which case manager their child is assigned. Parents at one school said that data is not shared unless they ask for it and they only receive progress reports twice a year. While at

another school, parents report they have been informed every step of the way and are very aware of the data. They further comment:

“Collaboration happens when there is agreement with the team. But when there is conflict-and differing opinions, it’s much harder. I’ve had experiences where communication broke down.”

Special education teachers report they try to find mutual times to collaborate with general education teachers, and sometimes use specials times or before or after school to plan and collaborate on specific students. They try to set up collaboration times with teachers.

Administrators, mental health providers, and interventionists state that, “Case managers are unclear or unguided on how to collaborate with teachers.” They explain that special education teachers do not have time to collaborate.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUPS

All focus groups articulated that the staff of CPS functions like a community and wants to do what is best for their students. Parents appreciate the support but feel they sometimes must request it.

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a general education system of supports that addresses interventions for both academics and behaviors. Focus group participants expressed is a district-wide lack of understanding of the MTSS (or Response to Intervention - RTI) framework including a separate system for academics and behavior. The system of supports is defined differently among buildings and is also defined differently among teachers in the same building. Some buildings are providing extensive tiered supports and others do not. Each “version” of RTI differs with various processes for entering or exiting criteria when school-wide interventions are available.

Focus groups agree that there is not a consistent system of supports for supporting students who struggle in the curriculum and described the system as fragmented or not done with fidelity at all sites and that more professional development on Tier 1 (or core curricular instruction) strategies is needed. Some teachers have been trained in differentiation but are not using it, others are using differentiation inconsistently, and some teachers have not been trained in differentiation. Teachers struggled with articulate intervention strategies to use in their classroom at some schools. This stems from a lack of understanding of the role of general education in providing Tier 1 instruction in the classroom and a lack of training to support teachers in providing these interventions. The lack of understanding of Tier 1 instruction, leads to unclear staff roles. Tier 1 Interventions are thought to be delivered by someone other than the classroom teacher and are often thought of as tutoring.

Across all sites, staff feel that the general education RTI process could be improved and that teachers need training in the process. They also felt there needs to be a defined and consistent

structure for the referral process, including entry and exit criteria. The staff also felt that they would benefit from knowing what good instruction in Tiers 1 and 2 should look like.

At all sites, staff reported that the role of the special education teacher is not clearly defined and is not consistent across the district and by grade level. In all schools some form of pull-out direct special education instruction does occur, but general education teachers are unsure of what happens during this time. At the middle school, special educators specifically cited the special education learning center model as challenging. Special education teachers are providing support based on the amount of homework a student is assigned, which shows that there is not a clear understanding of the difference between tutoring and specially designed instruction by the staff.

Tutors report they attend class and keep track of the homework, so they can assist students in the work. The focus then in the learning center is on the completion of homework, not on the skills needed to succeed in the general curriculum. There is a heavy reliance on tutors to provide interventions, special education services, and to substitute when general education teachers are absent. Some tutors play the role of special educators in the general education classroom at the elementary level. Special educators, as case managers, report not having the opportunity to provide the direct instruction that they would like to provide.

Focus groups shared that Concord Public Schools provides special education services within an inclusive setting, although some students are placed out of district. The out-of-district placements are decided most often due to significant behavioral issues. Focus group participants described that they have the capacity for a continuum of services, but the structures and system such as scheduling get in the way of providing appropriate services.

Focus group participants across the district stated that there is not a real structure for collaboration. Collaboration varies by building and teachers. In addition, schedules are such that there is not time built into the schedule for collaboration, so planning is sometimes on the fly. There are situations where the special education teacher and the general education teacher have worked to set a continuous specific time to collaborate, but it is not standard practice across the district or from school to school in the district.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as described by focus groups are a structure that is in place but not used as effectively as they could be. Groups report there is not a set structure for the meetings and that they should be used as time to review data and to plan interventions for students.

WestEd observed 56 classrooms at Concord Public Schools including general education classrooms, special education classrooms (including learning centers), and as interventions. Most of the observations lasted approximately 15 minutes, occurred during the middle of a class lesson, and were taught by general education teachers. Class sizes ranged from two to 25 students. Students with IEPs in those classes ranged from one to ten students. (Observation Tool can be found in Appendix C).

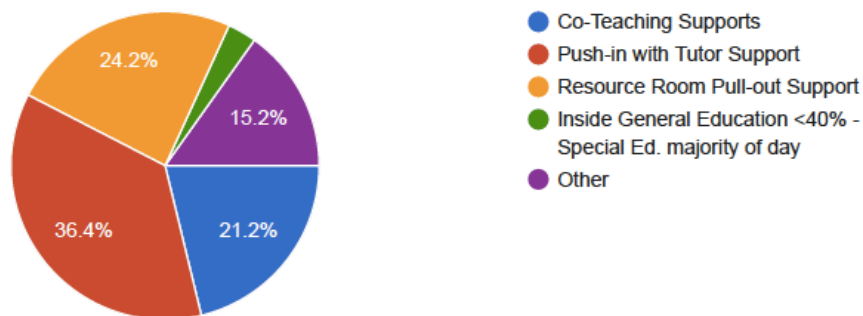
Principals scheduled WestEd observers primarily in the inclusion classes, therefore WestEd observers did not observe many direct instruction special education classes. While small group instruction was observed at some of the elementary schools, it could not be differentiated through observation if the instructor was a special educator providing specially designed instruction or another interventionist providing targeted general education intervention instruction. While a few special education classes were observed at the middle school, it is difficult for the WestEd team to comment on the quality of the majority special education direct instruction since the observation in the learning centers only provided opportunities to observe teachers helping students on general education classroom assignments.

Most classes observed were Middle School. Eleven classes were observed in 7th grade, followed by nine in 8th grade, and six in 6th grade. In the elementary schools, WestEd observed seven in 4th grade; five in 1st grade; four in grades five, three, and Kindergarten; and three in 2nd grade. The most frequent content area observed was English Language Arts with 46% of observations. A wide range of classes were observed including Math, Social Studies, Science, Reading and Learning Center. Nearly 64% of the observations occurred in general education classes, 24% were in special education classes such as the learning center, and 11% were determined to be intervention classes.

The special education delivery model observed most frequently was push-in with tutor support (36%) and resource room pull-out support or intervention during the intervention block. (24%). Other special education service delivery included co-teaching support (21%) and other (15%), which included students working with a tutor. Co-teaching support was observed in 21% of the classrooms. The co-teaching model used most often (74%) was one teach, one assist.

Special Education Service Delivery

33 responses

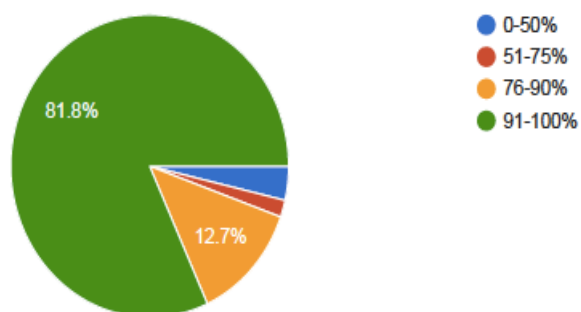


Nineteen co-teaching situations observed consisted mostly (73.7%) of the one-teach, one-assist model. It is important to note that it was difficult to identify if the teacher co-teaching with the general education teacher was a special education teacher or a tutor. In many of the situations observed the general education teacher was teaching and the co-teacher was assisting students or observing while the general education teacher led the lesson. Tutors assisting students was observed in 63% of the observations, followed by supporting instruction (13%). Support from tutors included leading instructional groups, one-on-one assistance, and keeping students on task.

Student engagement observed was strong with 82% of the classes having 91-100% of the students participating through speaking, writing, signaling, performing, and/or responding to instruction during the observation. In 13% of the classes, 76-90% of the students were engaged or participating during the observation.

Student Engagement/Participation (Students are: participating through speaking, writing, signaling, performing, thinking/responding)

55 responses



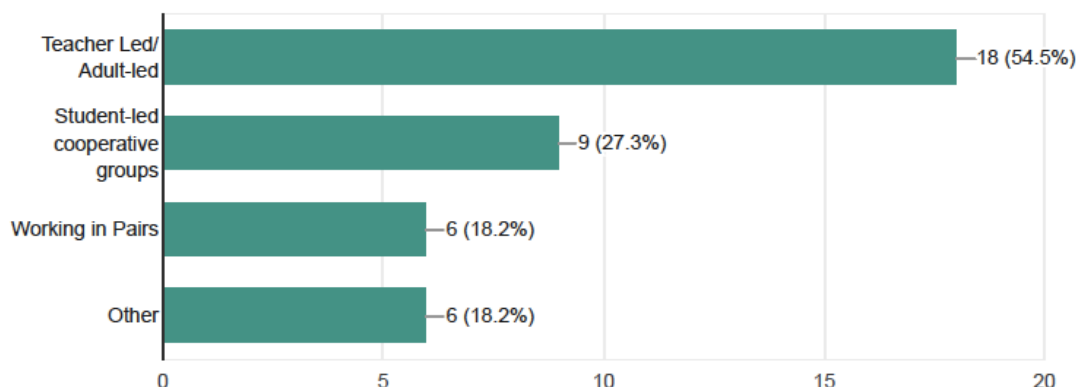
Instructional Delivery

Observations of instructional delivery showed most teachers (54.5%) use small group instruction with some (34.3%) using the more traditional lecture model (34.3%).

