Program Review Report for Milton Public Schools

Topic of Review: Special Education Department

Submitted to: Garth McKinney, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Human Resources
Milton Public Schools
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Executive Summary

Academic Discoveries, LLC was contracted to conduct a program review of the Milton Public Schools' programming within their special education department. The town of Milton supports its local school system and is a member of South Shore Educational Collaborative (SSEC), Norfolk County Agricultural, and Blue Hills Regional Vocational Technical. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, Milton Public Schools is a Title 1 District, does not provide inter-district school choice for grades kindergarten to twelve, and does not accept METCO students. The school system serves students from preschool to age 22 and has 4,321 students enrolled, 17.7% (approximately 765 students ages 6-21) receiving special education services, comparable to Massachusetts' population of 19.4%.

The program review focused on the efficacy and efficiencies of resource allocation to support students with disabilities, including quality of instruction, appropriation of staff, and communication required to ensure students are appropriately serviced. The program review was multidimensional, emphasized the participation of multiple stakeholders, and included data collection.

Components of the analysis included:
- A review of district documents relating to the focus of the review
- A review of statewide reporting
- Classroom observations
- Interviews from a sample of educators and administrators
- Survey to staff and community members
- Literature that supports the focus of the review

This review was undertaken at the request of Janet Sheehan, Interim Superintendent of Schools, to provide the district with an unbiased perspective regarding the district's efforts to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students requiring special education services.

A critical element of this review was determining how Milton Public Schools provides an educational learning environment conducive to students' learning abilities who require special education services and how the staff is supported in providing such services. Given that Milton is concerned about the efficiencies and effectiveness of the special education department, the district asked for an objective party to review the current elements of the district's programming with the hope that minimal revisions would be necessary.

The district provided Academic Discoveries with a rationale for this inquiry, referencing that the goal of Milton Public Schools was to provide students with appropriate support to access the curriculum while ensuring a least restrictive environment. Furthermore, the district expressed an interest in how Milton's current pedagogical practices support the needs of students who struggle with education in an inclusive setting. The district hoped the program review would outline potential gaps and district strengths per special education guidelines and regulations. The

district's ultimate goal was to ensure Milton Public Schools were meeting the needs of their students while supporting educators in their working environment.

Highlighted Review Findings

MPS has historically invested in supporting students in co-taught classrooms, of which this model appears to have been reduced over recent years with the philosophy of creating more push-in models. The lack of clarity around the entrance and exit criterion for the different models of inclusion and specialized programs creates inconsistencies across the district vertically and the elementary schools horizontally. There appear to be concerned regarding communication between central office administration and building-based educators. Staff have raised concerns about equitable practices within the French immersion program, stating the need to support students with disabilities in French rather than English. Overall, interviewees and survey participants reported a lack of staffing support in general education classrooms to support students with disabilities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

MPS participants expressed their appreciation for the recent efforts provided by the new administration at MPS in trying to reassure the efficiencies and effectiveness of the special education department. Participants in the observation and interview processes identified sharing concerns with administrators and Central Office that have been addressed inconsistently. Participants expressed having a special education programmatic evaluation benefits the district by identifying the challenges to developing a systematic plan to support areas of need. Participants sought assurance this independent evaluation would value input from all stakeholder groups ensuring transparency of the process. The overarching strength identified by the evaluators is the district's dedication to hiring dedicated and committed staff. However, the overriding weakness is the lack of consistent pedagogical practices, common language, and curriculum to support specialized programming. Another identified weakness is the district's lack of cohesiveness around entrance and exit criteria to support the recommendation for students to participate in substantially separate classrooms and programming. The guideline for such programming is essential to provide consistency in student profiles, support for students, and a comprehensive understanding of the purpose of such programming.

The district is encouraged to identify its personnel areas of expertise who can consistently create in-house professional development. The district is strongly encouraged to create a three-year comprehensive special education strategic plan that aligns with the district's vision and supports specific special education topics within the professional development plan provided to ALL general education and special education staff. Special education is not just the responsibility of the Pupil Personnel Services. A truly inclusive philosophy must be modeled from the top down and be adopted by every educator in the district, not just the special education department.

Further findings, conclusions, and recommendations are provided at the end of this report. It is encouraged to consider reviewing all sections of the report before reading the submissions to better understand the rationale of such suggestions. It is important to remember that these results are based solely on the information provided to the evaluators during the program review. The systematic implementation may have changed since the beginning of this review.

Milton Public Schools Special Education Department - Final Review Report

Under the leadership of Nadine G. Ekstrom, Ph.D. and Heather Tucker, M.Ed., CAGS, Academic Discoveries, LLC reviewed the Milton Public Schools (MPS) special education department regarding its efficiencies and effectiveness in supporting students and staff. According to Janet Sheehan and Garth McKinney, MPS is interested in exploring the strengths and weaknesses of MPS' philosophy of supporting students who require special education services and how the district may enrich pedagogical instruction and learning experiences. In addition, the district hopes to receive an objective exploration that includes a review of current best practices and, based on research, potential recommendations for additional best practices. The district further questioned whether some district past practices in these areas are being implemented efficiently and effectively to support ALL students.

Academic Discoveries was given a rationale for this inquiry, referencing that the goal of Milton Public Schools is to provide students with effective support to access the curriculum. Furthermore, her interest is to ensure student supports are matched to the IEP goals and objectives. She wants to better understand the strengths and needs within the special education department. Her goal is to provide the least restrictive environment for students. Through a comprehensive review, she would like to be reassured that Milton Public Schools provides appropriate interventions and modifications to support students in their home school. Furthermore, they are interested in determining the potential need for professional development for general and special education staff to ensure tiered levels of support are implemented

throughout classroom practices with rich differentiated instruction for all students for less restrictive learning environments.

The Framework of Program Review

The program review followed an improvement-based review model in which the primary goal was for the reviewers to assist MPS in outlining best practices and potential improvement in identifying answers to the following questions:

1. How are resources, such as staffing, curriculum, and programming aligned to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

2. What are the roles and responsibilities of special education and general education staff who support students with disabilities?

3. How is staff allocation determined and recognized within the special education department to support student achievement of IEP goals and objectives?

4. How is communication with parents, students, and staff regarding special education protocols, procedures, and student IEPs?

Meetings and Interviews

Dr. Ekstrom and Ms. Tucker met with MPS special education and central office administration to discuss the program review expectations, questions, next steps, and completed process. Each meeting was an informal discussion outlining the program review process, topics for consideration, developing survey and interview questions, and providing an overview of the special education department. In addition, Dr. Ekstrom and Ms. Tucker conducted interviews with the MPS administration, staff, and parents. Each interview session lasted between 30 to 45 minutes in length. The interviews and meetings took place in March and April before the end of the FY2023 school year. On occasion, there were follow-up email discussions for additional clarification when needed.

Records Review

Milton Public Schools provided the evaluators with documentation, including but not limited to; a Google folder consisting of special education protocols for MPS, team chair caseload numbers, student disability categories, and a list of out-of-district placements. Additionally, Academic Discoveries reviewed the Milton Public School profile on the DESE website, online Massachusetts census information, the Special Education homepage on the MPS website, notes from interview sessions, results of the staff survey, and peer-reviewed literature articles related to leadership, communication among public school systems, and special education professional development opportunities.

Process

Data were analyzed to identify the strengths within the MPS special education department related to the focus of the program review. Data validated effective approaches within the current special education department that best serve students, specifically those educated in substantially separate classrooms. In addition, the data were used to determine areas for potential improvement within this domain. To provide recommendations, it was essential to understand best the perspective of the administration, staff, and parents who are educationally involved with the special education department. Thus, this report first provides an overview of MPS, focusing on the special education population. Next, we deliver qualitative data from a survey, observations, interviews, and document review. In addition, the report provides a literature review that supports the topics of this report. The document concludes with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses within the special education department based on all data outlined, followed by recommendations for potential improvements in MPS specialized programming.

Overview of Milton Public Schools

Milton is a town in Norfolk County, Massachusetts. The community's adjacent towns consist of Dorchester, Mattapan, Quincy, Randolph, and Canton. According to the 2020 United States Census Bureau, 28,630 people with an average median value of owner-occupied housing of $710,700. Approximately 25.7% of the population includes people under 18 years of age. In addition, 71.6% of the community's population is White, 16.7% Black or African American, 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Native, 5.1% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 2.9% Hispanic, and approximately 5.6% associated with having two or more races. While English is predominately the most common first language in homes (81.4%), approximately 18.6% of individuals aged five and above consider another language as their primary form of communication. Of residents aged 25 years and older, 95.8% have graduated from high school, and 65.0% have graduated with a bachelor's degree or higher.

The school district consists of six schools, with an enrollment of 4,321. The six schools consist of Cunningham School, grades preschool to five; Collicot, grades kindergarten to five; Glover, grades kindergarten to five; Tucker, grades preschool to five; Charles S. Pierce Middle, grades six to eight; and Milton High, grades nine to twelve.

According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, 66.6% of the students are white. In comparison, 6.5% are Hispanic, 6.2% Multi-Race, 12.5% African American, 8.0% Asian, .2% Native American, and 0% Native Hawaiian-Pacific Islander. In addition, 90.5% of students with IEPs met the graduation target rate compared to the State's rate of 80.4%. According to the 2019-2020 reporting, MPS had 667 students on IEPs from

Kindergarten to age 21. According to Table 1, Milton's partial inclusion (inside the general education classroom 40%-79% of the day) and substantially separate (inside the general education classroom less than 40% of the day) are lower than the state's average rate. In contrast, however, Milton's full inclusion (inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day) and separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements (does not include parentally placed private school students with disabilities) have a higher percentage than the state's rate.

Indicator 5: Educational Environments for Students Kindergarten - Age 21 with IEPs

For 2019-20, the state target for % of Students with IEPs served in **Full Inclusion** is 65.5%, the target for % of Students with IEPs served in **Substantially Separate** placements is 13.3%, and the target for % of Students with IEPs served in **Separate Schools, Residential Facilities, or Homebound/Hospital** placements is 6.4%.

Table 1: Kindergarten-Age 21 Placement

	Enrollment	District Rate	State Rate	State Target
Enrolled students with IEPs	667	--	--	NA
Full Inclusion (inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day)	500	75.0%	66.2%	65.5%
Partial Inclusion (inside the general education classroom 40%-79% of the day)	70	10.5%	13.7%	NA
Substantially Separate (inside the general education classroom less than 40% of the day)	51	7.6%	13.5%	13.3%
Separate Schools, Residential Facilities, or Homebound/Hospital placements (does not include parentally-placed private school students with disabilities)	46	6.9%	6.5%	6.4%

Special Education data are suppressed for enrollment counts fewer than 6.

In addition, according to the FY2022 to FY2023 report on DESE's website, Milton is below the State's average in students with a first language, not English, English language learners, low-income, students with disabilities, and high needs. This is clearly outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Selected Populations FY 2022 – 2023

Title	% of District	% of State
First Language not English	10.4	25.0
English Language Learner	2.7	12.1
Low-income	12.4	42.3
Students With Disabilities	17.7	19.4
High Needs	29.2	55.1

Overview of Students with Disabilities

According to the MPS administration, the district currently serves approximately 17.7% (about 765 students) of its student population, from kindergarten to age 21, to those with disabilities. About 15% (about 115 students) are identified as being placed in a substantially separate or out-of-district placement. Currently, Milton Public Schools has sixty-three students attending an out-of-district day school.

Overview of Survey Participants

Educators and parents were asked to complete a survey regarding the specialized programming offered by MPS. Of those asked, 11.3% (18 participants) were special education teachers, 18.9% (30 participants) were general education teachers, 3.8% (6 participants) were support staff, 3.8% (6 participants) were specialists (OT, PT, SLP, BCBA, Psychologist, Counselor, etc.), 60.4% (96 participants) were parent/guardians, and 1.9% (3 participants) were administrators who

responded to the study. The surveys were emailed to educators and parents. Below is a chart of

the roles of the participants.

