

Hingham Public Schools

Special Education Program Evaluation



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Purpose

- Identify trends and patterns in referrals and program placement in special education.
- Determine the effectiveness and utilization of current special education personnel.
- Determine the effectiveness of current programs and service interventions.
- Identify instructional strategies that are utilized throughout the district.
- Support the creation of a long-range plan that address the needs of the student population.



Methodology

- Document Review-Documents reviewed include program descriptions for in-district programs, job descriptions for department staff, census, and procedural practices for special education.
- Walk-throughs-This allowed observations of all special education settings, information conversations with principals, and meeting with numerous special education personnel.
- Observations-Observations among the specific programs were conducted.
- Interviews-Individual and group interviews were conducted.



Commendations

- District Commitment to Reflective Educational Practices and Inclusion
 - Gradual efforts to introduce Tiered System of Instruction, including Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
 - Support of elementary interventionists for general education and special education students
 - Professional development opportunities in regards to the new implementation of a new reading program.
 - A variety of after school activities at the middle and high school
 - Commitment to the social/emotional wellbeing of students



Commendations

- Special Education Instructional Programs
 - Developing a continuum of program and services for the various disability groups of students access the district at all levels
 - Commitment to inclusion
 - Curriculum modifications are made by special education teachers at the elementary level
 - Efforts to align instruction in the substantially separate programs
 - Strong commitment to developing specialized programs



Commendations

- Individualized Education Plans
 - Student IEPs provide a detailed picture of the student, their strength, and their needs, with disabilities clearly defined.
 - Assessment data is integrated into the student performance profile and what steps need to be taken.
 - Transition plans are complete where required.
 - Goals and benchmarks are measurable and are tied to the specific benchmark.



Commendations

- Special Education Administrative Personnel
 - Well-functioning Evaluation Team Chairperson model.
 - Dedicated Evaluation Team Chairs at the middle and high school level
 - Well-functioning central administrative personnel



Factors Affecting Programming and Services

- Increase in special education numbers from 12% over past five years.
- Create programs for the inclusion of students with special needs.
- Increased costs of special education programming including personnel, out-of-district tuition, and transportation.
- Increased costs can be driven by the impact of advocacy and legal proceedings related to special education.
- Provide access to technology advancements to support better access to their environment.
- Continual consideration of the needs of students with respect to program and service options.



Findings

Individual Education Program

- IEPs include a host of accommodations that are best practice, and not specific to the disability or the student.
- IEPs include measurable data to indicate performance levels yet inconsistently incorporate specific benchmark data within the goals and objectives.
- Calibration of service delivery among special educators and related services personnel to the particular needs of students is needed.
- Extended year services are often included in service delivery without school year data collection to document substantial regression.



Findings

Entrance/Exit Criteria

- Lack of understanding by school-based personnel as to what the entrance/exit criteria are for numerous special education programs and services.
- Speech and language eligibility should be calibrated system-wide.
- Criteria exist for physical and occupational therapies. Specific benchmarks for child development or particular test instrument used are needed.
- Some criteria exist for the placement in the Integrated Preschool Program.



Findings

Curriculum and Instruction

- Pull-out model of special education is the predominate model of providing services. Paraprofessionals provide support in the general education classroom.
- Augmentative Alternative Communication devices are available for students in specialized programs.
- Criteria for leveling of students in math must be clear to all involved in the process.
- Paraprofessionals provide support for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The district needs to develop criteria for receiving such supports.
- Data is not consistently taken, analyzed and integrated into best practices, except for the programs that provide services to students on the autism spectrum (ASD) or students with similar needs.



Findings

Specialized Programming

- Programming for students with behavioral and emotional issues is limited.
- Criteria for specialized programming is needed.
- Specialized classrooms have one designated special education teacher and a minimum of one paraprofessional. Small group or individualized instruction is provided.



Findings

Transition Activities

- More consistent communication with respect to transitioning students from one level to the next across the district is needed.
- Transition between the levels for students with social emotional/behavioral concerns needs particular attention.



