



Futures Education

Authentic Work : Sensible Costs : Building Better Lives

***Clinical and Educational Services Analysis Summary
Presentation to the Medway School Committee***

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Team Members

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A Brief History of the Clinical and Educational Services Analysis (CESA)

The rationale: As Futures' personnel began providing services within school districts, it became evident as contractors that we were not necessarily contributing to improvements at a more global level in the effective and efficient delivery of services to students. Both we, and the districts that we served, began asking the fundamental question Can we provide services better?

Where we've been: 150 schools districts across Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Virginia, North Carolina, Illinois, Georgia, Michigan, New York, Arizona, and Idaho.



Current Challenges in Special Education

➤ “Cultural” Aspects

1. Ownership of All Students
2. Parental and Community Expectations of the IEP and the IEP Team

➤ District Resource Capacity

➤ Systematic/Procedural/Cultural

1. General Education Interventions
2. Absence of Entrance and Exit Criteria

Executive Summary

The District leadership commissioned this review that encompassed the following:

- Related services in the specific domains of speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy
- The assignment and utilization of paraprofessional personnel and supports.
- School-based behavioral health services.
- IEP and pre-referral processes including the uniformity and efficacy of the special education coordinator model.
- The efficacy of instructional models currently utilized to support students with educational disabilities.
- A review of programmatic and fiscal parameters pertaining to out of district placements and home-based services.

Methodology and Presentation

Interviews

- All interviews were confidential, allowing for candid responses
- Interview questions were catered according to the interviewees' particular areas of expertise and relevance to the area (s) under review
- A representative number of related service providers, educators, administrators, and paraprofessionals involved in the area (s) under review were interviewed in order to attain valuable and contributory qualitative information from a variety of perspectives

IEP Reviews and Practice Patterns

Work Load, Financial, and Comparative Analyses



Related Services: S-LP, OT, PT, and Home Based ABA Supports

Item #1 Quality of IEPs

Findings:

- The service providers are adhering to evidenced-based practices
- Inconsistent cohesiveness of IEPs linking educational need to identified weaknesses
- Inconsistent use of quantifiable and reliable measurement parameters for S-LP and OT services that is intrinsically linked to the forthcoming discussion of exit and entrance criteria; excellent measurability of ABA services.

Recommendation

- Provide the S-LPs, OTs, and PT with Professional Development in the writing of cohesive, measurable, and educationally-directed IEPs

Related Services: S-LP, OT, PT, and Home Based ABA Supports (cont.)

Item #2 Equity and Uniformity of Services

2a. Paraprofessionals

Findings:

- **The assignment of paraprofessionals is more often than not appropriately designated as a programmatic assignment to a teacher or program and has become increasingly based on data.**
- **There is still an over-prescription of 1:1 paraprofessionals**

Recommendation

- **Create district wide criteria for a continuum of paraprofessional supports that can be equitable applied at all schools; if 1:1 supports are needed, the IEP team should formulate specific goals linked to student outcomes and, if appropriate, reduction of 1:1 time to enhance**

Related Services: S-LP, OT, PT, and Home Based ABA Supports (cont.)

Item #2 Equity and Uniformity of Services

2b. S-LP and Home-Based Supports

Findings:

- **The number of services for students receiving S-LP services is quite high-averaging an hour-even for students with more mild impairments and underscores disagreement about qualifying students in that department**
- **Home-based ABA services are well-managed, but there may be better ways to provide these services with greater efficiency**

Recommendation

- **Create district wide criteria for related and ABA services with corresponding to a broad range of frequencies that need to be tied to student profile and need. The default mode should be that which promotes LRE and FAPE.**
- **Make an integrated IEP a key component of the District's plan**

Related Services: S-LP, OT, PT, and Home Based ABA Supports (cont.)

Item #3 Workloads

Findings:

- **Using a benchmarking processes, the number of MPS' related services are either at (paraprofessionals and psychologists), or below (S-LP, OT, PT, and special education teachers), expected numbers of staff across disciplines**
- **Despite the above finding, the numbers of fully registered providers in S-LP, OT, and PT creates an opportunity for greater cost-savings**

Recommendation

- **With a re-organization of registered therapists and assistants, MPS could realize savings of \$100,00 per year with the following re-configuration: 3 S-LP assistants with supervision by 2 S-LPs and 1 occupational therapy assistant supervised by 1 occupational therapist**

Instructional and Pre-Referral Practices

Item #1 Instructional Service Delivery

Findings:

- The resource model is the favored instructional option that is due largely to a lack of time special education teachers; this lack of time is attributable to the number of students each has on her caseload.
- Similarly, the related service providers in S-LP, OT, and PT use the more conventional “pull-out” model to provide their services

Recommendations:

- Build instructional and administrative capacity to enhance co-teaching throughout the District. Teachers’ time to co-plan and ensure they are serving students requiring their services is tied into the discussions of Rtl and appropriately discharge from services.
- Encourage the related service providers to support students in the classroom (B grid) or with lesser intrusive consultation (A grid) services and to align their interventions to grade-level expectations and curricula.

