



Watervliet City School District

Special Education Program Review

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Superintendent of Schools in the Watervliet City School District requested a review of the district's special education programs and support services. Although this review was designed to focus primarily on the special education programs and services K-12, this review cannot be conducted in isolation from the building practices, interventions and supports for all struggling learners. The focus of this study is outlined below.

II. NATURE OF WORK

- To conduct a special education program review of the current special education procedures and services, organizational structure and personnel supports involved in the implementation of CSE procedures, programs and services.
- To identify instructional and behavioral supports, AIS /RtI interventions available to students with disabilities.
- To review access to general education programs and adapted curriculum, instructional supports and proficiency for students with disabilities.
- To review curriculum, types of formative and summative assessments and instructional practices to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- To provide a special education program report with findings and recommendations to the superintendent of schools.

III. DELIVERABLES

The primary deliverable is to submit a report to the superintendent of schools of the Watervliet City School District that focuses on the instructional and fiscal effectiveness of special education programs and services for students K-12, alignment with federal and New York State laws and regulations, use of district data, and the impact on classroom instructional rigor and supports. Federal and State laws and research studies state that students with disabilities must have access to the general education curriculum aligned to the Common Core with instructional rigor, whether the student is in a special education program or in general education. The findings and recommendations will include those related to leadership, educational programming, fiscal resources, and instruction for all students in Grades K-12. These recommendations are intended to be implemented over the next three years.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Each of the findings is based on the triangulation of data from multiple sources using a review of identified documents, classroom visitations, and interviews with staff. This review process started with an administrative team meeting in August 2016, followed by onsite visitations with building administrators and teacher focus groups in September and October. A total of 24 classroom visitations

were conducted and staff were interviewed included the following: superintendent, director of programs and pupil services/transportation, building principals and assistant principals, director of curriculum and instruction, director of literacy and universal pre-kindergarten, general/special education/ reading teachers, speech therapists, and psychologists/counselors. Specific data included:

- Document review of special education policies, procedures, data, IEPs, special education reports, staff schedules/caseloads and IEP Direct data.
- Review of trend data for the District from the *New York State Report Cards* for all students and the subgroup of students with disabilities for the last two years.
- Review of *Special Education Data Report* for the last two years.
- Review of 2014-2015 State Education Department Data on Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).
- Data from the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school data.
- Review of randomly selected IEPs of specific programs.
- Structured interviews with District and building administrators, and focus groups of special education, related services and general education teachers.
- Visitations to special education classrooms and programs at K-12 levels.
- Review of special education data and IEPs from IEP Direct student management system for special education.

V. STRENGTHS / AREAS OF CONCERN

District strengths as reported by administration and teachers include:

- Support of the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools for this review of the District's special education program and services.
- The Board of Education has developed goals/targets.
- Administration and staff acknowledge the concern for the increasing gap in performance for general education students, economically disadvantaged learners and students with disabilities.
- The District has assembled a strong cohesive group of administrators that work well together.
- The District has an RtI team (grant funded) that has developed a K-12 RtI structure which is in the initial stages of implementation.
- The District is providing one period of job embedded professional development each week to its teaching staff.
- The District met the four-year graduation rate criterion for ALL students for 2014-15 school year (78%), which is an increase from the previous year (68%)
- There is adequate special education staff to reconfigure the special education continuum to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

District areas of concern as reported by administration and teachers include:

- Closing the gap between students with disabilities and general education students in the areas of ELA and Math in Grades 3-8.
- Increasing the overall academic performance for all students.
- Increased needs of students (academic and behavioral) but limited resources/poverty.
- The classification rate of students with disabilities is at 16.3% which is higher than the State target of 14.3% and higher than the previous year at 15.4%

- Providing a well known, clearly defined continuum of services that can appropriately meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- Mindful use of data to drive instruction.
- Appropriate use of special education staff (teaching and non-teaching) and service delivery models.