What is your role?
159 responses
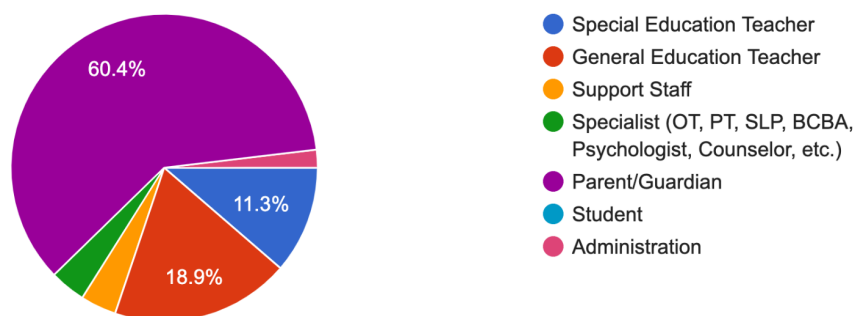
The participants represented all district locations respectively. For example, 13.2% (21

participants) from Collicot Elementary, 9.4% (15 participants) from Cunningham Elementary,

15.1% (24 participants) from Glover Elementary, 13.8% (22 participants) from Tucker

Elementary, 22.6% (36 participants) from Charles S. Pierce Middle, 25.2% (40 participants)

from Milton High, and 0.6% (1 participant) from Central Office.

Please tell us which location you are associated with:
159 responses
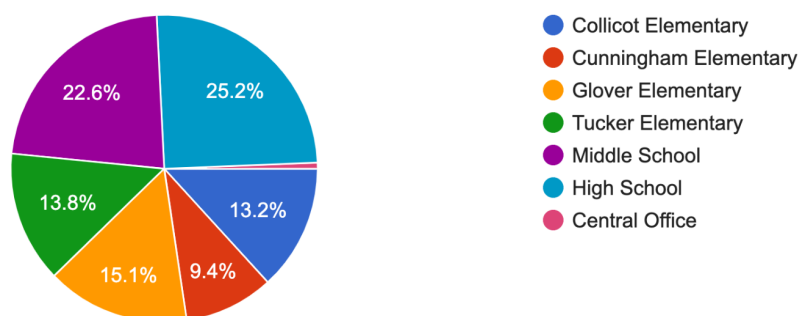
Strengths of the Special Education Department

Participants were asked what they viewed as the strengths of the special education department

for MPS. Although some responded they did not know of any strengths within the special

education department, many provided positive examples. The participants identified three

distinct categories: staffing, special education programming, and parent support. Table 3

outlines the responses from the 159 participants.

Category	Characteristics
Staffing	- Hiring of classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and therapists - Principal and classroom teachers support, recognize, and advocate for children needing special education services, individual or small group work (i.e., reading specialist, math intervention, after-school ELA tutoring, etc.). - The time special education staff spends with students, investing in their students' success providing comprehensive support, and being flexible - Glover School - Identifying students requiring a 504 before entering the middle school - Middle School special education staff - works collaboratively with general education teachers. - Work long hours to meet the needs of students, creating curriculum for all subject areas and supporting classroom teachers. - High School - Supportive administration - Cunningham School - Special education staff - Special education staff - Provides minimal pushback on parent requests - Are well-versed in their subject of expertise. - Provide support to the general education teachers, and - Very involved in their student's learning process. - Great teams and positive thinkers - Openness to parent feedback - Academic support personnel - Staff want what is best for their students - Talented and committed staff - Teachers are knowledgeable, highly-qualified, dedicated to student success, and building student relationships

Category	Characteristics

	• Staff put students' needs first, and demonstrate passion in caring for all students, listens to parent concerns and makes changes as needed
	• Special education department remains committed to meeting the individualized needs of students, focusing on data driven instruction, and collaboratively with parents and staff
	• Staff are sympathetic, kind, and patient with children receiving services
	• Communication
	  ○ Openness to parental involvement and collaboration
	  ○ Staff are committed to consult, work alongside students, or create materials to help within the classroom setting
	  ○ Collaboration and overall communication with adjustment counselors and classroom teachers
	  ○ Consistent, student-centered, and creative to support students
	  ○ Special Education teachers communicate with General Education teachers about student accommodations and needed supports.
	• Meetings
	  ○ Great responses when requesting a meeting
	  ○ Address student concerns
	  ○ Professionalism of staff
	  ○ Staff assists in cultivating a collaborative learning environment
	  ○ Quality of IEP team meetings feeling like a dialogue between school and families
	• Follows legally defined timelines - consent to test, actual testing, and scheduling meetings and knowledgable about special education laws and regulations
	  ○ Quality of evaluations of student needs
	• Consistent Out of District coordinator who is helpful and knowledgable
	  ○ Responsive to parents and readily available to listen and discuss concerns
	• Caring paraprofessionals, committed and responsive
	• Committed to providing an equitable and challenging education to our students on 504 Plans and IEPs.
	• Goal-oriented, resourceful, responsive

Special Education Programming	• The NECC program that provides access to outside resources and its smaller class size
	  ○ Expanded through the grades
	  ○ Level of ABA support
	  ○ Opportunities to attend inclusive classroom settings
	• The integrated preschool classroom
	• Identifying that there is an issue with the special education department

Category	Characteristics
	- Location and convenience - Inclusion classrooms and overall structure of specialized programming - Professional development that has been beneficial to specific methodologies to best support students with deficits in decoding and encoding (Orton Gillingham and Seeing Stars) - Knowledge of special education laws - Teacher to student ratio - Academic Support course offerings - Substantially separate programs - Specific program offerings for students who are neurodivergent - Universal Design Learning - Strong inclusion model - Substantially separate program that supports inclusion class offerings - Counselors supporting mental health programming - Specialized services, such as but not limited to OT, ABA, BCBA - Options for students to learn within their hometown school - The district provides many manipulatives, materials, equipment to help special education students succeed. - Individualize instruction - Attention to specific needs - Ability to identify needs and execution of plans - Individualized and small group instruction for academics - The district's expansion in programming to address social, behavioral, and emotional needs of all students - Hiring of interventionists - Paraprofessional support on health, safety, and behavior needs of students - Diversity of programming - Ability to tailor programming to individual needs - Partnership with families to identify appropriate out-of-district placements - Flexibility in special education programming to allow for substantially separate and inclusive programming - Self-contained classrooms at the elementary school level - Addition of the language-based classroom - Co-taught program
Parent Supports	Parents feel they can collaborate and share strategies to ensure students are receiving the support they deserve.

Category	Characteristics
	● The parent support group is active and supportive of one another ● Families take a vested interest in their children and the Milton school community ● SEPAC has strong leadership

How Milton Public Schools Student Services Department Could Improve

The survey participants were then asked how their student services department should improve. While some question how Milton Public Schools values specially designed instruction, supports special education in the district as a whole, and equity of programs, the overall responses resulted in three themes: *providing information, training for staff, and resources.* Table 4 provides examples of the participants' responses to this question.

Category	Characteristics

Providing Information	● Sharing evaluation results and explaining qualifications of needing special education services.
	● Creating a district-wide vision and strategic plan for special education that includes goals, benchmarks, and accountability
	● Assessing each student's strengths and weaknesses at the end of the year to determine balanced programming during the Extended Summer program.
	● Partner with community agencies that would be willing to work collaboratively and partner with the school or even certain camps to provide activities not typically addressed during the school year
	● Follow through
	  ○ Ensuring all staff have read IEPs and 504s before the beginning of the school year and when documents are revised
	  ○ Staff understand expectations of providing accommodations
	  ○ When new students enroll, the response rate in providing supports should be improved
	  ○ Special education administration to visit classrooms and offer direct

	support more frequently ● Communication ○ Honest and consistent communication between all stakeholders ○ More frequent outreach to families regarding student long-term goals, service provider schedules, and what has occurred in therapy sessions ○ Explain special education services provided ○ Special education need to collaborate with general education teachers so they are aware of when students are being referred for special education testing - communicate the IEP evaluation process with ALL colleagues ○ With parents during the evaluation process ○ More transparency between school and parents/guardians on the services kids are receiving (e.g. missed services) ○ While there is certainly "integration," there's not a lot of talk or action around true inclusivity ○ Supporting parents of students with disabilities transitioning from elementary to middle school ○ When students are placed in a specialized program, the educators who support these programs should be informed and included in the decision-making ○ Define, clarify, and share descriptions of each special education program offered throughout the district to ALL staff ○ There needs to be greater collaboration and support between special education leadership and teachers within the programs ● Hiring/Evaluation ○ Clarity on job descriptions for "paraprofessionals" and "ABA paraprofessionals" ○ Clarity of roles and responsibilities of general education and special education staff relating to servicing students on IEPs ○ Use of the educator evaluation system to either support educators who are challenged with teaching ALL students, or let go due to lack of improvement ● Website ○ Clear description and definition of ALL special education programs offered throughout the district ● Transportation ○ Ensure safe and reliable for ALL students requiring specialized busing.
Training for staff	● Professional development how to explain the pros and cons of students being identified as requiring special education services ○ Timeliness of submitting reports, IEPs, and other documents to home for signatures and consent

	○ Professional development on differentiated instruction for ALL staff ○ Workshops on working with students with disabilities for ALL staff ○ Offer professional development for staff who support specific programs with specific disabilities to ensure they become highly specialized in this area ○ Training for building-based special education coordinators regarding IEP process and special education protocols ○ Offering differentiated professional development to support staff who require specific training to support students with disabilities ○ How to work in partnership with parents and educational advocates ○ Overview of medical needs and how to support medical concerns for students ○ Training on how to write and service IEPs, support in co-taught content areas, common language across all IEPs ● Efficiencies ○ Protocols to be put into place at the high school to ensure process is consistent, streamline, and efficient ● Paraprofessionals ○ Should be provided with more professional development to support the district's expectations ○ Workshops to increase their knowledge of specific disabilities to support the students of whom they serve
Resources	● Need more money allocated to the SPED initiatives instead of initiatives that are not learning focused ● Provide a more holistic and flexible approach to education: the system should try to adapt to the student needs instead of forcing the student to fit in the system ● Special Education Programming ○ Requires explicit detail and descriptions of special education programs, not just a name, but the program's purpose ○ Too restrictive/exclusive they do not reflect the needs of our students ○ Guidelines for specific/higher level supports (i.e. para, ABA services, should academics be push in or pull out?) are not in place ○ Elementary schools lack equity of program offerings ○ Review of programs to align with student needs, resulting in less out-of-district placements ○ Increase student expectations and outcomes for substantially separate classrooms ○ Need to adjust on student need rather than trying to fit a student into a program ○ Appropriate furniture, specialized tools, and equipment for special education programs ○ Must create a program to support other students with autism,

social/emotional, trauma, behavioral disabilities, and school refusal students

- ○ Review of 18-22 program and increasing opportunities for inclusive learning
- ○ Entrance/exit criteria for special education program offerings
- ○ Expand the NECC program to the high school
- ○ Full-day preschool
- ○ meaningful placement for students with disabilities
- Space
  - ○ More space is required to provide specialized instruction to avoid the use of hallways and non-confidential spaces
- Classes
  - ○ Elective classes are too big due to inclusion setting opportunities
  - ○ Classes are overcrowded
  - ○ Equity/access to all programs/services
  - ○ Increase and improve consistency across grade levels in terms of services, goals, qualifications for services, and placement.
  - ○ Support for special education services in science and social studies, not only in ELA and math
- Curriculum/Pedagogy
  - ○ Offer language-based curriculum in early childhood classrooms
  - ○ Lacks consistency between classes related to pedagogy
  - ○ Begin therapy sessions on time
  - ○ Review of equity and inclusion in the French program
  - ○ Assist in future educational planning for students with disabilities after high school experience
  - ○ Review of the curriculum in substantially-separate classrooms and provide professional development on implementing newly purchased curriculum for these programs
  - ○ Increase afterschool programming - inclusive opportunities
  - ○ Include social health as part of the curriculum
  - ○ Mental health should be prioritized over academic achievement.
  - ○ Offer APE for students, as appropriate
- Co-taught classes
  - ○ More offerings required and with more general education students in classrooms for peer modeling
  - ○ More co-taught opportunities should be included at each school to provide equity across the district
  - ○ Expand co-taught classes to include science, which is an MCAS content area
- Tiered Supports
  - ○ Provide supports to students prior to requiring special education services
  - ○ Be more pro-active rather than re-active on supporting students who

are challenged with curriculum and classroom expectations
- ○ Improved supports in tiers 2 and 3 to ensure general education teachers can appropriate educate all students in their classrooms
- ○ Meet each student where they are and adapt to the child rather than expecting the child will/can rise up to where they/the general education classroom is
- Middle school
  - ○ Offer less learning platforms to streamline expectations for students to complete homework, etc.
  - ○ Lack of bullying prevention, and lack of appropriate teaching of social skills to those who needed them
  - ○ Lack of oversight, coordination, and support for special education services
- Staffing
  - ○ Caseloads are not currently equitable
  - ○ Funding to increase special education staffing
  - ○ Increase in general education support
  - ○ Need for more interventionists at the elementary to support at the younger level, with the potential of reducing this need at the middle school level
  - ○ Adjustment counselor needed in the Compass program
  - ○ Need for consistency
  - ○ Need for common planning time between general education, special education, and specialized programming staff
  - ○ Planning time for special education to implement testing, accommodations, etc. should be considered and reviewed for equity between special education and general education staffing
  - ○ Ensuring high school has a special education department head, as aligned with content department heads
  - ○ Attendance of service providers and following up with rescheduling missed services, and ability to provide coverage for testing
  - ○ Collaboration time between special education staff, general education staff, and paraprofessionals
- Parents
  - ○ Provide parents with resources on what is occurring at school and how they can support from home
  - ○ Addressing need for support from home
  - ○ Greater partnership with and feedback to parents
  - ○ Training in understanding transition planning - from academic-based to lifeskills-based IEPs and educational environment
  - ○ Remove educational jargon so parents do not feel the need to hire advocates