In thirty-three classrooms, West-Ed observed small group instructions or centers. In eighteen of those classrooms observed the small groups were led by a teacher (either general educator or special educator) or the tutor. Nine of the small groups observed were student-led cooperative groups. Of the remaining observations, six of the observations revealed students working in pairs, and six were another form of small group work.

Small Groups/Centers (Check all that apply)

33 responses



In thirty-three of the classrooms, students sat in clusters or pairs. Six of the classrooms observed documented students sitting in rows. Other configurations observed were U shaped classroom seating. In these classrooms, students were working in groups, pairs, or independently.

Higher Order Thinking

The complexity or depth of understanding that is demonstrated to answer an assessment question with higher order thinking is the Depth of knowledge or DOK. This concept of depth of knowledge was developed through research by Norman L. Webb in the late 1990's. Webb identified four distinct depth of knowledge levels. Level 1 includes basic recall of facts, concepts, information, or procedures. This is the rote learning or memorization of facts. Level 2 includes skills and concepts such as the use of information (e.g., graphs) or requires two or more steps with decision points along the way. Level 3 includes strategic thinking that requires reasoning and is abstract and complex. Level 3 DOK requires students to logically analyze and evaluate complex, real-world problems with predictable outcomes. Level 4 includes extended thinking such as an investigation or application to solve complex real-world problems with

unpredictable outcomes. Students must strategically analyze, evaluate, and reflect over time and often must change their approach to arrive at a solution.

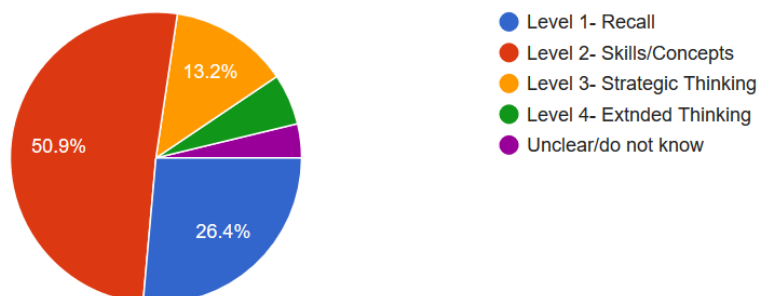
Most lessons observed (50%) demonstrated alignment to Level 2 skills/concept Depth of Knowledge. In 14 (26%) classrooms observed, the instruction was aligned to the recall level, Level 1, Depth of Knowledge. Five classrooms observations (13%) saw Level 3, or Strategic Thinking, Depth of Knowledge. Classroom observations showed that a small number of classrooms (3) utilized Level 4, Extended Thinking, Depth of Knowledge.

Some examples of higher Depth of Knowledge level lessons included an assignment to create streets in a town using descriptions of angles. Students needed to place buildings based on angles. All students had the same sheet with the same directions, but each had options on how to draw the angles for the town. In another classroom students were interpreting other people's (authors, activists) opinions.

Observations showed that instruction is often aligned to the skills and concepts levels where students are not required to think strategically or to extend their thinking to support the generalization of concepts across the content areas.

Higher Order Thinking: Depths of Knowledge Observed:

53 responses

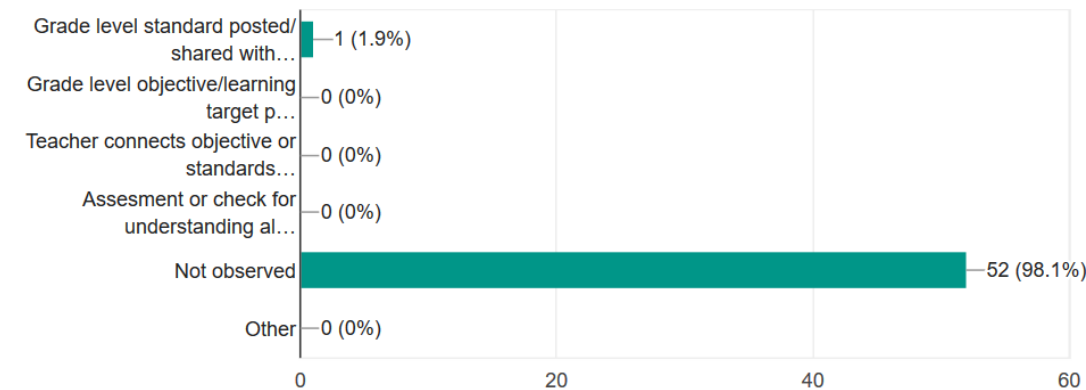


Standards Based Instruction

In one classroom, the grade-level standard was posted and shared with the class. The teacher connected the instruction to a standard in the lesson itself. In most classrooms (98%), observers did not find the standard posted in classrooms or noted in the platform the students were using. Since objectives and standards were not posted, it was difficult to ascertain if the lesson and the checks for understanding were aligned with the objectives intended for the lessons observed.

Evidence of Grade appropriate, standards-based instruction (Check all that apply):

53 responses

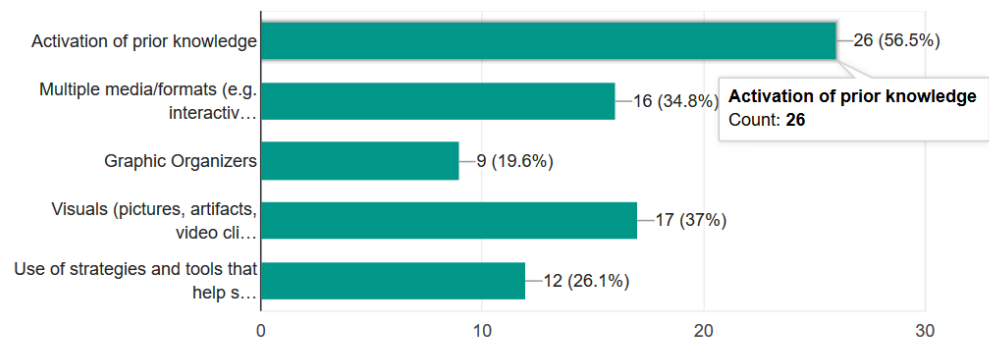


Effective Instructional Strategies

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides flexibility in ways information is presented, the ways students respond, or how students demonstrate knowledge and skills. Observations revealed that this is a strength area with most teachers are using these principles in their instruction. In 56% of the classrooms, observers saw activating prior knowledge and using multiple media formats to support the “what” of learning. The “what” of learning is recognition, or how we gather facts and categorize information through seeing, hearing and reading. Examples of multiple means of representation include using a smart board for review, teacher activating prior knowledge with a quick-write, and, in math center, students using tables, chips and math sentence frames where students solve problems and write number sentences. Teachers used many tools and strategies to help students make meaning of learning

Multiple Means of representation ("what" of learning) Observed (check all that apply)

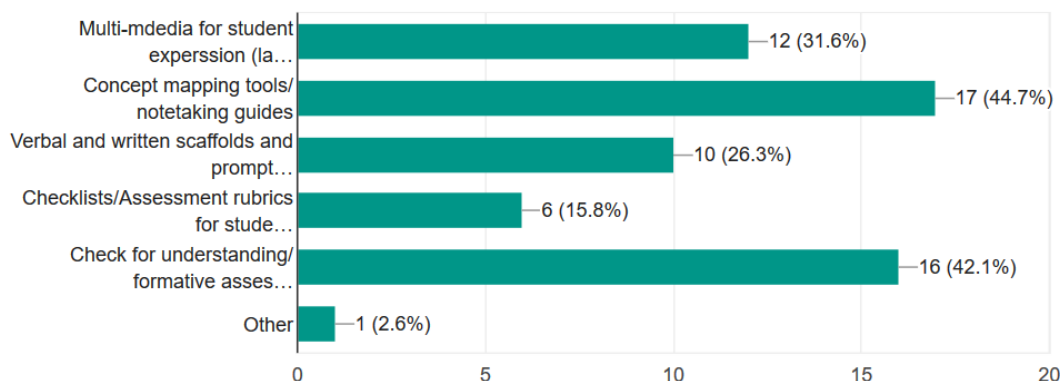
46 responses



The “how” of learning refers to the planning and performing tasks. It is how we organize and express our ideas. Multiple ways of expression, or the “how” of learning, is observed as the differentiated ways that students can express what they know. In 12 classrooms teachers were using multi-media for student expression, such as a laptop, iPad, video, audio, texting, or drawing to support the “what” of learning. Seventeen classrooms used concept mapping or a note-taking guide as a means of expression. Verbal and written scaffolds and prompts such as sentence stems were used in 10 classes. Six classrooms used checklists and/or rubrics for students to monitor their own learning and 16 classroom teachers checked for understanding through formative assessments.