VI. FINDINGS

A. Data Analysis

Data from the New York State Special Education District Report Cards (2013-2014 and 2014-2015), Grade 3-8 Assessment Data Reports, the Special Education School District Data Profile, NYSED 2014-15 LRE Report, and District generated reports were reviewed for this section of the report. These reports are available on the NYSED website. Key data points are summarized below:

- During the 2013-2014 year, the graduation rate for students with disabilities was 42.9% which did not meet the state target of 53% or higher. During the 2014-2015 year, the graduation rate rose to 45% but still did not meet the state target of 50.48% or higher. (Special Education School District Data Profile Indicator 1-Graduation Rate)
- The Special Education School District Data Profile showed that the 2013-2014 special education classification rate was at 15.4%. This was above the statewide average of 13.2%. For the 2014-2015 school year, the district reported an increase to 16.3%, which is above the statewide average of 14.3%. This is disproportionate in the decline in enrollment from 2013-14 to 2014-15.
- During both the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, the dropout rate for students with disabilities was below the state target of 14% or lower. (Special Education School District Data Profile Indicator 2-Dropout Rate)
- During both the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, the suspension rate for students with disabilities was less than 1%, which met the State target of 2.7% or lower. (Special Education School District Data Profile Indicator 4A-Suspension Rate)
- During the 2014-2015 school year, 58.8% of students with disabilities received services more than 80% of the time in general education programs. The District does not meet the State target of more than 60%. However, 17.2% of students spent more than 60% of their day in special class settings, which did meet the State target of less than 22%. Additionally, the District met the State target (less than 5.8%) of having students with disabilities placed in separate settings outside of regular school facilities (separate schools, residential placements, or homebound/hospital) having 3.9%. (Special Education School District Data Profile Indicator 5-Least Restrictive Environment)
- The School Report Card revealed that during the 2013-2014 year, the graduation rate was 68% for all students with a State progress target of 78%. The District did not meet the criterion for whites, students with disabilities or economically disadvantaged. During the 2014-2015 year, the graduation rate was 78% for all students with a State progress target of 69%. The District did

meet criterion for all students and white students but not for the students with disabilities or economically disadvantaged subgroups.

- During the 2014-2015 school year, the District did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) at the elementary/middle level in ELA and Math for all students, white students, students with disabilities, or economically disadvantaged.
- During the 2014-2015 school year, the District did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all subgroups in secondary ELA or Math.
- During the 2015-2016 school year, 19% of all students were proficient in ELA (Levels 3 and 4) compared to 38% statewide. In Math, 27% of all students were proficient compared to 39% Statewide. (Note: Due to changes in the 2016 exams, the proficiency rates/data results for 2016 cannot be compared to exams prior to 2016)
- During the 2015-2016 school year, 3% of students with disabilities were proficient in both ELA and Math (Levels 3 and 4).
- As of September 2016, there were 207 students within the district that were identified with a disability; they include: 31% of students have been classified with Learning Disabilities, 32% Other Health Impaired, 2% Multiple Disabilities, 15% Speech Impaired, 10% Autism, 4% Intellectual Disability, 4% Emotionally Disturbed, and <1% Deafness.
- At the beginning of the 2016 school year 36 of the 207 students (17%) were placed out of district in either BOCES or private placements of which 56% (20/36) are in grades 6-12.
- Special education programs are provided within the home school buildings to 81% of the students in the district with the other 19% being serviced outside of the district in private schools, BOCES programs, or charter schools.
- As of September 2016, 30 students were identified as having a 504 Accommodation Plan; six (6) of them of (20%) were at the elementary level; twenty-four (80%) were at the secondary level.
- During the 2013-2014 and the 2014-2015 school years, no students with disabilities were proficient in Grades 3-8 ELA and a small number (5%) in Math. (See below)

The following Table represents the percentage of students scoring at levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 for all students, general education students, economically disadvantaged and students with disabilities for two consecutive years. (Note: As mentioned above, due to changes in the 2016 exams, the proficiency rates/data results for 2016 cannot be compared to exams prior to 2016.)