Special Education Offerings

Participants were asked various questions regarding the learning environment for students with disabilities, specifically regarding inclusive practices and substantially separate settings. The responses varied, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: Extent In Agreement with Statements

To what extent do you agree with the following:	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Students with disabilities are more successful in school when there is a paraprofessional in the general education classroom.	3	3	24	40	89 (56%)
Students with disabilities should be educated in a substantially separate classroom rather than in a general education classroom	43	56 (35%)	42	15	3
Students with disabilities should be provided with opportunities to learn in out-of-district placements rather than at their home school.	12	21	44	52 (33%)	29
MPS' specialized substantially separate programs are aligned to meet the needs of students.	23	37	57 (36%)	29	13
MPS provides clear guidelines as to how students qualify for substantially separate programs.	58 (36%)	32	40	16	13

Overview of Interviewees

Academic Discoveries, LLC interviewed administrators, educators, and parents throughout the program review. All individuals interviewed were respectful and thoughtful when responding to the questions asked. The interviews took place in March and April of 2023. However,

continuous informal discussions occurred during classroom observations as well. According to the evaluators, everyone provided appropriate responses that supported the questions asked to support the needs of students in the district. There were sixty-seven individuals interviewed for this program review. This includes representation from each of the six schools and central office administration.

Results Supporting Program Review Questions

MPS was interested in learning answers to four questions as they referenced communication, efficiencies, and effectiveness of the special education department.   In addition to these questions, the program review explored systemic approaches that could enhance the special education services provided to MPS students. This review aimed to determine the district's strengths and weaknesses to ensure it offers a rigorous and rich learning environment for its student population while supporting educators who serve their students. This report section includes responses to four questions researched in this program review due to data collection, interviews, and classroom observations. Before reviewing the specifics of these questions, it is essential to note the interpretation of the meaning of "inclusion" defined by MPS staff.

Interview participants, including staff, administration, and parent groups, were asked, "*What does inclusion mean to you? How well does MPS provide an inclusive learning environment for its students with disabilities? Can you provide an explicit example?"* Their responses included but were not limited to the following statements.

- Collicott participants outlined inclusion as:
  - Inclusion gives every child the right and opportunity to experience an education in the least-restrictive setting as much as possible.
  - Inclusion allows students to be included during lunch and recess.
  - Giving children the appropriate support to be successful, like their peers.
  - Allows a special education teacher to work with students with disabilities and the curriculum in a general education classroom.
  - Trying to help students with disabilities by creating modifications.
  - Allows students with disabilities who participate in a substantially separate classroom to join their peers during specials.

- Collicott participants explained how well an inclusive learning environment is provided as follows:
  - Staff believes inclusion is done well.
  - Have had visitors from other school systems impressed with our work.

- We constantly discuss increasing inclusion - guest speakers, assemblies, etc. all students are included in a general education homeroom classroom with their same-age peers.
- General education teachers are thoughtful in allowing students to enter their classrooms for part of the session and to return to their substantially separate classrooms for the remainder of the lessons when needed.
- Noticing an increased number of students taking the MCAS rather than MCAS-ALT speaks volumes about how we include children.
- There are things that the school does to support inclusion that make all the difference. For example, those in substantially separate classes participate in class pictures, music events, and other extracurricular activities.
- It appears that strides are made in all of the larger events.
- Every effort the staff can think of is made, and when inclusion is not happening, it's because of financial constraints or a lack of staff.
- One reason why families come to Milton is for their SPED programs.
- MPS has created programs, such as Partners for Students with Autism, which has allowed students to stay in their home school and participate in general education classes with support.
- Families would like more inclusion and are told not enough staffing to support this.

- Cunningham participants outlined inclusion as:
  - Amazing, experienced teachers working symbiotically as a pair working with all students together
  - Seamless between the adults where you are unsure who is playing what roles (aides, general education, and special education)
  - It is a mindset and a philosophy, not a classroom
  - Creates opportunities and relationships for all students
  - Meaningful opportunities for students with disabilities to participate as much as they can throughout their day.
  - Great friendships
  - Students all do it at a different paces. We do not say easy because it might not be easy for someone else.
  - Personalized learning as a district initiative helps all students.

- Cunningham participants explained how well an inclusive learning environment is provided as follows:
  - Principal Redding is " a fierce advocate for inclusion." The principal has shaped the philosophy of inclusion.
  - Cunningham's philosophy is from the top down. Not just a classroom but a philosophy across the building.
  - Students are included throughout when they are ready.
  - Inclusion time and pull-out time for services are planned to support the students, not just to meet service delivery time.
  - It sets up the rest of the peers watching to interact with someone who needs help. Compassion at such a young age to carry to middle and high school, and to society.
  - Trying to keep as many students in-district as possible.

- Thoughtful about where to put staff to be a good fit for everyone to be inclusive.
- The physical building space is challenging.
- The availability of bodies is hard to fill open positions. It is also harder to train staff for specialized positions.
- There may be times when a student's level of need surpasses the support and services we can actually give in-district.
- High-quality staff. We cannot say enough about the teacher, specialists, and paraprofessionals.
- There are concerns about the revolving door of staff. The lack of communication about staffing is concerning.

- Glover participants outlined inclusion as:
  - Inclusion means providing instruction in a classroom appropriate for each child. Full inclusion all day is not always appropriate but should be focused on individually, providing services and inclusion opportunities as needed throughout the school day.
  - Meaningful and intentional inclusion is provided to set the child up for success as much as possible.
  - Educating the whole child and ensuring they feel welcomed and safe in an environment where they can thrive and learn.
  - It's not a one size fits all strategy.
  - Inclusion is designed to help a child meet their full potential.
  - Inclusion could be answered differently for different situations. For instance, educators must ensure all students have access to the curriculum and every opportunity to reach their potential.
  - Inclusion is a philosophy to ensure the school makes everyone feel they are a part of Glover regardless of what they bring into the school.
  - Children are appropriately involved in whatever they can be and should be based on their needs.
  - Students are included in class activities or fully included with additional support.
  - Students are included in the school culture even when enrolled in a substantially separate specialized program.

- Glover participants explained how well an inclusive learning environment is provided as follows:
  - Glover does a great job at trying to meet each student's needs.
  - Glover used to have co-taught classes and now offers language-based programming that allows students to participate in general education classes and specially designed language-based classes.
  - That has been a huge piece of what our principal has worked towards. We celebrate every child at our school to make them feel they are all included. Each classroom is a family and connects as a community. Glover focuses on building a culture of acceptance for every child.
  - They do an extraordinary job. The co-taught is an ideal way to include students with disabilities.

- o   This is the first year we have not had an inclusion classroom in each grade. We are moving towards a push-in model in our school.

- Tucker participants outlined inclusion as:
  - o   All students work together and are included in the general education classroom, regardless of their ability.
  - o   This is easier in kindergarten than in other grades to find ways to accommodate and ensure all students succeed. For example, some students draw, write, match, and find ways to be included.
  - o   Inclusion means providing students with whatever they need to succeed in the general education classroom.
  - o   Inclusion means that all services are available for students with IEPs as they are without IEPs.
  - o   Giving students everything they need to strive, feel supported, and be a part of the school. Tucker needs to do a better job of this all around, especially in the after-school program.
  - o   When I think of inclusion, the term "least-restrictive environment" comes to mind. This means that students, as much as possible, are included in the regular education environment.
  - o   Ensuring all students who do require specialized instruction are given as many opportunities as possible to learn along with peers.
  - o   Since Tucker has no specialized programs in their building, the school's nature is to be collaborative. Gone are the days of people stating, "That room" or "That's where the kids go."
  - o   Ensuring all students are within the school learning community regardless of their needs.

- Tucker participants explained how well an inclusive learning environment is provided as follows:
  - o   Tucker has no substantially separate programs, so all students are included.
  - o   Instead of pulling students outside of the classroom, we focus on how to educate them in the classroom.
  - o   We offer a quiet space if that is really what is best for the. It's what students need. Including inclusion and pushing support is not always beneficial for the student.
  - o   Our school really pushes for the push-in model, and effort is strong for educators to make a meaningful choice as to whether a push-in model or push-out model is appropriate for each student.
  - o   The after-school enrichment program is a concern because if your child has a behavior problem, then they are not supported in this program. Parents are continuously asked to pick up their children from the after-school program if there is a behavioral concern.
  - o   The school system is not successful with inclusion opportunities, especially concerning the French immersion program.
  - o   Not all families are told about the specifics of the French immersion program upfront. For example, the district does not provide special education services in French. Within this

program, the special education services are provided in English, while the instruction is provided in French. This causes a lot of confusion for the students.
- o Tucker used to have co-taught classes, which were great. However, they no longer offer co-taught classes, while other buildings in MPS still provide the co-taught model, resulting in concerns about the least-restrictive environment.
- o Tucker is frustrated by the fact that students in their building are rarely offered specialized, substantially separate programs in other school buildings due to lack of space.
- o Positive peer learning opportunities are naturally incorporated into the school due to the nature of the push-in model offered.

- ● Pierce Middle participants outlined inclusion as:
  - o All students are able to participate in the life of the school, including extracurricular activities.
  - o School expectations of caring for fellow human beings.
  - o Kind and caring environment
  - o Inclusion is always the goal. Every child is included with grade-level peers as often as possible and as meaningful as possible.
  - o Looks different for different students in different contexts.
  - o The students are at the heart of it all.
  - o Value the students with disabilities interacting with students in the general education curriculum.
  - o Disjointed. Some teachers are very open to being inclusive. Some incredible general education teachers are very collaborative in creating an inclusive environment.
  - o In general, including students with needs in the general education setting and meet their needs as best as we can depending upon the profile of the student.
  - o Some inclusion depends on the student's needs, academic or social, and what they are getting out of it.
  - o Individualized

- ● Pierce Middle participants explained how well an inclusive learning environment is provided as follows:
  - o It is standard practice to address how we treat our peers with value, it matters.
  - o There is a fully inclusive after-school program with district-provided staff as needed.
  - o Science and Social Studies are supported as needed.
  - o Decisions are made in order to problem solve short-term, but considering the impact on inclusion is the biggest.
  - o Unwavering focus on doing right by kids. Get every child what they need to be successful.
  - o Some staff is unsure how to handle student needs and look for someone else to handle them.
  - o It is unclear how students are placed in specialized programs or what the district offers.
  - o Educators do not have the support and resources needed from the system.
  - o General education teachers are making accommodations and modifications to the curriculum for science and social studies without special education support in the

classroom.
- o Need to look at the students not having success in the curriculum. We are not supporting of them in the way they need to be successful, particularly in the substantially separate programs.

- ● Milton High participants outlined inclusions as:
  - o Inclusion means accessibility.
  - o It is an equal opportunity for all and allows everyone to access instruction in their way.
  - o Inclusion personalizes the learning in general education classrooms so students with disabilities can access the curriculum and be successful.
  - o Our inclusion classrooms allow students with disabilities to participate in a course for a period of time and then transition back into a substantially separate classroom.
  - o Inclusion requires us to personalize the student's schedules and look at their strengths so they can be a part of the school community.
  - o Some of our students' access and are a part of the school plays. This is important. It is good to see that inclusivity trickles into the student community.
  - ● Inclusion means that everyone has a voice in the room and feels a part of the room. This is not always possible in every classroom all day.
  - ● Once a student is in the classroom, we need them to be there whether they are students with or without a disability.
  - ● Inclusion creates a diversity of learners within the classroom without having students feel trapped in their learning.
  - ● Inclusion requires adapting curriculum and activities so students with disabilities can participate at their own level.
  - ● Inclusion ensures everyone has the opportunity to participate in the way they are intellectually able.
  - ● Inclusion is when you have a true partnership and are willing and eager to understand each person's role. For example, when you walk into a co-taught class, there should not be one teacher in the front of the room and another in the back of the room, which, if not trained or experienced in the content, could become challenging.