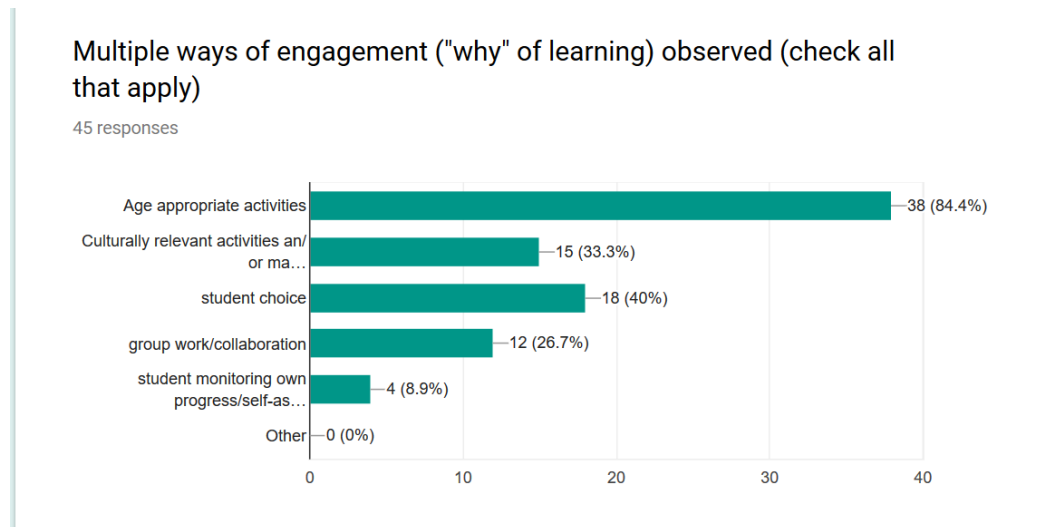
Multiple ways of expression (“how” of learning) observed (check all that apply):

38 responses



Observers noted a variety of multi-media expressions that were used in classrooms. Examples include: students using a chart from a book to record sound generation, white boards with magnetic letter tiles, note-taking guides that asked for a claim and supporting evidence, laptops, and checklists.

Multiple means of engagement, reflecting the “why” of learning, is how learners are engaged and stay motivated. Observers look for ways that teachers are stimulating interest and motivation for learning. In observing instruction, observers looked for strategies associated with multiple means of engagement. In 38 of the classrooms (84%) the instruction reflected age-appropriate activities and 15 classrooms (33.3%) reflected culturally relevant activities and materials. Eighteen classrooms (40%) used student choice to support engagement while 12 classrooms (27%) used group work or cooperative grouping. Four classrooms (9%) had students monitor their own progress using some type of self-assessment.



Observers noted the following examples of engagement: students collaborating on building a sound proof box, students had a checklist at a cut/paste table, so they knew if they were done, manipulatives were used, and one student joined virtually.

Physical Space

In 85.4% of the classrooms observed, the physical arrangement of the classroom encouraged engagement in student learning. The classrooms had spaces for students to work together in groups as well as spaces for students to work independently. In some classrooms there were tables for interventions and grouping of desks were conducive to learning. In other classrooms there were tables and a large space on the floor for student activities. In 20 classrooms (41.7%), teachers used physical space strategically to increase access to learning for all students. Observations also showed evidence that throughout the schools the special education classrooms are located near general education classrooms and are not segregated from the general school population.

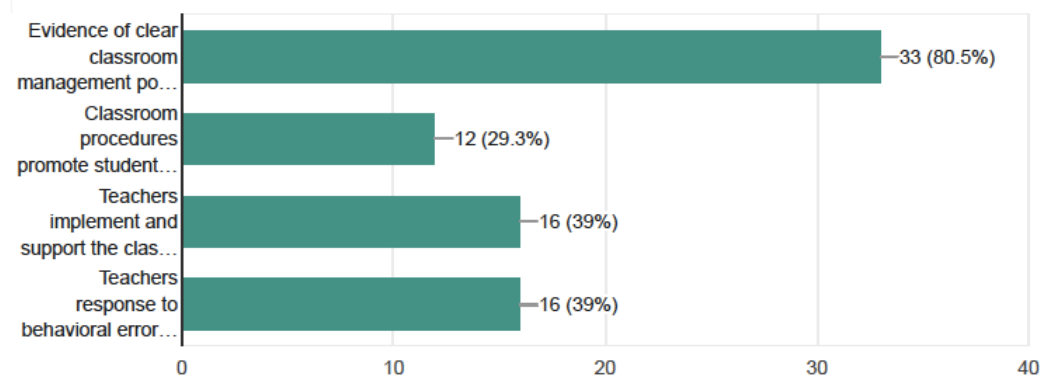
Managing Student Behavior

Overall, challenging behaviors were not observed. Students were engaged and participating in the classroom instruction. This was strong evidence (80.5%) of clear classroom policies and procedures in place. Several classrooms had classroom policies and expectations posted. In 39% of the classrooms there was evidence of teachers implementing and supporting classroom policies. When behavior errors were observed, teachers responded in an appropriate manner that reflected and conserved student dignity.

Teachers were observed using bells for transitions, proximity control, routines such as lining up and pre-assigning groups. They provided movement breaks for students and allowed them to walk around the class while instruction was being delivered. Teachers engaged in lots of group work while providing individual support as needed. Teachers supported behavior by posting of rules and expectations, being organized and prepared.

Managing Student Behavior (Check all that apply)

41 responses



SUMMARY OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

In the 56 classrooms that WestEd observed, there was evidence of good classroom management policies. Student engagement was a strength with most of the classrooms observed, 91 to 100% of the students, engaged or participating in the learning. Principles of Universal Design for Learning were another strength area with evidence that most teachers use strategies to support multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of expression.

While full lessons were not observed, since standards and objectives were not posted or referred to during instruction, it was difficult to know if students understood the objectives of the lesson. The most common way to deliver instruction was small group instruction with some teachers relying on teacher talking or lecture. For reinforcement of concepts, most teachers used teacher led questioning and answers and small group instruction. Several of the classrooms observed students were working on worksheets.

The Depth of Knowledge focused primarily on the second level of skills and concepts where students use information to critically think through several step processes. There was limited evidence of alignment of the instruction to lesson objectives related to the standards. From experience, it was clear that most instruction was aligned with the MA DESE instructional frameworks, but these connections were not clear to students as the purpose for the lessons or activities. While the posting of objectives is not a requirement, evidence that the students understand the work they are engaging in as it relates to the long-term outcome of mastering specific standards is missing. Posting the standards and the specific lesson objective allows students understand the purpose in learning and to acknowledge progress toward a clear goal.

Most classrooms were set up to support small group and cooperative learning, so students could work together in small groups as needed. Teachers used resources to support learning although it was noted by observers that while many of the classrooms had visual resources, such as student work or informational resources on the walls to support student learning, there were some that did not.

Special education classes were located throughout the building and were not segregated in any way. When observing special education service delivery, services in the elementary school were provided in the general education classroom as well as pull-out during the intervention block or other times during the school day. In the middle school, services were provided in the learning center with some push-in by special education teachers or special education tutors in classrooms as well as a few dedicated special education replacement classes in ELA and math.

OVERALL STRENGTHS

Concord Public Schools is a high performing district where caring teachers and staff are working very hard to maintain a strong inclusive environment. Staff are dedicated to providing a multitude of interventions and supports to students across the district in a variety of ways including a strong RTI framework at Alcott Elementary. Instruction is characterized by the use of Universal Design for Learning principles in most classrooms. The outcome has been a district that exceeds the state average in all academic and non-academic benchmarks. Special education teachers and tutors expend much of their energy in providing students one-on-one supports to help them complete assignments and remain successful in their general education classes, with some opportunities for providing direct special education instruction. At the middle school the replacement math and ELA classes equip students to be successful in high school with these high school special education students scoring well on statewide assessments.

With a large staff, schools have numerous interventions to support students academically and with social emotional health. Staff overall, including counselors, psychologists, special education staff and related service providers, tutors and other intervention staff take a deep interest in each student they work with and provide high levels of support.