Comparison of Grades 3-8 NYS ELA and Math Assessments from 2013-14 to 2014-2015*

Grade	2014 Grades 3-8					2015 Grades 3-8				
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	% Proficient	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	% Proficient
ELA										
All	41%	37%	18%	2%	20%	41%	39%	18%	3%	20%
General Ed Students	36%	41%	22%	2%	24%	34%	42%	20%	3%	24%
Econ. Disadv.	48%	36%	15%	1%	16%	45%	38%	15%	2%	17%

Students										
Students with Disabilities	87%	13%	0%	0%	0%	84%	16%	0%	0%	0%

Grade	2014 Grades 3-8					2015 Grades 3-8				
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	% Proficient	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	% Proficient
MATH										
All	34%	38%	19%	9%	27%	38%	37%	19%	6%	25%
General Ed Students	27%	42%	21%	10%	31%	31%	41%	21%	7%	28%
Econ. Disadv. Students	38%	40%	15%	6%	21%	41%	38%	18%	3%	21%
Students with Disabilities	77%	18%	5%	0%	5%	83%	12%	5%	0%	5%

*NYS School Report Card Data 2014-2015;

The Table above identifies the significant gap between the achievement of general education students and the sub-groups of economically disadvantaged learners and students with disabilities.

Given these results, students with disabilities and those who are economically disadvantaged are at a higher risk for dropping out. Effective June 2016, the NYS Board of Regents approved an amendment to the Regulations by the Commissioner of Education that now requires only the passing of the ELA and Math Regents exams and not necessarily the other three content area exams. The challenge remains for the District to increase the instructional rigor in special education K-12 with a design of access to rigorous general education instruction to ensure that these students, and the economically disadvantaged/struggling learners, have the skills and knowledge to pass Regents examinations to achieve a high school diploma.

The Table below represents the District's ELA and Math results for the 2014-2015 school year by grade. The results listed below reflect that NO students with disabilities met proficiency (i.e., Levels 3 or 4) in Grades 3-8 ELA or Grades 5,7, and 8 Math.

2014-15 NYSED School Report Card Data by Grade

Grade	Grade 3 ELA		Grade 4 ELA		Grade 5 ELA		Grade 6 ELA		Grade 7 ELA		Grade 8 ELA	
	Level 2	Level 3/4										
Gen Ed	42%	28%	42%	44%	45%	19%	41%	37%	37%	32%	43%	39%
SWD	9%	0%	11%	0%	29%	0%	40%	0%	25%	0%	27%	0%

Grade	Grade 3 Math		Grade 4 Math		Grade 5 Math		Grade 6 Math		Grade 7 Math		Grade 8 Math	
	Level 2	Level 3/4										
Gen Ed	28%	61%	31%	65%	40%	28%	39%	53%	46%	39%	64%	14%
SWD	9%	9%	0%	22%	38%	0%	33%	11%	13%	0%	27%	0%

While it could be expected that students with disabilities would not score at the same rate as their non-disabled peers, the gap does not diminish nor do the results improve from Grades 3-8. Students with disabilities are not moving towards proficiency nor are they closing the gaps in their achievement.

Given these Grades 3-8 elementary/middle level assessment results, it is difficult at best for students with disabilities to graduate. Without strategically developed interventions, programs and instructional methodologies, there is a risk that the percent graduating with a Regents or local diploma will not increase. Hence, closing the gap with general education students will be a challenge. As a result, the district may see an increase in student dropouts and students leaving high school with only special education credentials (i.e. Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential (SACC) and Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS)).

B. Special Education Programs, Services, and Procedures

The focused review findings for the Special Education Department are summarized below:

- The position of Director of Programs and Pupil Services has been established for several years. Her responsibilities include oversight of the area of special education and pupil services, CSE/CPSE Chairperson, supervision and evaluation of nurses and all related services providers

(Speech, psychologist, social workers) and evaluator of some general education teachers. The Director also has responsibility to oversee Special Transportation, Medicaid and STAC, Home Instruction, Homeless (McKinney-Vento) and home tutoring for those students who cannot go to the off-site secondary program. She also assists others with writing the Title I Consolidated Grant, Impact Aid Grant, Part 154, 611, and 619 Special Education Grants.