Findings

Parent/Guardian Awareness and Support

- Interviews indicated that parents are not always feeling welcomed or treated as Team equals.
- While staff engage with parents, there is no clear or consistent process/protocol used across the district to engage parents.
- Parents are inconsistently provided with team meeting summary notes at the conclusion of team meetings.



Findings

Preschool/Early Childhood Programming

- Placement is determined primarily by age and the recommended services in student IEPs.
- Enrollment process and class composition with less community peers limits opportunities for program development and enhancements.
- Speech and language and occupational therapist provide direct services to students.
- Implementation of research-based early childhood curriculum is needed.



Findings

Staffing

- Counseling is provided through a coordination of school counselors and school adjustment counselors at each level.
- Related service providers have manageable caseload. Coordination of therapies among providers is needed.
- Established criteria are not in place for the assignment and utilization of special education paraprofessionals to a program or a student.
- District has invested in the development of specialized programs but not in the necessary consultation and monitoring needed for effective programming.



Findings

Inclusive Practices

- The district has a commitment to inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms.
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support have been established at the elementary level.
- DCAP has not been updated and is not currently utilized.



Findings

Professional Development

- There is a need for more frequent and in-depth training opportunities in multiple areas including eligibility determination, instructional and behavioral interventions, and grading of students with disabilities.
- Provide in-depth training of paraprofessionals is needed.
- Specialized professional development for staff who teach in substantially separate programs/specialized programs is needed.
- Support increased collaboration among special education staff.



Recommendations

- **Individualized Education Program**-IEPs need to be tailored to the individual needs of students and written to be understood by educators working with the students and parents.
- **Entrance/Exit Criteria**-There is a need for clear and concise entrance and exit criteria that are well established and followed for all special education program and services.
- **Curriculum and Instruction**-There needs to be a thorough review of evidence-based “best practice” that is applicable to the various special education instruction and support programs currently operating within the district.
- **Data Collection**-A thorough review needs to be conducted of what data the district is collecting, to improve decision making and internal practices.



Recommendations

- **Specialized Programs**-The district needs to analyze the current profile and needs of its special education population, to strengthen its capacity to address these needs with high quality special education program options and components.
- **Transition Activities**-Transition practices should be structured in a more sequential and consistent manner between the various levels.
- **Parent/Guardian Awareness and Support**-The district needs to develop effective strategies to improve parent awareness and understanding of their child's disability.
- **Preschool/Early Childhood Programming**-The district needs to re-envision and create a high quality early childhood special education program and Integrated Preschool Program, to reflect the current profile and needs of students and families.



Recommendations: Staffing

- **Special Education Teachers/Related Service Providers and Team Chairs**-The district needs to assess staff utilization and allocation of professional resources to maximize effectiveness and efficiency in meeting the needs of students and various special education programming options.
- **Counselors and Counseling Services**-The district needs to assess the roles and responsibilities of its clinical staff, including guidance counselors, school adjustment counselors, and psychologists, to maximize the use of their expertise and skill sets with students, staff, and families.
- **Paraprofessionals**-The district needs to establish criteria by which paraprofessionals are assigned to a student, a group of students, a program, or a classroom.
- **Administrative Oversight**-Administrative oversight of special education programming, services, and special education personnel needs to be redefined, with possible structural changes in the Department of Student Services.



Recommendations

- **Inclusive Practices**-Inclusive practices need to be a district priority to meet the needs of the students with ongoing review, and strengthening opportunities within general education programs and classrooms.
- **Professional Development**-The district needs to develop a more comprehensive approach to professional development for all school personnel, by focusing on general and special education topics.



Next Steps

- Review findings and recommendations with various stakeholder subgroups.
- Outline 3 three year plan to address areas of need identified in the report and present these in June to the School Committee.
- Research, develop and plan for social emotional and behavioral health programming.
- Continue to strengthen access to research based reading programs at all levels as part of MTSS.
- Support schedule development at the secondary level to best align special education services. Team at eighth grade level to support scheduling of special education students.
- Outline entry and exit criteria for current programming for students with disabilities.