Strong support and involvement from the community and families, along with deeply caring staff, makes CPS a place where students are provided a variety of options to receive help to meet their academic and behavioral needs.

OVERALL CHALLENGES/CONCERNS

While there are a variety of interventions in place throughout the district, there is no consistency across schools due to the lack of a district wide MTSS framework. There is considerable confusion across schools about what interventions are and there are currently no district wide data systems or processes in place to support decision making regarding student interventions within the MTSS framework.

Instruction observed at the elementary level in ELA revealed inconsistency of standards aligned curriculum and instruction that is aligned to standards across all schools. Differences in instructional content occurred across grade levels and even within grade levels resulting in education inequities with instructional content being dependent upon teacher knowledge and skills rather than alignment to the MA DESE frameworks.

Despite a very strong inclusive atmosphere and numerous special education and general education intervention supports, students with disabilities have limited access to the full continuum of special education services. While there are options for direct instruction for students with disabilities in some of the schools, these options do not exist with equity across the schools. Data reflecting significant achievement gaps for students across all grade levels signals a need for more intensive special education supports than what is currently being provided primarily through pull-out intervention and the learning center model. The current program needs to be redesigned to provide greater options for students who need specially designed instruction for up to 50% of their day in a special education setting from a special education teacher to meet their learning needs and close achievement gaps in the core content areas.

While co-teaching can provide highly scaffolded special education supports in the general education classroom, the current model of co-teaching reflecting the “one teach and one assist” model is not effectively supporting students with IEPs in their general education classrooms. Co-teaching teams need to be trained to become teaching partners and the site principal must provide the infrastructure of common planning time to plan co-taught lessons for the grade level classroom. Without consistent co-teaching support, general education teachers do not feel equipped to support students with IEPs.

Improved specially designed instruction in the general education classroom is dependent on principals providing teachers time to plan instruction and collaborate across general and special education like at Alcott. Teachers need to have access to student data and use that data to plan instruction within the framework of professional learning communities. Instructional practices will not change on professional development alone. CPS teachers across the district need opportunities to learn from each other to improve their instructional practice.

Currently there is a lack of defined role for special education teachers within the district. Their title as, “case managers,” is confusing as this creates the impression that they do not teach, but rather manage the services that a student receives on their caseload. This confusion has led to the district wide and community wide impression that special education services are not about direct instruction, but about supports to be successful in the grade level curriculum. Special education teachers need to be teaching, not managing if the district expects to close the achievement gaps that persist across grade levels.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overarching Question # 1 - General Education Multi-Tiered Systems of Support:

Is there a general education multi-tiered system of support in place to meet the academic and social emotional needs of all learners?

General education multi-tiered systems of support vary across the district. Two elementary schools have tiered supports, while the two others have some interventions in place, but they are sporadic and undefined. The middle schools have some “intervention” classes but the framework and processes for these interventions are uncertain.

Recommendations:

- Adopt a district wide general education MTSS framework. Provide district-wide training and implementation coaching of a systematic MTSS framework that meets that academic and social-emotional needs of all learners.

Does the multi-tiered system of support have a data-based decision-making structure that uses data to determine the effectiveness of interventions?

There are no district-wide data systems in place to help school teams make decisions about the effectiveness of the interventions. Two schools are using screening and progress monitoring data to make decisions about student placement in homogenous groupings for ELA, but the others report primarily using grades to make intervention decisions.

Recommendations:

- Within the MTSS framework, identify and purchase data systems that can be used for universal screening and progress monitoring, so teachers and support staff can access data to inform intervention planning and instruction.

Does the multi-tiered system of support have a means to provide differentiated instruction within the Tier 1 general education classroom?

Some teachers provide in class supports to struggling learners through small group instruction, but district-wide teachers were not able to articulate what in-class supports they provide for students who may be struggling. The common response was that struggling students go to intervention.

Recommendations:

- Within the district-wide general education MTSS framework, provide teacher training, Professional Learning Community (PLC) planning and coaching supports to help teachers plan and implement Tier I instruction that provides in-class supports to struggling learners.

Does the multi-tiered system of support have criteria for entry and exit of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for academics and behavior?

Two of the schools had developed some entry and exit criteria for interventions, but the others had not. At some schools, students enter interventions through a child study team

process which is not clearly defined. Teachers named only a few intensive interventions at the elementary level with no other interventions than LLI identified at the middle school.

Recommendations:

- Within the MTSS framework, develop decision rules regarding entry and exit from interventions based on universal screening, progress monitoring data, and other curriculum-based measures to determine the effectiveness of interventions.
- Develop protocols and processes for regularly scheduled data reviews to make intervention decisions.

Does targeted instruction occur during the Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention time?

At both the elementary and middle school, most intervention teachers are using the Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) for Tier 2 intervention. At some schools, intensive intervention consists of the Wilson Reading program, Foundations, Read Naturally, Reading A-Z, and Lucy Caulkins writing. Some teachers are using the math curriculum intervention materials that have been provided for math intervention.

Recommendations:

- Within the MTSS framework, provide consistent district approved options for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions and provide teacher training. Use PLC planning and coaching supports to help teachers analyze data to provide targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

Is there a clearly defined process for students who do not respond to general education intervention?

The process is not clearly defined according to some guidance staff. But for most schools, if students do not respond to the general education intervention, a referral to the child study team and subsequently a special education evaluation is made.

Recommendations:

- Within the MTSS framework, develop clear guidelines and processes for decision making for students who do not respond to academic and behavioral interventions.

Is there a clearly defined process for special education referral?

The process goes through the child study team. Each site seemed to have a different process and membership for these teams. They explained that usually the team recommends an additional round of intervention and then they come back to the child study team to determine if a special education referral is appropriate.

Recommendations:

- Within the MTSS framework, develop clear guidelines and processes for decision making for students who do not respond to interventions and special education referral.

Do students with disabilities have access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions?

At two of the elementary schools, students do have access to the general education interventions as data is used to determine placement. At the middle school, students with IEPs can access the general education interventions if there is room in the intervention group for them to join.

Recommendations:

- Within the MTSS framework, identify processes that allow students with IEPs to access general education interventions as needed determined by universal screening, progress monitoring, and curriculum-based data measures.
- Ensure that special education teachers are providing specially designed instruction for students with disabilities.

Overarching Question # 2 - Continuum of Services:

What is the current model of special education services in the Concord Public Schools?

Concord Public Schools has a strong inclusion model that is supported by special education tutors or special educators in general education classes to “help” students in their classes. While some teachers and tutors call themselves co-teachers, the model most often observed was, “one teach and one assist,” or, “one teach and one observe.” Most instruction is provided through a pull-out model of supports. At the elementary, these supports were observed in some classes as small group instruction or independent work in a special education setting. At the middle school the special education model is primarily a Learning center Learning center model in which students receive assistance on homework or classwork assignments in a special education setting. This class does not provide an opportunity for direct instruction. The middle school has a designated ELA and math class for students who need more than learning center help for these subjects.

Recommendations:

- Site based scheduling support to change the model of pull-out supports to allow special education staff scheduled time to provide specially designed direct instruction in ELA and math in a special education setting focused on closing academic skill gaps.
- For students with more significant impairments where inclusion does not meet their academic, functional, and behavioral needs, design academic core special education classes to provide these supports within the district for elementary and middle school students.
- Improve co-teaching practices through professional development, coaching and the infrastructure to support collaboration to provide highly scaffolded in-class supports to students in inclusive classrooms.

Is the current organization of special education services the most effective means for providing services in inclusive settings while maintaining a full continuum of service delivery options for students with disabilities in Concord Public Schools?

The current mode service delivery through the learning center at the middle school and pull-out at the elementary schools is not the most effective means for providing services to **all** students with IEPs. The current learning center model focuses on assignment completion and does not allow for the opportunity for special educators to provide direct, targeted, skill-based, specially designed instruction intended to close learning gaps. The widely used inclusion model for most elementary students does not allow for adequate instructional time from a special educator in a separate class that is needed by some students to develop their academic, functional, and behavioral skills.

Recommendations:

- Change the learning center model to become a scheduled opportunity for direct instruction special education support class aligned to the ELA and math standards.
- Provide options for students who need all, or most, core content instruction from a special educator such as the one being planned at Thoreau for next year. Use this model to scale up the grade levels to meeting the needs of students who need substantially separate classes for most or part of the day.

What is the continuum of services and support available to students with disabilities?

Currently, the continuum consists mainly of inclusion for all students with learning center or pull out supports to help students complete classroom and homework assignments. Some in-class supports are provided through the presence of a special educator in a general education classroom, which in some cases is referred to as co-teaching. In some classes, students with IEPs are being supported by special education tutors in a similar manner. There currently is some small group pull out instruction occurring at the elementary and a few replacement special education classes at the middle school in addition to the learning center pull out and general education interventions. Schools do not provide special education supports for students who need specially designed instruction for more than 50% of the day, although there is such a class planned for the 2018-2019 school year at Thoreau.