- One of the challenges facing the special education department is that the Director is not providing focused leadership to the department and has been serving in a more managerial role. This is further supported by staff expressing concern that there is a “distant relationship and involvement” from the Director. Communication between and among staff was reported lacking or inconsistent. No regularly scheduled meetings are held by the Director of Programs and Pupil Services to meet with the special education department as a whole.
- A new student management system (IEP Direct) was implemented during the summer of 2016. The CSE secretary reported that she is learning the IEP Direct student management system this year. Training is being provided to the special education office staff and teachers. This system will allow the department to have easy access to various reports regarding data, services, placements, frequency of related services, progress reporting, 504 Accommodation Plans and has the capability to bill for Medicaid services.
- As of October 2016, staffing for in-district special education programs and services included 17 teachers and 32 teaching assistants (TA's) for 168 students. This would suggest that there are more than enough staff available that could be reallocated in different ways to meet the needs of students at respective grades levels.
- At the elementary level there are 8 special education teachers and 18 teaching assistants providing services to 78 students. Five special education teachers serve as consultant teachers (CT) for ELA and Math, typically with 2 different general education teacher/grade assignments. The diverse assignments for the CT teachers may contribute to the inability to plan with colleagues. There are three self-contained special education teachers (K-2, 3-4, 5-6) with 2 teaching assistants assigned per class. These classes were reported as “blended” classes (not truly self-contained) with the students going into grade level general education classes for science, social studies and specials with TA support. It was reported that the self-contained “blended” classes may contain a mix of behavioral students with low functioning students and may not be group according to similarity of needs.
- At the secondary level there are nine special education teachers and 14 teaching assistants assigned to 90 identified students. Five special education teachers serve as consultant teachers for ELA and Math and resource room teachers. There are 4 self-contained classes, however these students are reported to be included in general education classes with teaching assistant support. The behavioral class is not self-contained and serves more as a resource room for students.
- There are three speech therapists in the district. Two are assigned to the elementary school and one for the secondary. At the high school there are 34 students receiving speech services (9 consults and 25 direct therapy). This indicates that 38% (34 out of 90 SWDs) receive this service. At the elementary school there are 55 students receiving speech services. One therapist has a caseload of 24 and the other has 31. This indicates that 70% (55 out of 78 SWDs) receive this service. This raises the question of overprescription of speech services. Occupational and Physical Therapy is provided at the elementary level but not at the secondary.

Currently the related services providers do not use Entry or Exit Criteria to determine levels of services for identified students.

- There are two psychologists in the district, one per building. Additionally, there is one school counselor and one social worker at the elementary level and three counselors and two social workers at the secondary level. The district is able to bill for Medicaid counseling via the social workers.
- General and special education teachers reported having limited planning time or clear expectations given for how they should work together to plan and grade for students in the Consultant Teacher classrooms. Although some morning time has been provided for planning, a clear understanding of how to collaborate and plan together has not been established.
- There is inconsistent access to a full Continuum of Special Education programs and services from the elementary and junior/senior high school. The District offers related services, consultant teacher services, and special class services at both the elementary and secondary levels. Resource room services are provided only at the secondary level and not in Grades K-6.
- Special classes in the district are called self-contained but, in most cases, they offer those services for only ELA and Math instruction. Students are then sent to the general education classrooms for the remainder of the day. The Jr. High 12:1:2 (7th-8th grade) classes appear to be the only grades that have typically self-contained programs.
- It was reported that at the secondary level, some students have multiple services listed on their IEPs, i.e., 2 periods of skills, consultant teacher services for math, and TA support in Science and Social Studies. The students can have multiple teachers.
- There is no criterion for the placement of students using learner characteristics in any of the special education programs so placements are often made by the CSE by considering existing programs, which some staff refer to as “cookie cutter.” Several teachers report that some students get many services, which seems like “too much”, and it is difficult for teachers to understand what students truly need. Placements appear to be made by the CSE based on availability of programs rather than what is most appropriate to provide a free public education in a least restrictive environment for all the students. Staff were not able to consistently describe the current special education continuum across the District. Insufficient planning and preparation, training, monitoring and communicating to general and special education faculty is a barrier to implementation of students having access to appropriate programs in the least restrictive environment.
- A random sample review of IEPs revealed that the services listed may not accurately reflect exactly what a student may be receiving and often look exactly alike. For example, all students receiving daily direct consultant teacher services for ELA and Math at the elementary school indicate direct consultant teacher for ELA 4x/30 and Math 4x/30 when in fact the teacher is in the room 5x weekly for more than 60 minutes. Many of the IEPs used computer generated goals that were alike for many of the children in the same class and not individualized. Children in the “blended classrooms” all had TAs accompanying them to the regular education classroom but some IEPs did not indicate the TA support.
- Based on the general education/consultant teacher classroom configuration, often times the class is heavily weighted with students with disabilities, low performing students, English as New Language (ENL) students, and students with 504 accommodation plans. For example, at the secondary level one class with a general education and a consultant teacher are responsible for teaching 26 students of which 11 are students with disabilities, 2 with behavioral needs, and 3 ENL. This represents more than half of the class as struggling learners.
- Professional development is not targeted for related service providers or, in some cases, the special education staff. Special education teachers attend the offerings provided to the general