- ● Milton High participants explained how well an inclusive learning environment is provided as follows:
  - o We are working to improve our inclusive opportunities. For example, co-teaching is trying to improve and hoping not to create more substantially separate programs.
  - o We should be looking at students with disabilities and creating their schedules first rather than the other way around.
  - o The master schedule team is working with special education liaisons to identify classes.
  - o The high school staff are getting course requests for students with disabilities and are helping build their course schedules, specifically working to allow students the same access as their peers.
  - o Co-teaching model tries to be inclusive but falls short because many students with disabilities are placed in these classes, resulting in less equitable classrooms at the high school.
  - o Whenever you have an English Learner student who is not on an IEP, they have always

been in a co-taught class along with those on an IEP, not creating opportunities for all students' needs to be met.
- o Musical and theater programs opened the auditions for singing and on-stage roles. There was a student with disabilities who was nervous to audition, and the staff worked together to make some accommodations for that student. They worked together to see how she could audition. In this example, the staff did a lot to accommodate and arrange for staff to attend rehearsals so the students with disabilities could be a part of the productions.
- o I don't think inclusion is something that is thoroughly thought out by all administration, and oftentimes, a liaison has to advocate for inclusive opportunities for students.
- o Unfortunately, many inclusive after-school activities are a result of parent-driven advocacy. I would like to see more staff advocating these opportunities.

- ● Staff representatives outlined inclusion as:
  - o We are missing a consistent philosophy of inclusion.
  - o Inconsistent in its definition across the district.
  - o It changes depending on who you speak to.
  - o It has changed over time depending upon the director.
  - o Ideally, keeping all students in the classroom with the special education teachers getting the support they need.

- ● Staff participants explained how well an inclusive learning environment is provided as follows:
  - o If current programs are funded and supported correctly, we would eliminate OOD students. We could bring students back if programs are set up properly.
  - o Special education teachers bend over backward for students. They want to do right by students.
  - o Clear program criteria to meet the appropriate students' needs. For example, students in the language-based program do not qualify for that instruction.
  - o Use consistent language to describe programs and services.
  - o Consistency across the schools and programs to ensure all students' needs are met equally.
  - o Students get what they need not because of need not because of loudest parents

- ● SEPAC participants outlined inclusion as:
  - o Inclusion means that people have given some thought around different entry points as to when a student with disabilities may participate in the general education classroom.
  - o Inclusion is a strategy used to make all students feel safe to express their thoughts and needs
  - o Inclusion happens before, during, and after school events
  - o Educators and parents collectively invest in the idea that not one size fits all students' abilities.

- ● SEPAC participants explained how well an inclusive learning environment is provided as follows:
  - o Inclusion is a problem for the district, as it is not consistent among the elementary schools, middle school, and high school.
  - o Some content areas focus on inclusion, but this is not true for all subject areas.

o The discussion around inclusion seems to be more reactive rather than proactive.

Overview of the Specific Review Questions

Below are the responses to the questions of the program review:

How are resources, such as staffing, curriculum, and programming aligned to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

The evaluators reviewed questions asked through interviews to respond to this question. The

staff was asked questions throughout the interview and before or after classroom observation.

Expressly, three overarching questions specifically asked students about staffing, curriculum,

and programming.

- Staffing Resources

Interview participants were asked, *"Have there been any concerns around how staffing is aligned to meet the needs of students with disabilities? What are your thoughts on these concerns, and can you provide explicit examples?"* Below are the responses from the various groups:

The *building-based and central office administration* provided similar responses across all settings. For instance, many stated that the staffing circumstances had been the best in a long time. Over the years, the district has expanded its special education staffing, allowing in-district programs to grow to support students. They are feeling well supported currently, except for the next additional ABA paraprofessionals. Some administration expressed their positive impression of the speed of hiring paraprofessionals compared to their former places of employment. Some administration expressed their appreciation for having additional interventionists in their schools. Principals seem to have ownership over the special education programs and staff in their buildings across the district. There seems to be autonomy in using the building-based special education staff to meet the needs of the specific building contexts.

At the middle and high school buildings, there was expressed concern regarding the infrastructure of the special education programs not being clearly defined and not being able to ensure appropriate staff is aligned with the special education programmatic expectations. Although staff support is provided in many English Language Arts and Math classes, there is a lack of special education support staff in social studies, science classrooms, and foreign language courses. There was an expressed concern regarding the special education department's lack of vision of what is happening in co-taught classrooms. For instance, some reported that general

education teachers, whose strength is in content knowledge, are challenged with working alongside special education teachers who do not necessarily understand the content of the lessons, resulting in unbalanced expectations.   The administration asked for support in providing training to staff implementing co-teaching in their classrooms so the teachers can better understand this approach to teaching.

At the elementary school level, the multiple inclusion models pose challenges in allocating staff to support the students' needs. The lack of programmatic clarity with entrance and exit criteria for all inclusion model types of service delivery and specialized programs creates confusion and inconsistencies across the schools. For example, a sending school may believe a student is appropriate for a service delivery model at a different school. However, the potential receiving school does not identify the student's needs consistent with the program in place.

Some expressed concerns about the ability to write IEPs based on student needs rather than based on the hired staff. For example, when a new student with a disability arrives at MPS, the IEP is often rewritten based on the district's programming rather than the student's individual needs. In addition, it was reported that some schools would develop an IEP to support the student, which may require a different learning environment. However, when parents reject this proposal, the school must work with a student they may not have the resources for.

While others believed the district was well staffed, other administrators expressed concerns about the appropriate staff to support the SEL programs, reporting that many staff is shared between the general population of the school and the specialized programs. They feel that the specialized programs should have staff hired to solely be responsible for the programs directly rather than spread out throughout the building or district.

Building-based administrators identified special education staff, including instructional assistants, require specialized professional development to meet the disability-related needs of certain student populations. It is important as new staff is on-board, they receive the training necessary to support the population of students' needs. On-going professional development is necessary to stay abreast of best practices in the field.

Communication structures around staffing are inconsistent. Some middle-level building-based administrations could not articulate the rationale behind staffing changes such as reallocations or reductions. Based on interviews the principals and team chairs are primarily responsible for communication building-based needs to the special education central office.

The *general education staff* responded that they seem to have increased classroom sizes and have received more students with disabilities in their classrooms at one given time without additional support. They also expressed concerns for their special education colleagues, who appear to have significantly high caseloads, resulting in reduced prep and lunchtime allotted to the special education staff. The general education staff described the needs of special educators in terms of workload, not caseload, as caseload may underrepresent the work of the special education staff.

They believe the administration often places students with disabilities in schools without truly

understanding the qualifications and abilities of the staff who serve these students. In a co-teaching class, for instance, a special education teacher assists in three sections of one content area and has minimal understanding of this content, resulting in challenging circumstances for students and staff. The co-taught sections also appear to have students with vast abilities enrolled in the same class.

At the secondary level, general education teachers expressed concerns about making curriculum modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities with minimal support from the special education teachers as they are not present for these lessons. Special education staff are assigned to the English and Mathematics classes. The general education staff expressed concern for the special educators in the specialized programs having the programmatic structure, support, resources, and training needed to meet the intensive level of needs of the students placed here.

The *special education staff* expressed that staffing is their largest concern due to the various disabilities among the student population and the district's understanding of the specialized personnel required to support all students with disabilities. The staffing qualifications from one special education program to the other are inconsistent. For example, skilled educators who can support language-based instruction are only housed in some school buildings, requiring students to be referred to other buildings. The district created a neurodiverse program, which the staff was excited about; however, the program was developed before aligning qualified staff that aligns with the program's profile. They want the district to be more proactive than reactive when considering staff and students for special education programs. They hope a proactive approach may assist in aligning staff strengths with student needs.

Not all staffing is directly aligned with the special education programs. The caseloads are inequitable as there is currently no cap on the number of students per resource teacher. Given the complexity of various disabilities, one educator may be servicing a student who requires support all day, while others may have more students with low special education services. In addition, a newly designed program originally had four educators supporting the program. Throughout the course of the year, as other staffing needs arose due to resignations, etc., this program is currently being supported by two teachers, resulting in a lack of support to be successful. This lack of staffing also increases students' age span in one program. The special education staff requested a case management committee to ensure all students are properly supported and to allow all educators to have planning and preparation blocks.

Special education staff is not feeling their voices are being heard when asking for more staff and are not sure who makes the determination on the level of support needed. They expressed concern about their capacity to support students with disabilities when parents refused the placement proposed. They reiterated that the placements are proposed due to staff qualifications that align with student needs. When these placements are rejected, this causes challenging circumstances for the students and the staff.

Many *parents* reported that they were very happy with the staff they have worked with and were not concerned with staffing at this time. They appreciate the co-taught classrooms and feel their children are supported in these classrooms. The parents have expressed their frustration, however, over the significant staff turnover and the lack of communication to parents regarding how retroactive services are being provided. They fear that students with disabilities are not receiving the special education services outlined on their child's IEP due to significant staff turnover.

Some reported they would like staff to pay more attention to students with sensory challenges. Parents would like educators to be more transparent with their background knowledge, understanding, and awareness of specific disabilities so they can be partners in the process. Parents would like to see more high-qualified special educators to support specifically designed programs such as, but not limited to, language-based programming. They fear that not honestly expressing their understanding of a specific disability may result in a lack of needed interventions for their child to be successful in school, which is an unsettling feeling for parents.

Some parents believe keeping their children in MPS during elementary school is a great experience. However, they have questioned this decision once their child has transitioned to the middle and high school levels. Parents would like staff and administration to pay closer attention to peer interactions in inclusive settings at the secondary level. They fear their child with a disability being teased by typically developed peers. Parents would also like to be part of the conversation when a teacher brings concerns about social and peer issues regarding their child to the administration.

Another concern by parents is the lack of coordination and support for the students placed in out-of-district placements. Given there appears to be an increase in out-of-district placements, according to parents, they feel more staffing should be provided to support families and students to ensure consistency in follow-through and quality control. Parents expressed concerns about the inequity posed by the French Immersion program as students with unique or intensive needs cannot participate in this program. They also expressed concerns about the allocation of resources to the French Immersion program that all students cannot access. Parents are concerned that more finances and ideas from administration and school committees are focused on DEI rather than students with disabilities.

- Curriculum Resources

Interview participants were asked, *"Do you believe MPS students with disabilities are provided with an appropriate curriculum to meet their needs? Please explain your answer and provide explicit examples."* The various groups provided the following details:

The *building-based and central office administration* stated that the curriculum varies among programs and school buildings. They expressed that curriculum is an area of growth for the district. For instance, they believed that the NECC partnership program has an outstanding curriculum that meets the needs of the students within that program. They overwhelmingly responded that the learning center teachers were well-equipped to support the curriculum

interventions. Some administrators reported they did not handle the modified curriculum well in substantially separate settings. Therefore, their assessment of the quality of the curriculum being implemented for those with more severe disabilities was less confident than in the inclusion classroom settings.

Administrators reported that the district has increased special education programs and purchased a new staff curriculum. However, educators have not received or did not participate in adequate training on implementing the new curriculum with fidelity. Therefore, there is a sense from administrators that educators in substantially separate classrooms may be struggling. Additionally, the intervention programs are not consistently used by the eductors.

In some instances, the administration expressed concerns about rejected placements by parents, specifically in the areas of SEL and Language-based instruction, causing students not to receive the curriculum they may require.

The *general education teachers* believe the elementary schools have the curriculum needed to support students in their classrooms but were uncertain about the substantially separate classrooms. The elementary schools have a new math curriculum with a special education component. Educators use rules-based phonetic instruction, believing special education classrooms provide more explicit direct instruction to support their students.

The general education providers expressed concern regarding the lack of training that supports the new curriculum. They are often told, "The curriculum is in the office if you want to use it." Their concern is the lack of consistency in implementing curriculum across all schools and multiple grade levels with fidelity. Given the lack of training, they expressed concern about the lack of equitable practices throughout the district. In addition, general education teachers provided examples, such as graphic organizers. There is inconsistency in models and strategies used throughout the classrooms, which is confusing for all students and the potential for "teacher shopping" by administration and students. They believe the same issue is true with testing materials. They have been told to use particular testing materials but have not received training to support this expectation.

The s*pecial education staff* feels fortunate to have the NECC classrooms in their district, as they are an additional resource for curriculum support. This program has different ABA requirements than the rest of the district, requiring different training.