Recommendations:

- Change the learning center model and redefine special education resources, pull-out for direct instruction in ELA, math, executive functioning, and behavior.
- Provide substantially separate special education programming across the district and across grades for students who need that level of support where students can receive all, or most, core content from a special education teacher at the elementary and middle school.
- Schedule special educators into general education classes and train to provide true co-teaching supports.
- Use tutors in core content classes and in resource rooms, or substantially separate rooms, to provide supports under the direction of the special education teacher.

What is the overall method of delivery and quality of specific programs or types of service delivery models within the district?

The primary method of delivery is a learning center or pull-out model where students receive pull-out support to help them complete classroom and homework assignments. These programs do not allow for specially designed academic instruction. A few replacement classes exist with some targeted special education pull-out instruction at Alcott during the school-wide intervention time.

Recommendations:

- See recommendations above.
- Change the names of special education “case managers” to special education teachers to clarify to the school and local community that special educators are teachers providing specially designed instruction and not managers of students’ special education services.

What is the district’s capacity to provide a full continuum of effective programs and services to meet the educational and related services needs of its students with disabilities?

If the district and school site leadership repurpose the current learning center and pull-out model to support classwork and homework, it could create direct instruction resource room opportunities, improve co-teaching practices, and create more substantially separate classes for students in need of more intensive special education supports.

Recommendations:

- See recommendations above.
- For students needing more support than an ELA and math resource, pull-out class, consider individual cases and provide substantially separate replacement classes for core content classes.

To what degree do students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, in the least restrictive environment, appropriate to their individual needs?

Students in Concord Public Schools have **tremendous access to the general education curriculum** in the least restrictive environment. All students in CPS have access to the general education curriculum in their home schools.

Recommendations: NONE

What factors may be contributing to placement of students in out-of-district or segregated placements?

The factors contributing to the placement of students out-of-district or into segregated settings is the degree of disability and these students’ need for therapeutic services not available in the district. A lack of district programming for these students and a parent perception that out of district is better has led to the pursuit of out of district placements by families.

Recommendations:

- Carefully consider the LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) for the individual student. Recognizing that the general education class will not always be the least restrictive

environment. Inclusive environments must be appropriate, that is provide educational opportunities, to be considered the least restrictive environment for an individual student. Provide a continuum of placements within the district.

- Continue to develop a scale up substantially separate classes, like the one being planned at Thoreau to meet the needs of students with significant learning and behavioral needs.
- Develop a process that is communicated to families on how students with IEPs are benefitting from general education instruction, specially designed instruction, and other interventions. Provide coaching and support to teachers who do not use data to inform instruction and who frequently “fail” students rather than adjusting instruction to meet learner needs. Provide training and coaching support to all general and special education teachers around Universal Design for Learning so that students with IEPs can be more successful in the general education grade level curriculum as well as in special education direct instruction.
- Continue to develop teacher’s skills around Leveled Literacy Interventions. LLI and other use of leveled readers to support students in the core classroom would negate the need to inappropriately send students to intervention.

To what degree does the district provide support for struggling students who do not have IEPs?

The degree to which the district provides general education supports varies. There is a lack of understanding across the district on the structures and components of MTSS or RTI. Most schools are implementing some form of supports, but they are not systematic and differ widely from school to school.

Recommendations:

- Provide district-wide training and implementation of an MTSS framework that supports all struggling learners academically and behaviorally based on data.

Overarching Question # 3 - Finance:

To what degree are resources being used in a cost-effective and efficient manner?

Staffing and out-of-district placements contribute to less efficiency of resources. The high number of staff members and low student-to- teacher ratios in the learning center and pull-out models do not allow the special education staff the time in their schedules to provide the intensity of specially designed instruction that some students need.

Recommendations:

- Reallocate staffing funds to provide a wider continuum of special education placements (e.g., full time general education with special education consultation, co-teaching, pull out for <20% of the day, pull out for <40% of the day, self-contained special education).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a full array of special education services (e.g., specially designed instruction, interventions backed by research to improve results for students with specific disabilities, executive functioning training, compensation skills training).
In what ways might costs be reduced while continuing to maintain high quality programs and services?
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide in-district supports for students in need of more intensive special education academic and behavioral supports such as the class that is planned at Thoreau for the 2018-2019 school year. Use ample staffing with the support of site administrators to create schedules that allow for a wider continuum of special education placements and a full array of special education services.

Overarching Question # 4 - Student Results/Outcomes:

How are students with disabilities performing on state and/or district-wide assessments?
<p>Students with disabilities perform higher than the state average on the statewide assessments in CPS. Across the state and in CPS, students with disabilities are performing below their general education peers on these assessments. Student with IEPs across the six grade levels assessed found an average of 37% meeting or exceeding expectations in ELA and 38% meeting or exceeding expectations in math. The general education population in these same grade spans found 81% of students meeting or exceeding grade level in ELA and 78% meeting or exceeding in math.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide targeted grade level, standards-aligned specially designed direct instruction through supplemental special education classes or replacement classes in ELA and math to students with IEPs. • Provide instruction utilizing curriculum that is evidence-based to close skill gaps and improve academic achievement.
To what degree are there discrepancies between students with disabilities and nondisabled peers on measures such as student achievement results, behavior and social emotional issues?
<p>Significant discrepancies exist between students with disabilities and their grade level peers across all grade levels ranging from 48% proficiency gaps in ELA to 53% proficiency gaps in math. Those gaps are maintained across all assessed grade levels in both ELA and math with some widening of the gaps at the middle school level.</p> <p>Achievement gaps exist at the academic level as evidenced by MCAS Next Generations scores across all the Concord Public Schools. Publicly reported data did not identify any discrepancies in the areas of behavior and social emotional skills.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See recommendations above. • Students with disabilities need to receive instruction utilizing curriculum that is evidence-based to narrow skills gaps allowing for more independence and success in their general education classes.
Are skill gaps closing for students with disabilities receiving special education services?
<p>Based on MCAS Next Generation data, skill gaps are not closing as students move up the grade levels. There is some reduction in skill gap from 3rd to 5th grade, but the gaps continued to widen once students reach middle school.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See recommendations above. • Ensure that students at the middle school have more options for replacement classes or supplemental special education support classes built into their schedules where they will receive instruction utilizing an evidence-based curriculum in math and ELA to close skill gaps.
To what extent are there achievement level differences among students with disabilities receiving different levels of special education services?
<p>Since there are site-based controls of special education programming across the schools in the district resulting in significant differences in programming and practice, it was not possible to determine if one model or program made a significant difference in student outcomes. At the elementary level, students with disabilities attaining proficiency averaged around 43% across all three schools in ELA and in math the proficiency average was 46% across the schools. At the middle school, an average of 40% of the students reached proficiency in ELA and 35% in math.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once evidence-based programs are in place, use pre, post and interim assessments to determine the effectiveness of the instruction on student achievement. • Monitor for the fidelity of implementation and provide coaching support as necessary to support implementation fidelity over time using a data-based decision-making model. • Monitor and review progress regularly so that instruction can be adapted to student need to ensure skill growth over time.

Overarching Question # 5 - Professional Development:

What are the professional development needs of staff within the district?
<p>At the elementary and middle school most staff felt that they had adequate professional development opportunities that are job embedded. Most staff identified the need for time to collaborate and processes or procedures to use this collaboration time effectively.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a district wide expectation of site administrators to provide grade level or department level meetings as professional learning communities (PLCs) to analyze data and plan instruction. • Develop protocols for PLC time focused on differentiated instructional practices supported by instructional coaching from principals, content area coaches, or department chairs that includes classroom walk throughs, feedback and targeted instructional planning using a process as described in the WestEd Visibly Improving Teaching And Learning (VITAL) model for teacher collaboration.
<p>What should be the district’s priorities for professional development for general and special education teachers and staff?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For district leadership including site principals and site leadership teams, provide in-depth training, coaching and systemic implementation support for the implementation of a district-wide MTSS framework. • For teachers, professional development around the implementation of Tier 1, classroom instruction that is built on the principles of universal design for learning using a teaching learning cycle so that grade level and department level teams plan instruction together, observe each other teach, provide feedback, and plan lessons together as described in the WestEd VITAL process. • Provide elementary staff with training on the use of a standards-aligned ELA curriculum. • Special education staff will need training on the use of evidence-based interventions curricula (see list at NCII https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/chart/instructional-intervention-tools) to be used during designated special education instruction time to narrow skill gaps

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall strengths

Concord Public Schools is a high performing district where teachers and staff are working very hard to maintain a strong inclusive environment. Staff are dedicated to providing a multitude of interventions and supports to students across the district in a variety of ways. Teachers use the principles of Universal Design for Learning in their instruction and inclusion of students with disabilities is the norm. The outcome has been a district that exceeds the state average in all academic and non-academic benchmarks. Special education teachers and tutors expend much of their energy in providing students one-on-one supports to help them complete assignments and remain successful in their general education classes.