education teachers. Although an hour a week has been allocated for PD, it is not always targeted to meet the needs of staff working in the special education department.

- Special education teachers reported there is confusion regarding roles and expectations in the general education classroom, i.e., lesson planning, grading and reporting, use of data for grouping students.
- There are limited strategies that teachers and administrators use with students who have behavior issues. It is clear that there is a lack of *progressive discipline* when dealing with behavioral issues.
- There was no evidence of a Special Education Handbook or a CSE/CPSE Procedure Manual having been developed to share with all parties to ensure consistency and clearly understood expectations within the district and among buildings and staff. A Paraprofessional Handbook was developed and disseminated for the first time this year.
- Elementary special teachers reported not having regularly scheduled meetings as a department. The secondary school does have monthly special education department meetings that are facilitated by the high school psychologist who serves as the department chairperson.
- The Director of Programs and Pupil Services facilitates CPSE meetings, BOCES/Private Placements and initial CSE and 504 meetings. She schedules her own meetings into the computer system. The school psychologists facilitate district level CSE subcommittee meetings and annual 504 meetings. They are responsible to schedule their meetings in the computer and input the data. Teachers input services into the computer system. The school psychologist progress monitors the implementation of 504 Accommodation plans in each building.
- It was reported that the primary role of the office secretary is to answer the telephone, print parent letters/IEPs, and oversee the Medicaid billing. In some cases, the duties performed by the Director of Programs and Pupil Services and the school psychologists could be delegated to the office secretary given support and training.
- Both special and general education teachers reported there is no explicit communication about the special education programs or the roles and responsibilities of general and special education teachers. Particularly, staff interviewed stated the lack of clarity regarding the role and responsibilities of the general education classroom teacher and the consultant teacher. In many classrooms visited (particularly at the high school) the special education teacher functioned more as an aide in the classroom rather than teaching in the role of a highly qualified teacher.
- There is a lack of alignment between the general education curriculum and intervention programs and supports for students with disabilities K-12. During focus groups, general education teachers expressed there is great inconsistency across grades, providers, and programs (i.e. Consultant teachers, inclusion, blended classroom, co-teacher). Teachers expressed not understanding the differences in the different types of program and services options for students with disabilities. There has not been adequate training on the roles and responsibilities of consultant teacher, co-teach and resource room programs designed to align with the general education CCLS curriculum delivered in the least restrictive environment.
- Although an annual report is presented to the Board of Education, there is no evidence of a multi-year special education plan.
- The District website contains information regarding special education programs and related services and offers information on resources and students' supports and services.

C. Teaching and Learning:

The rigor of the curriculum or instruction in the special classes is not in alignment with that of the general education classroom. There is a perception of low expectations for students with disabilities by some special education and general education teachers oftentimes leading to the expectation that services need to be provided by special education teachers.