As for the remainder of the district, the special education staff is not trained in the curriculum programs they have materials for. Most substantially separate programs do not have a separate curriculum from the general education classes. In the district's new neurodiverse program, for instance, the staff were required to figure out how the program would run and what was needed. The district bought the curriculum but did not provide support or a breakdown of what students needed before purchasing.

Some reported that in past experiences, the special education staff within the special education programs would use the general and specialized curricula with explicit directions. Over recent

years, the progression of curriculum development within special education programs has shifted with minimal fidelity. Others, however, stated that the substantially separate programs had not been given a curriculum in the past. Rather, it has been a combination based on the individual special education teacher's knowledge, experience, and background. Recently, the curriculum has become more of a concern for the administration. There are still many questions from special education teachers about the expectations of implementing curriculum within special education classrooms. The special educators have never received support, supervision, or review of social studies or science content areas within their substantially separate classrooms.

Some explicit and direct curriculum programs such as, Seeing Stars, Orton-Gillingham, and Wilson were mentioned as staple programs used in the substantially separate classrooms. The teachers also reported that they create multi-sensory strategies to support the curriculum. Their largest struggle, according to some, is when students require heavy modifications to their curriculum, and the teachers do not feel they have the resources to support these needs.

Some _parents_ felt they were not able to provide an answer regarding the curriculum. However, others felt strongly their child, who receives inclusive support, is accessing grade-level curriculum with support. Many feel educators do a great job adapting curricula to support their children.

Parents of students in the NECC program appeared frustrated with the curriculum because their children may have different homework and assignments from their peers in the general education classrooms. Another group of parents, who have children with disabilities in the French immersion program, reported their concerns about assessing their children for special education services. They needed their child testing in French because that is what language their child is learning. However, once their child qualifies for special education, they receive these English services.

Parents reported that many students are being placed in other schools, outside of MPS, because of the lack of the district's ability to educate students in-district. It is frustrating for families to hear of the money being invested into the school system to support students with disabilities to have them educated in an out-of-district placement.

- Programming Resources

Interview participants were asked, _"MPS has different specialized programming. Please give me your perspective on these programs. Are they meeting the needs of the students with disabilities? Why, or why not? What does MPS need to do to improve its special education programming to support students with disabilities?"_ Below are the responses from the various groups:

The _building-based and central office administration_ reported that the use of the term "program" is concerning because there is a lack of clarity around the profile of students and the types of services required to support students who are enrolled in the programs. Furthermore, there was

an expressed concern regarding the educational gaps that continue to exist within the special education student population. Although some programs, such as NECC, appear to be meeting the needs of its students, some administration questioned the COMPASS and 18-22 transition programs.

They stated that while the NECC program (a program that supports students with autism) currently serves 24 children, more than originally planned, children attended because it is an excellent program. The district is trying to hire staff to support continuous student enrollment. In addition, there appears to be turnover in this program, causing frustration between the NECC program staff and the general education teachers when students from this program enter the general education classrooms.

The administration expressed an interest in creating more special education programs within their own buildings so students would not need to attend another school across Milton. For example, not all schools have a language-based program, and students who require this explicit instruction may be recommended to attend another school. They would like to see the NECC program expand to the high school, create a medically fragile program, and more language-based programs in more buildings. It was reported that the district's finances and lack of training are barriers to assisting this approach.

The lack of definitions for special education programs is concerning, resulting in educators' challenges in creating a comprehensive program to support students appropriately. There is a lack of shared understanding of programs' entrance and exit criteria, purpose, and student profiles. This causes a lack of consistency and a systemic approach to supporting special education between special education and general education teachers, special education team chairs, and building-based administration. In addition, the philosophy of inclusive support and the ability to provide successful inclusive education for students who participate in substantially separate programs varies between general education and special education staff, questioning student placements in the general education settings. There appears to be a disconnect between the roles and responsibilities of data collection for students enrolled in special education programs and attending general education classes.

The *general education teachers* reported that the special education programs are good, but there aren't enough within the district. For example, if a student qualifies for a co-taught classroom, getting them into that school that houses that program is extremely difficult. The qualifications are loose for some schools. They would like a co-taught class offered in every school. Concern was expressed that while programs "check boxes" to meet state and federal requirements, what is on paper does not always accurately describe the everyday classroom functioning. At times the appearance of maintaining the Milton name is a priority versus transparency.

They believe some programs have been invested in. Some are well-funded and staffed, while others are poorly thought out. At Glover, the district attempted to create two new programs; one for neurodiverse populations and a language-based program. However, due to the lack of clarity around the purpose of these programs, they have resulted in learning spaces rather than clearly defined programs with a specific purpose.

The general education teachers do not know all of the programs within the district. They are not feeling versed enough about the special education program offerings to support their special education colleagues. Additionally, all educators do not know the communication of programs being introduced, faded out, vacant spaces, or at capacity. When they hear of a program offered in the school district and recommend a student for that program, they are often told there is no longer any space available. They also do not know how a student would qualify for the special education program. According to the general education staff, the co-teaching classes are not meeting all the students' needs, as some of these classes have an 80/20 split between special education and general education students. Students who do not need co-taught are put into these classes. They do not feel support from the administration for the co-taught programming, as the teachers do not have time for planning and preparation.

In some instances, the general education teachers expressed an interest in having students from the substantially separate classrooms attend their general education classes more frequently and with additional special education support.

Special education staff reported that special education programs have recently changed, and they have not been informed about what specific changes have taken place. The special education staff reported that they feel changes are not transparent among the staff and administration. They shared a concern that these programs are only discussed within the school they are housed in rather than across the district, resulting in uncertainty about program options and profiles of students that can be supported within the programs. Special educators want to actively participate in the conversations around programs and be part of the solutions developed and executed. They seek consistency between the day-to-day actions and what is communicated.

The special educators recently learned of a potential of a new program that aligned with the profile of a private school, Landmark. However, this has not been verified or formalized. According to those who have worked at MPS for a long period of time, the district used to have entrance and exit criteria to determine the profile of the students who would qualify for the special education programs and how they would graduate from that program. There is no longer an entrance/exit criteria for these programs. Therefore, the qualifications of those who can be enrolled in these programs are clearly resulting in uncertainty.

As for special education programming aspects of MPS, *parents* expressed concerns about the lack of transparency and communication between the school district and parents regarding what is offered for students with disabilities. They believe that if they do not know the correct questions, their child does not receive special education services and programming. They often feel adrift and don't understand the entire picture. Parents would appreciate learning more from the school district about special education and knowing about the SEPAC as a resource and would like more training about what is available to them. Being a parent of a student with disabilities requires parents to do significant research and due diligence. On the website, according to the parents, each school has a different name for the special education programs

they offer, which confuses the parents about what is available for their child and who to ask about these programs.

Parents reported their concerns about the NECC classrooms. They believe the district experiences many issues preventing students enrolled in this program from participating in inclusive classrooms. Some parents feel that the NECC program is so strongly ABA-based that students may not reach their academic potential.

Parents with children enrolled in full inclusion settings were very positive about their child(ren)'s experience. Others with children who receive pull-out services for reading were also supportive of MPS' special education programming.

What are the roles and responsibilities of special education and general education staff who support students with disabilities?

The response to this question is based on interview responses and district reporting. It is important to note that interview responses are based on the perspective of individuals interviewed in this review and have not been triangulated to ensure accuracy. Below are the responses from various interview groups.

Participants were asked, *"Could you please define the role and expectations of general education teachers in supporting students with disabilities?"*

Administration:
The administration felt that general education staff and special education staff often misunderstand who is responsible for supporting students with disabilities. They stated that it is important for general education staff to be reminded that they are responsible for ALL students and it is not the sole responsibility of special education staff.
They also reported the following roles and expectations for general education teachers:
- All IEPs and 504s are read at the beginning of each year and when IEPs and 504s are revised. Educators sign off that they have read all required documents.
- Must know all accommodations for each student and ask the team chair questions about such accommodations.
- When they are concerned about student progress, they bring these individuals to the support team.
- Science and Social Studies teachers are 100% responsible for students on IEPs.
- Overall responsibility relies on the general education teacher.
- Must understand how special education support in the general education classroom will

be provided to students with disabilities.
- Must collaborate with special education staff to ensure all accommodations and modifications are occurring for students with disabilities.
- Work alongside the liaison and co-teachers.
- Communicate to families when students are struggling.
- To provide a Tiered One curriculum.
- To create a strong understanding of what the students need on IEPs and to progress monitor and report this to special education staff.

General Education Staff:

The general education staff offered some challenges with their roles and responsibilities. For example, they are trained in understanding content and instruction but do not have a background or license in special education. Therefore, they rely on special education professionals to ensure their pedagogy supports students with disabilities. Below are some of their identified roles and responsibilities.
- Knowledgeable about the curriculum content and frameworks.
- They collect data for BCBAs, when necessary.
- Collaborate with adjustment counselors, BCBAs, specialists, and other special education providers.
- This role has changed over time, as they feel they are also special education teachers.
- They follow the IEP and accommodations, modify classwork and curriculum, and offer paraprofessional training.
- Provide recommendations for Plep A on the IEPs.
- Must have an understanding of accommodations and become familiar with each IEP.
- Co-taught is fazing out, but many teachers are working together.
- Responsible for accommodating and supporting ALL students all alone, without special education providers in the classroom.
- Create teachers' notes, graphic organizers, etc., as students require to access the curriculum.
- Completely responsible for communicating with parents and adjustment counselors.
- Getting to know the students more than just their IEP.
- Making sure students have access to google classroom.
- At the IEP team meeting, update the student's progress.
- Facilitate regular parent/teacher conferences and participate in the IEP meeting.

Special Education Staff:

The special education staff reported that the general education teachers work closely with the special education staff to support students with disabilities. However, they also reported that some general education teachers are more flexible and understand the needs of students with disabilities than others, which can sometimes become challenging. It was reported that some general education teachers struggle with taking on the responsibility of special education students and are known to say, "They are not mine, they are yours," or may say, "This is not my job", which is not the expectations in public education. The following are the responses provided by the special education staff:
- At the beginning of the year, general education staff are equally responsible for reading the IEP, reviewing accommodations, and knowing the students' IEP goals.

- They must attend IEP meetings and be prepared to talk about student progress and needs for accommodations.
- They are legally bound to the IEP.
- They are part of the team to identify the areas of student need and share responsibilities.
- To provide the accommodations in the classroom and implement them.

Parents:
Some parents were unsure how to answer this question regarding the roles and responsibilities of the general education teacher. One parent reported disappointment when a general education teacher stated, "I didn't know your child was on an IEP." Some parents expressed concern about the general education teachers not always being willing to meet the needs of students on an IEP. In contrast, other general education teachers go above and beyond, causing them to "teacher search" to request teachers who will support their child with a disability. The overall responses, however, were quite similar to that of the administration and educators. Below are some reflective answers from the parents.
- They need to access and read IEPs and 504s as soon as they walk into the classroom to ensure they understand the student's needs.
- May need to work with parents separately to encourage student progress.
- Roles are similar to that of the special education teacher.
- To know what the students' needs are.

Participants were asked, *"Could you please define the role and expectations of special education teachers in supporting students with disabilities?"*

Administration:
All administrative responses were consistent with one another. It was noted that the high school has limited supervision and less support from the administration. Below are the overarching responses of all participants.
- Special education teachers are representatives at the IEP team meeting who provide intervention recommendations.
- They participate in classroom observations
- Special education teachers have fewer testing responsibilities, but once IEPs are written, they need to get to know the child and implement the IEP.
- Sometimes modify work or assessments for students, as they are equally responsible compared to general education teachers.
- Do not share much of the responsibility as one might assume in a co-taught classroom. (General education's responsibility is instruction, and special education's responsibility is to attend to the IEP for students.)
- Varies on the student population they are working with and fluctuate on students' need.
- Must be well-versed in multiple curricula and content areas.
- They are the administrator's lifeline to understanding special education services.
- They know the students with disabilities best and are valuable in conversations about what works best for students.
- They are comfortable giving their suggestions for student success and asking for help when needed.

- They work at the beginning of the year to ensure staff has access to IEPs, review students' schedules to ensure alignment with IEPs, work with general education teachers, and communicate at home.
- May require direct 1:1 services to students.
- Advocate for the students with disabilities and may have to facilitate difficult conversations.
- Measure students' progress with accommodations.