With a large staff, schools have numerous interventions to support students academically and with social emotional health. Staff overall, including counselors, psychologists, special education staff and related service providers, tutors and other intervention staff take a deep

interest in each student they work with and provide high levels of support. Strong support and involvement from the community and families, along with deeply caring staff, makes CPS a place where students are provided a variety of options to receive the help they need to meet their academic and behavioral needs.

Overall concerns

While the district provides a variety of interventions in each school, there is no consistency due to the lack of a district wide general education MTSS framework. There is considerable confusion across schools about what interventions are and there are currently no district wide data systems or processes in place for all struggling students to access interventions within the MTSS framework

Despite a very strong inclusive environment and numerous special education and general education intervention supports, students with disabilities currently have limited access to the full continuum of special education services in CPS due to the lack of substantially separate classes that provide special education instruction in the academic core. A program is planned for 2018-2019 at Thoreau, but more of these classes should be considered for the future as research is showing that the, “focus of special education should be effective educational practices whether they are in inclusive settings or not.”⁶

While there are options for direct instruction for students with disabilities in some schools, these options do not exist district-wide. Data reflecting significant achievement gaps for students across all grade levels signals a need for more intensive special education supports than what is currently being provided primarily through the learning center model. The current program needs to be redesigned to provide greater options for students who need specially designed instruction in a special education setting from a special education teacher to meet their learning needs and close achievement gaps. The implementation of substantially separate programs that provide academic and behavioral intervention and instruction to students with significant needs may also lead to a reduction of out of district placements.

While co-teaching can provide highly scaffolded special education supports in the general education classroom, the current model of co-teaching reflecting the “one teach and one assist” model is not effectively supporting the acquisition of skills in the general education classroom. Co-teaching teams need to be trained to become teaching partners and must be provided an administration driven planning time to plan co-taught lessons to provide specially designed instruction within the grade level classroom. Without consistent co-teaching support, general education teachers do not feel equipped to support students with IEPs.

⁶http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/speced/2018/07/inclusion_and_academic_achievement.html?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzRss&utm_campaign=onspecialeducation83

Instruction observed at the elementary level in ELA revealed the lack of consistency of standards aligned curriculum and instruction aligned to standards across all schools. Differences in instructional content occurred across grade levels and even within grade levels resulting in education inequities with instructional content being dependent upon teacher knowledge rather than the MA DESE frameworks.

Improved specially designed instruction in the general education classroom is dependent on the infrastructure of teachers having time to plan instruction and collaborate across general and special education. Teachers need to have access to student data and use that data to plan instruction within the framework of professional learning communities. Instructional practices will not change on professional development alone. CPS teachers across the district need opportunities to learn from each other to improve their instructional practice.

Currently there is a lack of defined role for special education teachers within the district. Their title as, “case managers,” is confusing as this creates the impression that they do not teach, but rather manage the services that a student receives on their caseload. This confusion has led to the district wide and community wide impression that special education services are not about direct instruction, but about supports to be successful in the grade level curriculum. Special education teachers need to be teaching, not managing if the district expects to close the achievement gaps that persist across grade levels.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

To improve teaching and learning for all students, CPS will need to identify a standard aligned curriculum for ELA at the elementary level and create the infrastructure for professional learning communities across all schools. Strong PLCS will provide teachers the opportunity to plan instruction collaboratively to support the learning needs of students with disabilities and other struggling learners in the general education class and the MTSS interventions rather than relying on tutors or special educator supports. General and special education teachers need the opportunity to collaborate to coordinate and support the instruction of students in the inclusive setting.

To provide consistent systems of supports to all students across the district, Concord Public Schools needs to adopt and implement a district-wide MTSS/RTI framework that supports both academic and behavior/social emotional interventions. The Massachusetts Tiered Systems of Support (www.doe.mass.edu/sped/mtss.html) provides many tools and resource that would help CPS take this important step to improving instruction and intervention for all students across all schools through general education interventions.

While inclusive practices are the norm in the Concord Public Schools, a greater continuum of special education placements must be expanded with more substantially separate classes

provided to meet the needs of students who require more direct special education instruction. While the general education inclusion is commendable, students in inclusion classes need the support of special educators through the scaffolding of co-teaching and supplemental pull-out supports as well as substantially separate classes. Clarifying the role of special educators as teachers and not case managers should allow the current staffing to be adequate to provide these more intensive classes leading to a reduction in out of district placements.

Finally, to improve communication with families and clarify expectations of special education services within the district, the district should revise or develop policies and procedures that clarify special education eligibility requirements, special education services and the role of special education teachers and tutors. The current perceptions of special education services as an added privilege has reduced the programs efficacy for students who truly are disabled and in need of more intensive supports. Once these adjustments have been made to CPS special education programming, improved outcomes resulting from more intensive service provision will be the result.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TEACHER SURVEY

Teacher Survey

Background – all teachers

1. Are you a general education, special education teacher or other service provider?
2. How many years have you been teaching at this school?
3. Do you teach one or more students with...IEPs, ELs, struggling learners

Instructional Practice- all teachers

4. Typically teaching of each subject involves...
 - ☐ Teacher-led instruction to the group/class
 - ☐ Teacher-led instruction to both large and small group(s)
 - ☐ Student led learning, teacher monitors small groups and assists students as needed.
5. Which statement best reflects how you represent information (the "what" of learning)?
 - ☐ Discuss Information
 - ☐ Discuss Information supported by planned visuals
 - ☐ Discuss information supported by planned visuals and other means of technology
6. Which statement best reflects how you assess students (the "how" of learning)?
 - ☐ Student receive the same assessment and assignments under the same conditions
 - ☐ Students receive modifications for certain students (e.g. more time and breaks, special room)
 - ☐ Students have alternative assessments or assignments (e.g. responding in writing, orally or by action with support)
7. I incorporate engagement strategies into my instruction (e.g. using clear, specific goals, opportunities for collaboration, flexible assessments, providing frequent formative feedback, use authentic and relevant examples):

Never Rarely Occasionally/sometimes Always

8. How often do you use each of the following instructional practices?

	Never/rarely	Occasionally	Often	Daily
Graphic organizers				
Other visuals (e.g. pictures, video clips)				
Hint, Cues, Probing Questions				
Think-Pair-Share (Turn and Talk)				
Students Summarize orally or in writing with support as needed				

Check for understanding (all students, not a few) and adjust the lesson to meet the students' needs.				

9. How often do students work/learn in pairs/groups to perform tasks?

Never Rarely Occasionally/sometimes Always

10. I have specific time to review student data and collaborate with my colleagues to plan instruction

Never Rarely Occasionally/sometimes Always

11. When students struggle in my classroom, I provide interventions in my classroom

Never Rarely Occasionally/sometimes Always

Please describe the intervention _____

12. There is a clearly defined process for referring students for Tier 2 and 3 Interventions

Yes No

13. There are clear entry and exit criteria for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

Yes No

14. What data is usually used for making intervention decisions?

15. Students with IEPs have access to general education interventions

Yes No

16. There is a clearly defined process for referring students for special education

Yes No

17. I receive IEP information including accommodations on every child with an IEP in my classroom.

Yes No

Co-teaching practices – all teachers

18. Are you part of a co-teaching team?

____ Yes

☐ Special educator

☐ Content teacher/general education

___ No (you can skip questions 16-20)

19. How often do you plan lessons collaboratively? (general education teacher with special education teacher; formally or informally)

Never

Rarely

Occasionally/sometimes

Always

Describe your collaboration time:

20. As a special education, how many different classrooms do you co-teach in per week?

☐ 1-2

☐ 3-4

☐ 5-6

☐ More than 6 different classrooms

21. What subjects do you co-teach in (you may select more than one)?

☐ ELA

☐ Math

☐ Science

☐ SS/History

☐ Unified Arts _____

☐ Other _____

22. During a co-taught lesson, the special educators is usually involved in...

☐ Academic instruction with students in general

☐ Academic instruction with only special education students/ELs

☐ Supporting special education students in other ways (behavior)

23. When you coteach, how often do you use these coteaching models?

☐ I am not familiar with any co-teaching models

Never/rarely Occasionally
Often

One teach, one observe





One teach, one assist





Parallel teaching (divide the class in half, teach simultaneously)





Station teaching (each teaches a group a different task)



Alternative teaching (one teaches the large group, the other works with a smaller group)



Team teaching (both deliver the same instruction at the same time)



Professional Learning – all teachers

24. The district's professional development has enhanced my knowledge and skills in integrating instructional supports for all students my classroom.