- Staff reported that although there is a Response to Intervention (RtI) structure at the elementary level, some but not all of the students with disabilities receive those services, particularly those in self-contained/blended classes. The bottom 10% get Tier III services and the bottom 25% get Tier II.
- Some students with disabilities get AIS but is may be scheduled during primary instruction from the general education classroom.
- At the junior high school level, teachers and administrators reported intense 2 year Tier I RtI training and have an RtI plan. Teachers in those grades are now leading and supporting other teachers. There is an opportunity for the majority of middle school teachers to meet at least 1x/week to discuss students. Special education teachers are part of the process.
- Although the special education students are participating in general education classes, it is not clear as to how the first level (Tier I) of classroom instruction, including scaffolding and differentiation, in the general education setting is tailored to the needs of SWD. It is a common practice that TAs be assigned to Science and Social Studies classes to support the students with disabilities. The children from the “self-contained “blended classes appear to be placed in those classrooms merely for social/emotional interaction. The TA is expected to report back to the special education teacher to support the general education curriculum.
- At the primary grades in particular, the literacy instruction in the content areas of Science and Social Studies for those blended students is not differentiated, and in some cases, inappropriate, even with the support of a TA. This would indicate a misalignment of human resources.
- This year, elementary teachers are designing “business centers” (i.e., stations). Teachers expressed needing more training to ensure consistent practice, understanding of the expectations and implementation to differentiate, and monitor these centers to meet the needs of all learners across all grade levels.
- Staff reported there are limited connections being made between the use of data and progress monitoring of IEP goals and overall implementation of instruction aligned with curriculum. There was little evidence that formative data was used to monitor student progress and inform instruction in all classes for all learners. Research-based practices are not always evident in the special and general education instructional programs. (i.e., cooperative learning differentiated instruction, etc.)
- The identified high school behavioral self-contained class has one to two periods of self contained direct instruction with two teaching assistants. The students are included in the general education class with TA support and return to the behavioral self-contained class to receive support similar to a study hall or resource room.
- Teachers and students reported that resource rooms generally operate as a “study hall” where students do their homework and prepare for tests. Direct supplementary instruction is difficult when students are not grouped according to similarity of needs. For example, one resource room observed contained 5 students in grades 9,10,11, and 12.
- Currently there is little communication with programs for students outside the school district except for annual review meetings to ensure rigorous instruction of CCLS. The school

psychologists do meet with these students every 3 years for the mandatory re-evaluation testing.

- A change from a team structure at the junior high school due to staffing cuts has created challenges in communication of curriculum needs. Staff reported shared teachers at the secondary level make scheduling difficult. Staff reported the impact of social promotion on class planning and instruction for all students.
- Staff reported that there are currently no curriculum maps being accessed.
- At the elementary school, teachers (regular education and special education) are using Journeys and some of the ELA modules. The District is looking at Core Knowledge for the future, having recognized that there is not enough phonics instruction in Journeys.
- Math Modules are used as the instructional math curriculum. Staff reported that curriculum maps had been used in the past.

D. Fiscal

- The School Report Card Fiscal Accountability Summary for 2014-2015 reported the average District cost per special education student was \$26,567 and general education student was \$8,337.00. The District cost for students with disabilities is lower than both the state average (\$31,502) and similar high need/resource capacity urban or suburban school average (\$29,820).
- The per pupil to student ratio is significantly lower than those identified in Regulations particularly for consultant teacher. For example, the majority of teachers have caseloads ranging from 10-12 students with TA's also assigned as support per grade level.
- Based on CSE interviews, placements for students with multiple disabilities, autism, and some behavioral needs have been more difficult to provide in the least restrictive environment. There are 36 students placed out of district in private schools or BOCES programs. In most cases, these students are able to generate private and public high excess cost aid based on STACs providing the District with revenue.
- The District contracts outside the district for OT and PT services.
- The district is using its Social Workers and Speech staff to bill for Medicaid.
- The District contracts with an outside consultant/group to process STAC (Management Advisory Group) and Medicaid claims (Kinney Systems) for revenue.
- The IDEA special education grants (611 and 619) are written by both the Director of Programs and Pupil Services and the Business Manager. The monies are used primarily for staff salaries and not professional development.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Special Education Programs, Services and Procedures

- Design a three-year action plan that can be annually progress monitored and incorporated into the Special Education Report to the Board of Education.
- Review job responsibilities of the Director of Programs and Pupil Services that may overlap with other district administrators, i.e., Title I, ENL, and grants. Design clear job duties and expectations for the Director.