Instructional and Pre-Referral Practices (contd.)

Item #2 Pre-Referral/Early Intervening Processes

Findings:

- CHAT and SAT teams are viewed as generally ineffective owing to a number of factors: an absence of tiered interventions throughout the District and many general education teachers do not view the early intervening processes as being theirs to own.
- The distinction between academic weaknesses as opposed to a disability is not a well-defined one among IEP teams
- The results of a generally ineffective assistance process and tendency to over-prescribe an IEP results in (1) a logjam of students that either could be accommodated in the general education classroom; (2) over-burdening of staff; and (3) deprivation of general education students to

Recommendations:

- Intensive PD on the principles of RTI as a general education initiative and differentiated instruction to also include math and behavioral interventions
- Change the pre-referral team process to a single name across the District
- Increase the principal's or other school-based administrator's role for accountability, oversight, and needed visibility
- Increase tier 1 supports

Instructional and Pre-Referral Practices (contd.)

Item #3 Special Education Teacher Staffing

Findings:

- The District employs 20.5 FTE special education teachers, equating to an average caseload of 23 students per staff member.
- It is typical to see ratios of 15 students per special education teacher.

Recommendations:

- Because caseloads may be skewed based upon the relatively high identification rate of students eligible for special education in the District it is feasible that improved general education practices and interventions to meet the needs of “struggling” students would minimize over identification for special education thereby allowing for more efficient and effective deployment of existing staff.

Procedural and Cultural Considerations

Item #1 Culture

Findings:

- The staff of the elementary school exhibits a strong sense of ownership and work collegially and collaboratively to meet the needs of all students
- Because special education may be seen as the “only game in town” there is a tendency to keep a student on an IEP longer than needed

Recommendations:

- Increase PD to staff and the community regarding the legal and programmatic components of special education. It is critical that all do not see special education as the first option for students and that there are many ways to support student achievement outside of the IEP process.

Procedural and Cultural Considerations (cont.)

Item #2 The Challenge of Transitions

Findings:

- Given the configuration of the schools, there are more transitions in the District than is typical. The practical consequences of these transitions—most notably at the middle school—are: (1) staff members tend to be reluctant to reduce or terminate services as students move to a new school; and (2) parents may be fearful of transitions and want to ensure that their children do not lose ground in the new school.
- The lack of consistency across the district makes these transition points problematic given: absence of exit and entry criteria, subjectivity at the IEP “table”, lack of understanding and promotion of “required” vs. beneficial, and the previously mentioned culture that special education is “the only game in town.”

Recommendations:

- MPS should develop a standardized procedure for conducting IEP team meetings to ensure consistency with respect to the IEP process with corresponding intensive PD to coordinators

Procedural and Cultural Considerations (cont.)

Item #3 Out of District Placements (OOD)

Findings:

- OODs have increased 62% (comprising 39 students and is over 8% of the special education population-17% higher than the state average) in the past two years owing to a number of factors including students with increasingly complex challenges, a lack of a uniform procedure to determine the appropriateness of placements, and an absence of in-district programs

Recommendations:

- Specific opportunities for simultaneous “bring back” and “keep in” initiatives exist with certain populations (i.e., younger students on the autism spectrum) and those with emotional needs provided that the District’s psychologists will have the time and resources to address their needs.
- Savings in this arena are substantial, and could approach \$150,000 annually

Procedural and Cultural Considerations (cont.)

Item #4 Administrative Structure and Organization

Finding:

- The MPS special education department is currently structured with special education coordinators as the “point person” at each school. The 3.4 FTE administrative positions may be expanded to encompass a broader range of support and supervisory responsibilities expected of an administrator at the school building and District levels.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended that leadership review the job description and span of responsibilities of all special education coordinators with a focus on expanding the requirements of the position to including implementation of policies and procedures as well as other potential functions including supervision and evaluation, classroom and student observation and evaluation, out-of district placement, scheduling, and other responsibilities to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the special education program.

Discussion