General Education Staff:
General education staff reported that the special education teachers have extensive caseloads that may be overwhelming and challenging for the special education staff to complete all of their roles and responsibilities. For instance, when they are pulled for meetings or testing, they must make up missed service minutes. The general education staff reported the following roles and responsibilities for special education staff.
- They deliver explicit, specialized instruction, such as but not limited to, Orton Gillingham and Wilson.
- Make modifications to the curriculum to support student progress
- Writing IEPs, and progress reports, collecting and reporting on data, collaborating with team members and general education teachers, supporting student schedules, and contacting parents.
- Special education teachers must focus on the service minutes, goals, objectives, and outcomes outlined in the IEPs.
- Responsible for the progress notes, which is a lot of pressure, especially when pulled for meetings and have to make up services.
- They are liaisons to some students with disabilities, teach academic support classes, provide instruction as co-teachers, frequent check-ins with general education teachers, and support students.
- Provide smaller group instruction.
- Communicate with families.
- Maybe at the hub of communication and check-ins.
- Give ideas for differentiation.

Special Education Staff:
Special education staff reported they feel like they are continuously asked to do more than they can. They responded that there had been times when general education staff may think it is the responsibility of the special education teachers to keep students up to date in the curriculum when that is a shared responsibility. When asked to co-teach a classroom, they are sometimes insulted that they may be viewed as an instructional aid rather than another licensed educator. Below are a few other roles and responsibilities they identified for themselves.
- When a student is found eligible for an IEP, they are to provide information to the general education teachers.
- If a student is struggling in science, they can support the teacher and student by providing recommendations for strategies.
- Provide direct instruction in substantially separate classrooms.
- Manage caseloads, ensuring they are the same in the building they work in.
- Glover special education teachers administer academic testing, but not in other schools.

- A lot of responsibilities for providing accommodations for general education teachers at the high school is expected.
- Modify assessments, reference sheets, and graphic organizers as needed.

Parents:
Similar to the general education staffing, the parents were not completely sure of the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. Below are some suggestions they came up with.
- Engage in direct instruction with general education teachers.
- Learning about students with disabilities immediately.
- Know the student with disabilities at the beginning of the school year
- Know the strengths and weaknesses of each student with a disability.
- Understand every student's IEP
- Collaborate with the general education teacher and anyone in contact with that student to make sure the accommodations are being understood and implemented.
- Must communicate with parents.

Participants were asked, *"Could you please define the role and expectations of your support staff (paraprofessionals) in supporting students with disabilities?"*

Administration:
The administration reported that many paraprofessionals support students in self-contained classrooms, are additional support in inclusive classrooms, and attend all professional development opportunities provided by the district. They realized that the district lacks supervision and support for paraprofessionals. Overall, the administration reported the following roles and responsibilities for paraprofessionals within the Milton Public Schools.
- 1:1 programming, as required by the student's IEP.
- Provide input to general education and special education staff for parent communication.
- Work with classroom teachers
- Is viewed as the bridge from what is being asked or instructed by the educator to what is produced at that moment.
- Are in tune with the student with disabilities and what is expected at that time.
- Ensure students have access to the curriculum.
- Paras should sometimes be brought to the table for discussion.

General Education Staff:
General education staff were extremely supportive of paraprofessionals' support in their classrooms. Because of the district's need for substitutes, paraprofessionals have frequently been removed from their roles to become a substitute. This impacts the ability of teachers to instruct with fidelity and students' ability to access the curriculum. Below are some of the responses from the general education staff.
- Help students succeed in class
- Allow students to participate in the least restrictive environment by attending a general education classroom.
- Collect data for student goals and objectives.

- In substantially separate programs, they may assist with toileting, feeding, etc.
- Create a bond where the student with disabilities can trust that person.
- Build a relationship with the classroom teacher and special educator.
- Paraprofessionals are specifically working with students because of their IEPs.

Special Education Staff:
The special education staff shared their respect and appreciation for paraprofessionals They expressed concerns regarding the lack of training for paraprofessionals. Some expressed that this position is underutilized in the district. Below are some of their ideas regarding the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals for Milton Public Schools.
- Help students with disabilities and know the profile of these students.
- Help to reinforce progress toward student IEP goal areas
- Provide behavioral, social, and safety support for students with disabilities by redirecting the student.
- Wait for instruction from general education or special education staff.

Parents:
Parents shared they did not know much about this position's responsibilities other than supporting students in the general education classroom so teachers can provide the instruction to students. Parents suggested that paraprofessionals should be provided with more extensive training, which would result in a higher pay rate to align with the training they were provided. Below are some suggestions they provided.
- Make sure the students get everything they need to access the curriculum.
- Translate the classroom work for students with disabilities.
- Help with behavior management in the general education classroom.
- Provides 1:1 support to students with disabilities.

How is staff allocation determined and recognized within the special education department to support student achievement of IEP goals and objectives?

Staff interviewed were asked, *"How is staff allocation determined within the special education department to support student achievement of IEP goals and objectives?"*

The administrators had more specific information regarding this question. However, many other staff members stated they did not know how the staff allocations were determined to support students with disabilities.

Administrators believe that special education staffing allocations are determined based on the number of students on IEPs and the level of service delivery on the IEPs. The allocations are initially determined by the services outlined on Frontline and ESPED (special education IEP platforms). The special education substantially separate programs receive more allocated resources. In addition, the students with an IEP are then grouped, and schedules are determined before the final decision is determined for staff allocations.

Other administrators stated that they try to analyze the needs for staff allocations based on the level of need rather than the number of students on the caseload. They rather review decisions based on workload instead of caseload. In addition, the assistant director of student services, team chairperson, and building administrators review the staff allocations at the beginning of the year. The administration would like to think that staff allocation is student-centered rather than adult-focused. Although the district has to wait until the beginning of the school year to make final determinations, they would love to do this work sooner than summer. in looking at the services and working from there.

Educators had perceptions of how staff allocations were determined but were not certain about the accuracy of their responses. For instance, staff believed that the administration look at caseloads and groupings with similar goals. The district tries not to have too many academic supports in one classroom, but this is not always well thought out, according to the educators. In fact, some felt the process was haphazard and reactive and that special education staff are assigned wherever there is a heated situation. Furthermore, there is a perception from some that staff is paired with individuals with personal relationships.

Some believe that principals make the final determination of special education staff allocations. Teachers feel that if they advocate for more staff, their voice is not heard, whereas if they have a positive relationship, they receive more support from staff. Given there is no cap on caseloads, educators have asked to identify staff allocation using a workload model. Given the extensive stress some teachers have undergone, one reported she took a leave of absence. Staff reported a lack of equity between the schools, whether in caseloads, workloads, compensation for additional activities, or staff placement.

Staff and administration were asked, "*To what extent is the staff allocation explained to teachers and paraprofessionals annually?*"

This program review section provided very little information from the interview participants. Many reported a lack of communication, and explanations for staff allocation ranged from limited to non-existent.

Administrators admitted this was an area of growth for the district to assist in developing trust between administrators and staff. Administrators reported that due to the teachers' lack of awareness of this process, they may not know how challenging it is. Although some stated that staff may assume staff is allocated based on student's needs, this is not always the case. Some administrators reported that teachers have asked to participate in the conversation but were told what they will be teaching.

When staff is initially interviewed, they are usually informed where they will be supporting students, but this may change throughout the year due to student needs or staff changes. This year, staff report what subjects they like to co-teach, considered whenever possible, which has not been allowed in the past. Although the response from educators is not a guarantee, it is a beginning process of providing them with a voice.

Some educators reported they had observed improvement from building-based administration in being more transparent regarding this process. Otherwise, staff usually receive a liaison list at the beginning of each year without any discussion.

How is communication with parents, students, and staff regarding special education protocols, procedures, and student IEPs?

To determine the extent to which communication from the special education department is provided to parents, students, and staff, the evaluators asked two questions during the 30 to 45-minute interviews. The responses to these questions are outlined below.

The participants were asked, *"Special education has procedures and protocols to ensure consistency and continuity are provided to all students across the district. It is also required to ensure MPS abides by state and federal regulations. How are these procedures and protocols communicated to staff?"*

There was a consensus among participants that this form of communication is inconsistent, vague, and requires revision. Most staff participants responded that procedures and protocols were outlined during a whole school professional development annually or twice yearly. Administrators responded they have weekly leadership meetings, and the special education director reports any revisions during those meetings. According to the administration, the team chairs are responsible for sharing information provided by the special education administration. In some instances, however, some buildings have had numerous team chairs over the past year, causing inconsistencies in communication.

Some remembered an attorney, Paige Tobin, presenting on legal and special education regulation updates, including child find and reports. Although many valued this approach, their feedback suggested this extensive presentation may be overwhelming and challenging to listen to such dense information in one setting.

Some participants expressed concern about the follow-up after a meeting, understanding who is responsible, and the exact actions needed. In addition, the communication appears inconsistent as sometimes information may be shared with building administration, who may not know how to communicate special education expectations to staff, resulting in the potential for staff to receive accurate information. This results in frustration and a lack of accountability.

Participants were asked, *"How do staff communicate with administration with regard to strengths and needs of students with and without disabilities?"*

This approach was inconsistent throughout the district. However, each building provided insight into its approach. All participants were comfortable sharing information with their building

administration and felt supported by their building leadership.

Some buildings outlined their weekly meetings, including student support, behavioral health, and special education teams. Some have monthly positive behavior interventions and support assemblies, data meetings, and weekly meetings with their special education chairperson. Within the buildings, participants expressed they were comfortable expressing their thoughts to their administrators. Teachers are forthcoming to building administration and feel as supported as possible and suggested that the building administration did not always have the capacity to provide additional resources, as the funding comes from central office administration.

Some expressed frustration when asking for information through email. They acknowledged that minimal information is shared through email and is often discussed in person. Although they appreciated the face-to-face discussion, the participants preferred to receive responses in written form. In addition, the high school has department heads for many departments but not for special education, resulting in a lack of receiving information regularly from the special education department.

Next, participants were asked, "*As a follow-up question, how are these procedures and protocols communicated to parents? Students?*

Many staff were unaware of how procedures and protocols were communicated to parents or students. Administrators, however, reported they communicate with families by distributing newsletters. The district has an active SEPAC that provides support to families. The Director of Special Education has a weekly blog, a direct communication source for families and employees. Participants also recognized the website, referencing resources, program handbooks, etc., available for families and the community.

In addition to multiple social media avenues, it was reported that parents receive communication about procedures and protocols at IEP meetings and are handed the Procedural Safeguard. Team chairs are responsible for sharing these documents with parents and caregivers at the IEP meetings. In addition, the team chairs explain the IEP process to parents at the IEP meeting.

Parents had differing experiences based on the school their children attended. Some reported they rarely receive information. In contrast, others appreciated the formal notifications sent to families during staff changes. Some confessed that they might not pay attention if the information is provided because they rely heavily on teachers at IEP meetings. Parents also expressed they were overwhelmed by receiving a Xerox packet of information at one time.

Observations

Milton Public School observations were conducted over several sessions during February and

March 2023 to include general education classrooms, special education inclusion classrooms,

and substantially separate program classrooms ranging from preschool to high school levels. As a result of the various observations conducted, the comprehensive Milton Public Schools programming for students was captured.

- PreSchool Observations:

The Milton Public Schools house the preschool program at the Tucker School and the Cunningham School. While both schools have an integrated preschool program, only Cunningham has an Autism program. An Early Childhood Coordinator, an Early Childhood Team Chair, and the Cunningham Assistant Principal, who supports the curriculum, oversee both program sites.

Tucker School Integrated Preschool Classroom

The special education teacher instructed a morning circle time with support from an Instructional assistant for the nine students present, five of whom are on IEPs. Several student absences on this rainy day meant a smaller class size than usual. The classroom size was approximately half of a typical classroom. The students were seated in two rows, either on the floor with crisscross legs or on chairs. While focused on preschool concepts such as 1:1 correspondence and numeracy, the teacher modeled expected behavior, such as raising hands to participate. The teacher provided students with repetitious opportunities to engage with the concepts in a variety of activities. Before starting an activity, the teacher sets expectations for participation and expected behaviors. "You are going to take a snapshot, a quick look, and count as quickly as you can in your head. Raise your hand. Try not to call out." The teacher hid shapes under a box. After a quick look, the students needed to hold up their fingers to correspond with the number of shapes under the box. The teacher used verbal and non-verbal cues such as "raise your hand" and modeled one hand in the air with the other holding her pointer finger over her closed lips. The

teacher used music throughout the center time to keep students engaged with a song with hand motions or as a reward, "First, is it a letter or a number? Then we will do songs." The teacher's delivery of instruction ensured all students participated developmentally appropriately.

Cunningham Substantially Separate Preschool Classroom

The Milton Autism program is a NECC program that is staffed with a combination of Milton Public School staff and NECC staff. The teacher divided the classroom into two groups called PreK and DTT within the same classroom. Half the class works on programs in cubbies with ABA-trained educators to complete discrete trial training programs where they collect data on the specific programs designed for the individual students. The Prek students work at tables centralized in the room individually or in groups of up to three with multiple staff. The students switch to the other instructional group halfway through the day.