Never

Rarely

Occasionally/sometimes

Always

25. There are ample opportunities in this school for me to participate in job-embedded learning (e.g. PLC team, grade/subject team, coaching, mentoring).

Never

Rarely

Occasionally/sometimes

Always

Special Education Teachers ONLY

26. What continuum of services is available to support students with disabilities in your school? (select all that apply)

- a. Consultation
- b. Full inclusion
- c. Resource room
- d. Push in
- e. Pull out
- f. Co-teaching services
- g. Related services
- h. Special classes
- i. Private placement

27. To what degree do students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs?

Never

Rarely

Occasionally/sometimes

Always

28. Describe the types of special education service delivery that you provide

29. Identify the supports provided to students in their inclusive classes

Co-teaching

Push in

Tutor

Other

30. Tutors supports students with IEPs in their general education classes.

Never Rarely Occasionally/sometimes Always

31. Special educators provide interventions to non-identified struggling learners?

Never Rarely Occasionally/sometimes Always

32. What are the strengths of the special education services in Concord Public Schools?

33. What are areas for improvement?

Parent Survey

Does your child receive any of the following?

Check all that apply

Special education (IEP)

Accommodations and modifications in their general education classroom

Teacher support/interventions in the classroom

Teacher support/interventions outside the classroom

Interventions from someone other than your child's general education teacher

Tutoring

General Education Interventions

Responses : Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

The school is providing interventions to help struggling students

School staff works collaboratively with me to solve student academic challenges

School staff works collaboratively with me to solve student behavioral challenges.

I am frequently informed of my child's progress

I understand what interventions my child is receiving

I understand why my child is receiving an intervention

My child is doing better in school (academic performance) as a result of the intervention

The interventions my child is receiving help them with grade level content.

Special Education

Responses : Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

I am considered an equal partner in planning my child's special education

My child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) tells me how progress will be measured

My child receives his/her special education services with children without disabilities to the maximum extent possible.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is being implemented as written

Open Ended Questions

What do the supports your child is receiving look like?

What are the strengths of Concord Public Schools in supporting the needs of your child?

What are the challenges and solutions to improving outcomes for your child?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

District Administrator Interview

Background: Years in education, previous education career positions, how long in the district in this position:

- 1) **Interventions:** Please tell us about the district's current MTSS intervention systems.
 - a. What academic and social emotional interventions are available?
 - i. How do schools choose these interventions?
 - ii. How is effectiveness determined?
 - b. How are students identified for interventions?
 - c. What data is typically used to make intervention decisions?
 - i. What intervention data is reported to the district?
 - d. How effective is Tier 1, core instruction?
- 2) **Special Education:** Do you think that the current organization of special education services is the most effective means for providing services in inclusive setting?
 - a. What is the continuum of services provided in Concord Public Schools?
 - b. What is the district's capacity to provide the full continuum of effective programs and services to meet the needs of all students?
 - c. What factors do you think are contributing to out-of-district placement?
- 3) **Finance:** To what degree are resources being used for special education and intervention in a cost-effective and efficient manner?
 - a. In what ways might costs be reduced while continuing to maintain high-quality district programs and services?
- 4) **Student Results/Outcomes:** How are students with disabilities performing overall?
 - a. Are there discrepancies or gaps for students with disabilities and their peers related to academics, behavior and social emotional issues?
 - b. Do achievement levels differ among students receiving different levels of special education services?
- 5) **Professional Development:** How do you support the professional development needs of your staff?
 - a. What are the current professional development priorities?

School Site Administrators Interview

Background: Years in education, years in this position at this school:

- 1) Please tell us about your current system of supports that are available to students who struggle in the curriculum and how the system of supports came to be.
 - a. Please describe the interventions that are available (academic and social emotional).
 - i. How do you choose your research-based interventions?
 - ii. Can you describe the targeted interventions that are occurring during intervention times?
 1. Who delivers the instruction for these interventions?
 - iii. How do you determine if they are effective?
 - b. How do you determine if students are in need of interventions?
 - c. Do you have defined entry and exit criteria for interventions?
 - i. What data do you use to make those decisions?
 - ii. What processes do teachers use to review the data for making decisions?
 - iii. What data is reported to you as the school leader?
- 2) Is there a clearly defined process for students who do not respond to general education intervention?
- 3) Is there a clearly defined process for special education referral?
- 4) What does inclusive practice look like at your school?
- 5) To what extent do general and special education teachers have the opportunity to meet regularly to plan instruction for their inclusive classes?
- 6) What instructional strategies or practices are used to support struggling learners including students with disabilities and English Learners in inclusive classes?
 - a. Can you describe these strategies?
 - b. How have teachers been trained in these strategies?
 - c. How frequently are you able to go into classes to observe and provide feedback regarding instruction and the implementation of instructional strategies?
- 7) How are resources allocated in the system of supports?
 - a. Is it cost effective and efficient?
- 8) Are skill gaps closing for students with disabilities receiving special education services?
 - a. Is there a hypothesis as to why?
- 9) What are the professional development needs of staff within the district?
 - a. What should be the priority?
- 10) Beyond the observation protocol, is there anything in particular that you would like us to note, consider or look for during our observations?

Interventionists Focus Group

Background: Title and roles, years in education, years in this position, years at this school:

- 1) Please tell us about your current system of supports that are available to students who struggle in the curriculum and how the system of supports came to be.
 - a. Please describe the various interventions that are available (academic and social emotional).
 - i. How do you choose those research-based interventions?
 - ii. How do you determine if they are effective?
- 2) How do you determine if students are in need of interventions?
 - a. How do you determine if they are making progress in the interventions?
 - i. What data do you use to make those decisions?
 - ii. What structures are in place to allow you and other teachers to review the data for making decisions?
- 3) Does the system of supports have a data-based decision-making structure that includes using data to determine the effectiveness of the interventions?
- 4) What is the course of action (process) when interventions do not prove successful?
 - a. What is your role in the process?
 - b. Is there a clearly defined process for students who do not respond to intervention?
 - c. Is this process the process for referring students for special education? How is it different?
 - i. What is your role in this process?
- 5) Does the system of support have criteria for entry and exit of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for academics and behavior?
- 6) Describe what Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction looks like.
 - a. What type of targeted instruction occurs in these interventions?
 - b. Do students with disabilities have access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions?
- 7) What instructional strategies or practices are used to support struggling learners in the general education classrooms (Tier 1), including students with disabilities and English learners in these inclusive classes?
 - a. Can you describe these strategies?
- 8) What type of support (professional development opportunities and/or job embedded support (PLC team, grade/subject team, coaching/mentoring) do you receive to support the instruction of diverse learners?
- 9) Anything else you would like to share?

Special Education Tutor Focus Group

Background: How long have you been a tutor at this school? What other roles have you had in your career?

- 1) Please tell us how you support students with IEPs in a general education, intervention or special education classroom.
 - a. What is your role?
 - b. What do you do in a typical classroom?
- 2) What training have you had around “inclusive practices” to support instruction in general education classrooms?
- 3) What is your role/contribution in the IEP process?
- 4) How do you learn about the instructional and behavioral needs of the students with whom you work?
- 5) What data do you have access to and/or use to inform you on how you can best support the students with whom you work?
- 6) How do you become aware of the classroom accommodations and modifications of the students with whom you work?
- 7) How do general education, special education and paraprofessionals collaborate in order to provide instructional support and scaffolding to students?
- 8) From your perspective, what strategies or practices are teachers using in their classrooms that support struggling learners?
 - a. What practices have you observed that need to be modified in order to better support students to be successful?
- 9) Anything else you would like to share?

Parent Focus Group

Background: How long have you been a parent of a child with a disability in this district? In this school?

1. Does your child receive any general education intervention supports at their school? Please describe.
2. What do your child's special education 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 Least Restrictive Environment and service delivery options?
3. How does your child access the grade level content standards?
 - a. What supports do they receive in the inclusive classroom?
 - b. What does grade level instruction look like in special education settings?
4. What data is shared with you to inform you on your child's progress
 - a. In their classes?
 - b. In intervention programs?
 - c. On their IEP goals?
5. What are the challenges your child faces in their general education program classes?
6. Are teachers using any specific instructional strategies or practices that support your child in learning the content that you are aware of? Can you describe any of the strategies or practices that help your child?
7. Are accommodations identified in the IEP (or other individualized plan) being implemented? Can you provide some examples?
8. Do you feel that the current district services are adequate to meet your child's academic and social emotional needs?
9. What role do special education tutors (paraprofessionals) play in helping your child?
10. What are the strengths of your child's school in supporting the needs of your child?
11. What are the challenges and solutions to improving outcomes for your child?

Mental Health Focus Group

Background: How long at this school? How long in your role? What other roles have you had in your career?