- Establish a schedule for monthly special education department meetings, classroom visitations, and visits to out-of-district placements by the Director to increase visibility and leadership opportunities.
- Develop a Special Education handbook or guidelines that document special education process and procedures such as, the scheduling of CPSE/CSE meetings, expectations for assessment prior to meetings, responsibilities of special education staff prior to meetings, directions for developing effective Individual Education Program (IEPs), accommodations/modification criterion, Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Improvement Plans (BIP) need to be documented and shared with all staff K-12 to ensure consistent implementation.
- Develop clear procedures for 504 and special education based on the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education and federal law and regulations.
- Convene a Student Support Advisory Committee of District stakeholders (administrators, special education/general education teachers, related service providers, guidance) to develop and communicate a special education philosophy that identifies a set of principles such as, education in the least restrictive environment, access to the general education curriculum with supports, accurate and appropriate programming, etc., that will provide a clear vision for the Special Education Department.
- Develop a set of learner characteristics of students with disabilities for all of the programs on the special education continuum. This should include the student's common academic and behavioral learner characteristics, needed supports and assessment measures. Develop a full continuum of services.
- At the elementary level there are three "self-contained" classrooms that have children at various grades with varying needs, i.e., cognitive and behavioral. These students are not grouped according to similarity of need. The design of all district programs should be reviewed to ensure the programs are appropriate and the supports allocated in each of the buildings are adequate.
- Examine and reallocate, where appropriate, staff assignments to maximize human resources and supports needed for identified students.
- The District should develop or re-calibrate criteria for Speech, OT, PT, and counseling services. It is recommended that the related service providers convene to create this document to ensure that all of the stakeholders agree on the requisite criteria, thereby ensuring their equitable application. At the outset, this document should focus on the primary issue of whether or not a student should qualify for (any or all) related services based on functional educational performance and performance on standardized tests; future protocols may be amended to specify the intensity of service delivery based on the variables of age, effect(s) of the disability on academic performance, and the nature of the educational curricula.
- Visit programs in other districts identified as having strong special education programs for consultant teacher, co-teach programs and resource rooms for students with disabilities. As the District moves forward, it should confer with similar districts that have been identified as having best practices for diverse and all students and provide training on the roles and responsibilities of consultant teacher, resource room teacher, and co-teaching.
- The PD plan to meet the needs of special education teachers needs to align with general education and district identified instructional priorities.
- Develop a yearlong schedule for training of paraprofessionals, specifically on behavior management and promoting independence in students.

Teaching and Learning

- Provide professional development on how to use data for the design of classroom student groupings, instructional lessons and interventions to be delivered in the classroom before academic services are provided outside of the classroom. Staff need to become more proficient in the use of data to inform instruction. Specifically, they need to understand the benefits of using formative assessments and benchmark assessments to monitor student progress and inform instruction for all learners. Develop formative assessments to track progress on a frequent basis throughout the year, especially reading, writing and math.
- Provide professional development on the roles and responsibilities of consultant teacher and co-taught instruction with general and special educators and administrators. Teachers (general and special education) could benefit from professional development in differentiated instruction and positive behavior management.
- Develop job-embedded professional development to support the development of staff skills and knowledge for a new or expanded continuum of services.
- Provide research-based practices in differentiation, scaffolding to support the CCLS, positive behavior management and use of data to inform daily instruction. Offer opportunities for professional reflection for general and special education teachers K-12 to participate in grade level, team and department level dialogue to share ideas and implement selected consistent instructional practices to support student engagement and student achievement.
- At the elementary level, strategically re-align the instruction for literacy in the content areas (Science/Social Studies), reading, and math from a certified teacher rather than assigning TAs to the general education classrooms where they function as an aide. Literacy instruction in the early grades is imperative. The current program/services structure is resulting in lost instructional opportunities for the neediest children.