DTT students sat behind partitions with one staff member and up to two students. Students performed matching tasks, manding (requesting), or following simple directions. After each completed segment of the trial, the student earned a reward. To earn tokens towards their reward, the student complied with directions to "Touch head, touch ear." The staff members gained attention by stating, "Look. Nice sitting." When the student looked at the staff member, he requested a key. After 10-15 seconds, the staff member took the key, and the process repeated. Student rewards were kinetic sand, coloring, and food.

PreK students sat at one of three tables with one staff member and up to two students. Students would participate in one activity and then transition to another table for another activity. One student identified color cards in a field of two, such as "Find green (pink, blue, etc.)." The letter of the week, "S," was introduced to students. Students were asked to point to the letter s" and point to objects/animals that start with "S" such as seal. Students colored with bingo dabbers by

requesting colors from the teacher. Students earned reinforcement time such as a short video or a preferred activity (toy cutting vegetables).

Universally across both instructional groupings, curriculum access was supported using developmentally appropriate strategies. "First …, then …" language was used to communicate expectations such as "First sit, then coloring." Staff reinforced appropriate behavior by commenting, "Nice sitting/standing." Across all student groupings, educators collected data in program books, on paper, and on devices. Staff and students used a total communication approach throughout both instructional groups. The staff members modeled the language, "I need help." Once the student requested to reinforce the statement, the staff responded, "Oh, you want sand?" Students were offered choices to support request-making, "Do you want more stampers or a snack?" The student signed more and was given the bingo dapper. Some students used a "talker," Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) device, given support from the educators. After the prompt, "Bye, crocodile song. You can say..," Using his device, the student said, "Bye" to the song. Given the verbal prompt, "Tell me what you want to play with on break," and pointing cue to his device, the student requested his break activity on his device. Notable was the classroom had two staff absences which required support from an Instructional Assistant from the integrated program. A new student started the program earlier that week. The student worked individually with an Instructional Assistant to identify preferred tasks and items in the classroom. The student sought to leave the classroom, while staff supported making the request using a total communication approach.

The integrated preschool classrooms were not observed. Additionally, this building had a significant flood with damage to multiple classrooms. Classrooms moved into the library. Three preschool classes were condensed into two classroom spaces.

<u>District Inclusion Programming Observations</u>

- <u>Co-Taught Model Program Observations Elementary:</u>

Co-Taught grade 3

The general education teacher and special education teacher staff a third-grade co-taught classroom for 22 students, eight of whom are in special education. The latter portion of this mathematics lesson had students in three instructional groups for center work. One group was outside of the classroom with the special education teacher. A second group gathered on the rug for a second round of supported instruction with the general education teacher. The third group of students worked at their desks to finish their workbooks. On the rug, the general education teacher used a whiteboard to draw the in/out tables to assist students in identifying numerical patterns on the same problem in their workbooks. "If the pattern is repeating by one on this side, this side is repeating by?" After students answered correctly, she prompted, "If you had to write a rule, what would it be?" She then provided a one-minute warning for the end of the lesson. The special education teacher entered the classroom with the first group of students. She provided whole-class instructions, "At your desk, you need to put the two math packets in your green folder so we can get ready for music next." The special education teacher responded to student inquiries, " We only have five minutes for snack today. We cannot go outside. We can try for tomorrow." The teachers then circulated the room to ensure the desks were clear, students washed hands, and check-in to ensure students were on task.

Co-taught grade 4

The observation started with the students cleaning up lesson materials from the previous lesson and placing papers in their mailboxes and books in their desks. The lesson started with Calm Classroom, a school-wide mindfulness program implemented across all buildings district-wide.

Students were instructed to keep their hands out of their desks and not to drink water while the short video clip played.

The special education teacher started the lesson on the Black History research project. As part of setting expectations for the lesson, she checked in by asking for a show of hands to assess what stage of the project students were on. The general education teacher projected the banner sheet on the board while the special education teacher told students at this stage "to check in with me." She provided feedback to students, "I noticed on some of your outlines that some students made quick notes, which is fine. Remember, though, we need your best work. You need capital letters. I recommend you use a pencil to fix your mistakes. Once you are done with writing, you can color, not over the writing. If you have more information, you can decide what to include." The teachers then provide the students with an opportunity to ask questions. After questions about the project details, the special education teacher took four students to the back table, while the general education teacher took three students to the rug, and the remainder of the class worked at their desks.

Grade 5 Collaborative Model

Three groups of students each had an adult educator, general education teacher, special education teacher, and instructional assistant facilitating a reading in the history textbook on the Underground Railroad. On the board were three color-coded lists of six names assigning students to the educator they would be working with through this assignment. Depending on the group, the teacher or students took turns reading in their groups. The educators stopped their students from noticing text features such as pictures, section headings, or quotations. One educator stopped to explain the metaphor of a conductor "moving people" to those who moved the slaves through the hiding places in the different homes on their way to freedom.

Kindergarten Collaborative Model

Students were seated around the perimeter of the rug, with the general education teacher seated between students on the broad side of the rug facing the whole class. One student from a specialized program was seated with a 1:1 support staff at a table behind the student group for an inclusion opportunity. An instructional assistant cleaned the tables from a previous activity to prepare the environment for the next learning activity. When the special education teacher arrived from the other collaborative kindergarten classroom, she seated herself at the coroner of young girls. In pairs, students had a bag full of patterned shape blocks. The general education teacher had a math binder on the rug with her while she directed the students, "You are estimating how many are in the bag. Then you will dump them out and count them with your partner." She then asked students to share their estimates, the partner estimates, and the exact number of blocks. She further probed the class for the number of blue shapes, green shapes, and shapes names such as rhombus or trapezoid. The teacher was clear and concise in her directions, providing pauses until students followed her directions. "Take your hands off your blocks. Take a look around. I notice math thinking." A student explained how they added each category of shape to reach a total of 15 shapes. The instructional assistant and special education teacher provided support to the student pairs to be able to do the same and share with the class. The teacher modeled kissing her hand and touching her temple, "Kiss your brains for incredible thinking." The general education teacher instructed, "Work with your partner to put your pattern blocks back in your bag. Get ready for stations." The special education teacher supported the group, "I notice this group is ready. I notice this group is ready. Stay where you are. We need to do choices for workstations." The ready groups of students were able to make choices for their next activity and move to the classroom tables.

- <u>Resource Room Pull-Out Program Observations:</u>

This classroom is shared between two special education teachers who are simultaneously instructing small-group reading support to a grade-level group. The third special education teacher for this school shares a classroom space with another interventionist. Each teacher had a horseshoe table facing a whiteboard so that the two groups of students had their backs to one another. Both groups of students participated in phonics-based instruction at their levels.

Younger Student Group: 4 students

The special education teacher had the Fundations manual open. There were sound cards on index cards on the table. Each card had an initial blend or digraph, a short vowel, or welded ending on it. The teacher manipulated the cards as she changed sounds to make new words. For example, she changed shr-ink to shr-unk. She asked students to identify short vowel sounds in rack and rush. She continuously prompted the students for attention, "1-2-3, eyes on me." She asked students phonics rules, "What does magic e do? What's its job?" Students responded, "Makes the vowel say its name." Students took turns adding magic e to words to change words such as a pin to pine.

Older Student Group: 4 students

The teacher asked, "What sound is that letter making?" The student-produced the soft g sound. The teacher repeated the letter and the sound. She asked the group, "What else makes a soft sound?" A student said the letter j. She reminded the student, "J has only one sound." Another student identified the letter c makes a soft sound. She had the students "air write" the letter. The students were following along on a paper of nonsense words. She cued one student, "You are coming up next." She then went back to the previous student, "First touch the vowel, tell me the sound.. /e/. Good, now say it." She repeated this process for words number 6-10, with each

student decoding one word. She ensured the students followed along with one another, directing students to the word as needed. She capitalized on opportunities to provide context as necessary, for example, explaining what a leech was. During students' turns, she probed for the word peach, "Does it have a vowel team? Which one?" She also provided reminders of decoding rules, "Remember short vowels need protection from hard sounds at the end." Students received a sticker for their reward chart at the end of the lesson. One student got to cash theirs in for the prize box.

- Co-Taught Model Program Observations Secondary:

Middle School Co-taught English

This co-taught English class was the first block of the day. At the start of the bell, all students were seated at their desks. The general education teacher led the lesson stating, "No computers yet. We are going to do the writing of the essay. Before we start, we are going to review the expectations for a 3-4 paragraph essay." The general education teacher referenced an anchor chart on the classroom wall, the RACE checklist for writing, and exemplars projected on the whiteboard. She asked students to identify the expectations for each of the paragraphs. Students utilized graphic organizers completed in a previous lesson for the writing assignment. The graphic organizers were differentiated to meet different levels of student needs. One graphic organizer had a basic template of boxes for students to fill out. The most supportive graphic organizer had sentence starters, number spaces for detailed sentences, and transition words embedded into it. The special education teacher did have graphic organizers ready for students. He also supported student technology, ensuring students logged in to the correct spot or their Chromebooks were plugged in. The general education and special education teachers circulated by each cluster of desks asking students questions. The special education teacher appeared to

spend more time with specific students, bending down beside their desks and quietly asking questions. The general education teacher told the class, "When you feel you are close, get a checklist." Students worked diligently throughout the observation.

High School Co-taught Math

This co-taught math block for upper-level students was the day's first period. Students entered and sat at clusters of desks around the room. The general education teacher did not set class-wide expectations. She provided expectations individually as the groups of students settled and then as individual students entered the class. Students placed their phones on a hanging organizer called "phone island" as they entered. The general education teacher told the student groups, "Take out your device because we have a test/quiz on Friday." She handed out a reference sheet and study guide, then stated, "Thanks to special education for the reference sheet." The special education teacher was not present at the start of the lesson. As the general education teacher moved through the room, she directed students sitting alone to other student groups. One student was given the option to sit with others or work independently. Using the internet, students defined mathematical vocabulary. When the special education teacher entered the classroom, she opened her computer at a desk to do the classroom attendance. She was on her laptop periodically throughout the lesson. She asked the students if they noticed the spelling error on the sheet, also stating, "This is a lesson in proofreading." The teachers discussed when the test/quiz would happen next week, Monday or Tuesday. The quiz would be on Tuesday due to the Monday following the Super Bowl. As the general education teacher circulated the student groups, she clarified, "Some of the paragraphs are long, shorten the definitions for next week." The special education teacher encouraged students to "work with your group to come up with the best

definition." The special education teacher also asked the class, "What is slope? Who has a good one for insufficient funds?"

Students staggered in tardy until mid-way through the period. One student entered, talking about April Fool's Day and the prom. A student entered with a Dunkin Donuts bag and coffee. Another student entered with a breakfast item given to him by a teacher outside the classroom. The general education teacher and the student discussed the food item. Off-topic conversations happened throughout the observation with the general education teacher and students about the teacher's child, the student's birthdays, and other topics.

High School Co-taught English

This co-taught English class for younger-level students occurred around the student lunch block. The desks were arranged in two rows in a semi-circle around the room's perimeter, leaving an open space for the students to stand and perform the assigned roles as characters from Romeo and Juliet. Students entered, sitting at desks with copies of the text prepared with an organizational chart of the characters inside the cover. As soon as the bell rang, the general education teacher set expectations stating, "Sometimes we forget our moths are moving. Sometimes we forget our headphones are in." She then modeled a closed mouth while showing her ears free of earbuds. The general education teacher asked, "What do we remember?" while the special education teacher ensured each student had a book.

After reframing student responses and clarifying misconceptions, the general education teacher showed students a pre-determined assignment of roles for their part in reading Act One, Scene Four. The general education teacher set expectations, "Side conversations are super disruptive. If you have a question, raise your hand. You will come to the center to read your part and return to your desk. If names are what stumps you, we will help you out." The special education teacher

circulated the room to ensure students were on page 57. He continued to monitor student tracking as the even pages on the left were Old English and the odd pages on the right were the modern English version. The general education teacher read longer parts and the stage cues to assist with keeping the cadence of the play and all students on task. The special education teacher supported students by providing names or longer words. After reading the act, students entered the Google Classroom to write a journal as a diary or letter. The general education teacher instructed, "Identify the character you want to be and write from their perspective. The requirements are a minimum of 250 words with 12pt font." She then provided some modeling. The special education teacher went to specific groups of students, either quickly to ask a question or pulling up a chair for a deeper discussion. The teachers spoke to one another about providing the Scene Sumamry in Google Classroom to provide the students with additional support to use as a reference for their expository. The student lunch divided the instructional block. After lunch, students were to return to the class to finish the writing assignment.