- 1) 1) What are the primary functions of your role as a psychologist or guidance counselor?
 - a. How do you support students with social emotional needs?
 - b. How do you support students with academic needs?
 - c. What other roles do you play?
- 2) Please tell us about your current system of supports that are available to students who struggle in the curriculum or with other social emotional issues.
 - a. Please describe the interventions that are available (academic and social emotional).
 - b. How do you determine if these supports are effective?
- 3) How do you determine if students are in need of these supports or interventions?
 - a. Are there specifically defined entry and exit criteria for both academic and social emotional supports?
 - i. What data is used to make these decisions?
 - b. Is there a clearly defined process for students who do not respond to general education interventions?
 - i. What structures are in place to allow interventionists, teachers and other specialist meet to analyze data to make decisions about next steps?
 - c. Is there a clearly defined process for special education referral?
 - i. What role do you play in this process?
- 4) What is the current model of special education services at your school?
 - a. What is the continuum of services and supports available to students with disabilities?
 - b. What is the district's capacity to provide a full continuum of effective programs and services to meet the educational and related service needs of its students with disabilities?
- 5) How is LRE decided to allow students to have access to the general education curriculum?
 - a. What factors may be contributing to placement of students in out-of-district or segregated placements?
- 6) How involved are you with IEP development?
- 7) What does inclusive practice look like at CPS?
 - a. What is your role?
- 8) Anything else you would like to share?

This has been a very helpful conversation. I think we have some useful data for our work.

Special Education Staff and Related Service Providers Focus Group

Background: Name and role, years in special education, in the district, in this school

- 1) Please tell us about your current model of special education services in this school.
 - a. What is your role in providing special education services?
 - b. What does that service delivery look like?
 - c. Describe your continuum of services?
 - d. How are current special education services provided to students with IEPs?
- 2) What does inclusive practice look like in this school? In the district?
 - a. What is your role in supporting inclusive practices?
 - b. To what extent do general and special education teachers have the opportunity to meet regularly to plan instruction for inclusive classes?
 - c. What roles do tutors play in supporting inclusive practices?
- 3) Is the current organization of special education services the most effective means for providing services in inclusive settings while maintaining a full continuum of service delivery options for students with disabilities?
- 4) What is your role in the decision of the least restrictive environment for students to access the general curriculum?
 - a. How are out of district placements decided?
- 5) What is the current system of supports that are available to students with or without IEPs who struggle in the curriculum or with social emotional issues?
 - a. What data is used to make decisions about access to those supports?
 - i. Are there specific entry and exit criteria for academic and social emotional interventions?
 - ii. What data is used to make those decisions?
 - b. To what degree does the district provide support for struggling students who do not have IEPs?
 - i. What is your role?
 - c. To what degree do students with IEPs have access to general education interventions?
 - i. What is your role?
 - d. What is your role in providing interventions to non-identified struggling learners?
- 6) What is the course of action (process) when interventions do not prove successful?
 - a. What is your role in the process?
 - b. Is this process the process for referring students for special education? How is it different?
 - i. What is your role in this process?
- 7) What type of support (professional development opportunities and/or job embedded support (PLC team, grade/subject team, coaching/mentoring) do you receive to support the instruction of diverse learners?
- 8) Anything else you would like to share?

General Education Teachers Focus Group

Background: Name and role, how long teaching, in this district, in this school

- 1) Please tell us about your current system of supports that are available to students who struggle in the curriculum and/or with social emotional issues.
 - a. Please describe the interventions that are available (academic and social emotional).
 - i. How do you choose your research-based interventions?
 - ii. Can you describe the targeted interventions that are occurring during intervention times?
 1. Who delivers the instruction for these interventions?
 2. How do you determine if they are effective?
- 2) How do you determine if students are in need of interventions?
 - a. Do you have defined entry and exit criteria for interventions?
 - i. What data do you use to make those decisions?
 - ii. What processes do teachers and interventionists use to review the data for making decisions?
- 3) What is the course of action (process) when interventions do not prove successful?
 - a. What is your role in the process?
 - b. What is the process for analyzing and reviewing data in order to determine next steps?
 - c. What is the process the process for referring students for special education?
 - i. What is your role in this process?
 - ii. What is your role in the decision of the least restrictive environment for students to access the general curriculum?
- 4) What does inclusive practice look like at your school?
 - a. What roles do tutors play in supporting inclusive practices?
 - b. To what extent do general and special education teachers have the opportunity to meet regularly to review data and plan instruction for their inclusive classes?
- 5) What instructional strategies or practices are used to support struggling learners in the general education classroom (Tier 1, core) including students with disabilities and English learners in inclusive classes?
 - a. Can you describe the practices that support differentiated learning needs?
 - b. Can you describe any strategies you routinely use to support your diverse learners?
- 6) What type of support (professional development opportunities and/or job embedded support (PLC team, grade/subject team, coaching/mentoring) do you receive to support the instruction of diverse learners?
- 7) Anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION TOOL



Concord Public Schools Classroom Observation Record

1. School:			2. Date:		3. Teacher's Name:		4. Observer:		
5. Start Time	6. End Time	7. Place in period	8. Number of Staff				9. Number of Students		
		Beg Middle End	0 1 2 Teachers (GE)	0 1 2 Teachers (SE)	0 1 2 Tutors	0 1 2 Other	Total	with IEPs	with 504 plans
10. Grade	11. Content Area	12. Setting	13. Special Education Service Delivery	14. Co-Teaching Models		15. Instructional Assistants/Other Adults		16. Student Engagement (Students are: speaking, writing, signaling, performing, thinking/responding)	
	<input type="checkbox"/> ELA <input type="checkbox"/> Math <input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> General Education <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Co-Teaching Supports <input type="checkbox"/> Push-in <u>with Support</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Room Pull-out Support <input type="checkbox"/> Inside General Education <40% (Special class) <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 teach, 1 observe <input type="checkbox"/> 1 teach, 1 assist <input type="checkbox"/> Parallel teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Station teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Team Teaching		<input type="checkbox"/> Assisting student(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Observing instruction <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Instruction <input type="checkbox"/> Non-instructional <input type="checkbox"/> Not work related		<input type="checkbox"/> 0-50% <input type="checkbox"/> 51-75% <input type="checkbox"/> 76-90% <input type="checkbox"/> 91-100%	
18. Instructional Delivery: Whole Class			Small Group/Centers			Class Seating Arrangement			
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher talk (lecture, model) <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher-led (Q&A) <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher modeling/students practice			<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/Adult-led <input type="checkbox"/> Student-led cooperative group <input type="checkbox"/> Working in pairs			<input type="checkbox"/> Students sit in rows <input type="checkbox"/> Students sit in clusters <input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Notes/Evidence:									



19. Higher Order Thinking: Depths of Knowledge:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Level 1—Recall	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 2—Skill/Concept	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 3—Strategic Thinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 4—Extended Thinking
Notes/Evidence			
20. Evidence of Grade appropriate, standards-based instruction			
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade level standards posted <input type="checkbox"/> Grade level objectives posted		<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher connects objectives or standards to instruction and/or assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment is aligned to standard <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment is aligned to objective	
Notes/Evidence			

21. Effective Instructional Strategies Multiple means of representation ("what" of learning) <input type="checkbox"/> Activation of prior knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple media/formats (Interactive Smartboard) <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Organizers <input type="checkbox"/> Visuals (pictures, video clips) <input type="checkbox"/> Use of strategies and tools that help students make meaning of their learning				Multiple ways of expression ("how" of learning) <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-media for student expression (laptop, iPad, video, audio, text, drawing) <input type="checkbox"/> Concept mapping tools/notetaking guides <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal and written scaffolds and prompts (e.g. sentence stems or frames, use of protocols) <input type="checkbox"/> Checklists/ Assessment rubrics for students <input type="checkbox"/> Checks for understanding/formative assessments used through-out				Multiple ways of engagement ("why" of learning) <input type="checkbox"/> Age appropriate activities <input type="checkbox"/> Culturally relevant activities and/or materials <input type="checkbox"/> Student choice <input type="checkbox"/> Group work/collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> Student monitoring own progress/self-assessment practices			
Notes/Evidence											
22. Physical Space <div> <input type="checkbox"/> Physical arrangement encourages engagement in student learning <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers use physical resources skillfully to increase access to learning for all students <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence that special education classroom is located near general education classrooms of same grade/age level <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable </div>											
Notes/Evidence											

23. Managing Student Behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of clear classroom management policies and procedures <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom procedures promote student learning, social development and group responsibility (use of norms, routines, "sponge activities", transitions, systems of recognition, consequences v. punishment)						<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers implement and support the classroom policies <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers response to behavioral errors is appropriate yet reflects dignity					
Notes/Evidence											