Fiscal

- Based on low caseload assignments, the District should examine the staffing patterns and programs to determine if a realignment of staff would better meet the needs of students in a more cost effective manner. Reallocate staffing based upon the needs of students and programs in each building.
- Provide PD to office staff to complete school-age STACs in house rather than using an outside source. Consider using the current IEP Direct Student Management System and Medicaid Toolkit which can bill and monitor Medicaid reimbursement rather than using an outside vendor to provide an opportunity to maximize revenue.

VII. SUMMARY

The recommendations in this report are designed to provide guidance in the development of District guidelines and expectations for the redesign of the special education office, programs and supports. The recommendations provided to the District will address administrative and teacher guidelines for redesigning the special education continuum, developing criteria for specific placement, and improving the skills and knowledge of staff in effective teaching practices to meet the needs of all learners that will result in improved student achievement.

The special education continuum of services is fragmented and currently operates in a “cookie cutter” fashion. There are different program and designs in each of the two buildings. There is limited K-12 special education communication between buildings and staff with no clear understanding of how to effectively deliver services. Therefore, faculty does not have a common understanding of special education programs, procedures and supports and services for identified and struggling learners.

The Watervliet City School District has an opportunity to develop a team of administrators that are focused on student achievement for all learners. There is an urgency that all students need to have access to a rigorous curriculum using data to inform instructional programming and reallocate resources to better meet the academic and behavioral needs of all students. . We appreciate all staff and administrators that participated in this review of special education supports and services.

VIII. NEXT STEPS

1. By January 2017, the District should consider readjusting the job duties and responsibilities of the Director of Programs and Pupil Services to help provide a mechanism for collaborative work among all administrators, teachers and support staff K-12 to bring focus and consistency to the programs and instruction for students with disabilities. Specifically, reassign the duties and responsibilities of ENL, Home Instruction and Tutoring, Title I and BEDS data to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction or the Supervisor of PreK-6 Literacy. This would allow the Director to become more of an educational leader within and among in the special education department.
2. Prior to the development of the 2017-2018 budget, the District should consider reducing the number of TAs (currently used as aides in CT classroom) and reallocate those financial resources to provide additional special education teachers to offer more services on the continuum, provide additional services based on data and numbers of students, and support inclusive practices with fidelity (i.e., co-teaching.)
3. By December 2016, the District should develop a district wide Student Support Advisory Team to begin to:
 - Review the Continuum of Services and develop Learner Characteristics to assist in the CSE decision-making process for student programs and services. This will assist in developing and providing programs and services based student need rather than placing students into programs that exist.
 - Use student data and align teaching staff and related services to more closely align to the academic and behavioral needs of students on a year-to-year basis.
 - Update program descriptions that will be shared with faculty, parents, CSE members, and placed on the District’s web site.
 - Provide professional development on de-escalation techniques and crisis intervention methods to all staff. Consider recognized programs such as TCI or Handle with Care.
 - Design a three -year special education program and services plan to address identified recommendations found in this report. This plan should develop SMART (specific, measureable, attainable, realistic, and timely) goals, to support the strategies targeted to increase the academic and behavioral proficiency of students with disabilities.

4. By December 2016, the Director of Programs and Pupil Services should begin to:
- Design a calendar and facilitate special education department meetings for increased visibility, leadership, and K-12 communication on procedures, data analysis, instructional improvement, teaching responsibilities in Consultant Teacher classrooms, etc.
 - Identify and attend outside professional development opportunities to keep abreast of educational changes in the field, learn of best practices from researchers and colleagues, and share knowledge acquired with staff within the district. Specifically, attend the monthly CSE Chairperson meetings, CASDA/BOCES trainings on data analysis, Medicaid updates, etc.
 - Design a Special Education Handbook to ensure consistent communication, expectations, and procedures and practices from special education teachers and regular education teachers in collaborative classrooms. Provide building principals with information that can be included in a faculty handbook to provide a common understanding of programs and services.
 - Work collaboratively with building administrators, psychologists, and guidance counselors to design a 504 Procedure Manual for district-wide consistency.
 - Re-assign the clerical work currently completed by the Director and school psychologists for the CSE/CPSE meetings to the office secretary. This allows more effective use of time focused on instructional leadership and support to staff and will allow the psychologists to complete mandated reports in a timely fashion.