One student, in particular, seemed challenged to understand the scene. The special education and general education teacher provided her with varying support. The student asked for an auditory version of the text but was on a device from home, not the school-issued device; therefore, she could not access the text-to-speech software. The special education teacher reviewed the organizational chart of the characters with the student. After consultation, the teacher modified the assignment for the student to write a summary of the scene using the text and the resource summary.

- Academic Support

Middle School Academic Support

The academic support class is a small group instruction block for students with disabilities supported by a special education teacher. The teacher supported four students in completing assignments individually, with a clear focus on executive functioning skills. The instructional block agenda projected on the board identified four activities for the lesson. Students were aware of the expectations and routines as they entered, went to their desks, and took out instructional materials and their Chromebooks. The teacher started each student check-in with a personal connection, such as a student's performance in the science fair or a student's new Lego set. A follow-up slide projected each student's name, a primary and secondary goal to be completed that period, and a time estimation of how long it would take to complete each task. One student identified Science and an Ed Puzzle as primary and secondary tasks to take approximately 15 minutes. Another student identified one objective, and the teacher assisted in identifying a second objective by saying, "Can you read my mind? There is a math practice sheet I want to review with you." The teacher modeled her primary and secondary tasks with completion times as well. After goal setting, the teacher went to one student to create an individualized checklist on a whiteboard. The teacher provided individual academic check-ins by asking, "Anything concerning? Anything you need help with?" The teacher used guiding questions for students requiring assistance to support the problem-solving process, "What is the predicted value? What do you think? Will you add or subtract? What is the difference?" At approximately the 154-minute mark, the teacher asked students about their goals. Using questioning, students made adjustments to the predicted time allocations. As students completed their work, the teacher congratulated them, "Finishing is such a great feeling. Congratulations!"

High School Class One

The academic support class is a small group instruction block for students with disabilities supported by a special education teacher. Students were supported individually or in small groups to complete assignments. Direct instruction included talking to a student step-by-step through solving a linear equation. The teacher asked questions to clarify thinking, such as, "What did you notice about what worked? Why were there no solutions? Why was this done this way? Does this make sense?" Throughout the lesson, the teacher modeled and directly instructed executive functioning skills. The teacher assisted students in managing their time by indicating the time remaining in the period. The teacher provided students with multiple formats of an agenda to track assignments. When asked about the effectiveness of the agenda format, she queried, " Does this make sense? We need you to manage yourself."

The teacher seems aware of the students' level of need, as noted in the differentiated agendas for students to select from. The teacher checked for understanding as she supported each student. She seemed to know what each student needed to do and the strategies to support them without doing the work for them. She incorporated executive functioning skills into her block.

One student did not engage in productive or meaningful work during the observation period.

High School Class Two

The academic support class is a small group instruction block for students with disabilities supported by a special education teacher. Students were supported individually or in small groups to complete assignments. The teacher started each student check-in with a connection about the students' day. Direct instruction included discussing imagery in poetry where "words make you feel something" for a student. The small group of students completing a math assignment was encouraged to check their thinking with one another. The Instructional Assistant (IA) took the initiative to approach students around the room to offer support or prompting. The

IA asked, "What is done, and what else needs to be done? Is anything due tomorrow? What about ELA?"

One student seemed challenged to engage. The student refused to engage with or acknowledge the Instructional Assistant. The teacher appeared conscious of how he sat beside the student with his body positioning. The observer was relatively close to the student, so the student would not engage aloud. The teacher had the student take out his computer to communicate in an online chat. This approach created interaction with the student to engage in school work. While the teacher spoke the mathematical problem solving, the student would use non-verbal gestures such as nodding or holding an amount finger to represent a number.

This teacher had many students "pop in" to the room to say hello, ask a question, or talk about anything athletics-related. Students seemed to be in and out of the classroom for the bathroom, to print something, or to give something to a teacher. There was a lot of discussion around running and track, as this special education teacher is also a track coach. The Instructional Assistant (IA) was not utilized efficiently.   The IA did take the initiative without direction to check in and support students or redirect off-task behavior. At times, the IA also sat at the back of the room reading her book while the teacher worked with individual students.

District Substatially Separate Programming Observations

The Milton Public Schools has several vertical tracks of intensive programming designed to meet the most intensive needs of the students with disabilities. The vertical programs have different names at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The design of each continuum meets the unique learning profiles consistent with the DESE special education eligibility categories. In-district programs are created to be a more-restrictive level of support than traditional inclusion models but less restrictive than Out-of-District placements (OOD). The benefit of in-district

programming is keeping students connected to the communities in which they reside. In-district programs often cost savings to OOD placements.

Reach Middle School (Lifeskills)

The Reach classroom had multiple instructional areas set up around the classroom. Student desks faced the whiteboard that projected the center time assignments color-coded by time block horizontally and vertically identified the staff member with student grouping for each time block. Center One was a table by the door with traditional and flexible seating, such as a gaming-style rocking chair. This independent work center was staffed with two IAs. On the other side of the flexible seating center, behind a half-wall, was Center 2, with a large table with multiple chairs. This reading comprehension center was staffed with two IAs. A small table with two chairs facing the wall is used for a 1:1 session with the SLP. This instructional area included a tall indoor garden against the wall. The last center and learning area was to the right of the student desks, staffed by the special education teacher to work on writing skills. This observation captured the second and third instructional blocks for this period.

Block 2: 4 students were out of the room for a session with the SLP

Center One: The two IAs, seated across from one another at the table, chatted while students sat on a gaming chair or yoga ball with their Chromebooks balanced on their lap, completing a literacy program Lexia Power-Up, designed for students grades 6-12 who are at risk for not meeting competency determinations.

Center Two: Two students took turns reading the story "The Biggest Aquarium." It appeared this book had approximately half a page of text and half a page of pictures per page. The IA stopped and asked, "Have you ever been to the Aquarium?" The IAs guided the students to answer comprehension questions such as, "Is that true or false? Where can we find that information?"

Center Three: The special education gave the student a paper-based story presented only one line at a time. The student highlighted directed letters in the story. The student read the story out loud. The student wrote words on a BoogieBoard, a black background whiteboard with rainbow-colored lines to write on, with a stylus.

Block 3: Four students returned to the room, and a student joined the SLP for individual service delivery.

Center One: Three students were seated at their desks, and one was on the gaming chair. The students opened their Chromebooks and logged in to the Lexia program. The IAs remained seated at the table, talking with one another. One IA from the reading group asked the student if they were on the program.

Center Two: One IA supported one student reading the text on the same topic. This text had pictures with 2-3 sentences of text per segment. The IA assisted the student in pronouncing approximately every third word. One IA shared she saw someone the student knew. It was unclear if the student understood who the IA was talking about.

Center Three: The special education teacher had four students seated at her table to read the story "Birthday Blues." She started the instructional time with a quick review, "Who remembers what we talked about last time?" She then reviewed the "words to know: " attention, congratulations, pointed, frustration, muttered, and distracted. The students then took turns reading the story. The teacher asked questions throughout to check for understanding, "Why was the mom distracted?" "She had a newborn baby." The teacher easily redirected the student, who made a personal connection, back to the story.

The instructional block concluded with the students packing their bags and wishing a classmate happy birthday.

RISE Middle School (Autism)

The RISE program is a partnership program with NECC designed to support students with disabilities on the Astims Spectrum. Six students and five staff members were present for the instructional block. Students' abilities range from receiving all instruction in the classroom to only participating in the program for an academic support period. This instructional block is designed for students requiring Discrete Trail Training (DTT) methodology for individualized services. At the same time, a small group of other students receives support to complete their grade-level content work. Across the back of the classroom, three cubby spaces divided the room, and each area belonged to a specific student. The students sat at desks or tables facing into the cubby while staff sat on the other side of the table facing out into the classroom. The staff ran trials with the students using hands-on prepared materials in binders. These materials are individualized to each student's IEP. Activities included: listening to a story read aloud and answering comprehension questions; answering when questions such as "When do you wear sunglasses? When do you use a flashlight?"; identification of feelings by looking at pictures of faces; and typing. Staff collected data on the student's performance on each set of tasks. Break and reward times were built into the trials. The staff prompted their student, "Show me ready. You need two stars for a break." The staff directed him to open his eyes multiple times. Within trials, students were able to take short, timed breaks. Between the tasks, students earned reward time, where they could move to another area in the classroom to do a preferred activity. Visual schedules were used to support the student's comprehension and set expectations for this work time.

In the center of the room was a rectangle of student desks. Three students completed a science packet from the general education classroom with the support of an Instructional Assistant (IA).

The IA quickly reviewed the directions, then had students add arrows and detail colors on their papers. When students finished the science packet, they moved on to mathematics work. One student worked on a line plot worksheet using an in/out table. The IA told him, "You need to show all your work. I shouldn't have to remind you." A female student told the IA, "I have not done my math homework because I do not understand it." The special education teacher for the program had the student sit at her table while she continued DTT trials with the student she was working with to explain the math concept to this student. Another student was listening to an IA read, Diary of a Wimpy Kid. The IA sat next to the student holding the book as she read to him. The student was looking around the room. It did not appear he was listening to the story. The IA did not ask questions to check for engagement or understanding. The special education teacher did ask an IA to check a student's reading log, as it was due that day.

Launch/Achieve High School (Autism/Lifeskills)

At the start of the observation, the special education teacher was exiting the classroom with a student to make copies of a paper. Two other students were seated at desks with IAs. Another IA was seated towards the windows, away from the door, laminating visuals. Present at the back corner of the room were the high school special education director and two individuals from Cardinal Cushing, a 766-approved private school, conducting an observation of one student with the potential of two more. Staffing during this observation was one teacher and three IAs to 3 students.

The teacher instructed a lesson on awesome action versus bummer behavior using BoomCard printable materials. The teacher started the lesson by asking students what makes them laugh. A student responded on his AAC device, "Funny." The teacher prompted another student, "I like to watch TV shows to laugh. What do you watch?" The student responded, "I like to watch *The*

Truth About Cats and Dogs." Another student was asked how he would feel if he got hurt, and his friends laughed. An IA prompted, "Would you like it?" The student said, "No." The teacher asked, "(Student), should you laugh when I am teaching?" "No." The teacher took a moment o explain what interrupt meant. Students were given paper copies of a book on Awesome Actions and Bummer Behavior. Using the laminated visuals, the teacher had a student tape one picture of awesome action to the front board and bummer behavior to the blackboard with guidance from an IA. The student with the device put his thumb up when asked if he was awesome. The class discussed what it means to be awesome such as being responsible for things like an iPad or giving their best effort like using an inside voice. The student asl asked about helping such as making copies before class. The class then discussed bummer behaviors such as losing a pinnacle or water bottle, hurting others, or coloring on someone else's paper. They were given a picture of an action, and students needed to identify the classification of awesome or bummer by tapping the image on the front or back board. The other students stood at the board by the classification they thought the action was. The teacher sat neutral. One IA stood by awesome actions and another by bummer behavior. The third IA assisted students in moving back and forth or resting in the middle of the room for the next turn. Examples of actions classified were pinching someone or helping to clean a mess. Students returned to their desks to do another BoomCard activity on this topic. Given a choice of a paper-based or computer-based version of the last activity, students completed a final task on this topic. Once finished, students earned break time.

Self-Management Learning Center (SMLC) Middle School (Social-Emotional)

Before the start of the instructional block was lunch. Lunch is an unstructured time that students may access the classroom as needed as the special education teacher was present eating his

lunch. Even though this time was unstructured, when a student who entered did not acknowledge the teacher, the teacher maintained expectations by modeling a basic greeting and waited for the student to respond. A student did not feel well; therefore, the IA took him to the nurse to be sent home. The student was visibly ill in color and action. A general discussion was about lunch, Valentine's Day, and candy.

At the start of the instructional block, the special education teacher supported a student in accessing Clever, the single access sign-on, to access the text electronically. A second student moved throughout the room, not settling into the space and coursework. This student did have a kind interaction with the sick peer who returned from the nurse to wait to go home. Then the student asked to leave the classroom for water and was monitored by an IA to do so. Upon return, the teacher stated, "You are killing me, man. Pull up the brochure on Africa." The student sat in the teacher's chair at the teacher's desk to use his computer. The teacher pulled up a chair next to the student. The student asked about staying after to finish the assignment. The teacher asked the student how much he could get done in this block. The teacher directed the student to look at what he needed to do by comparing his project to the expectations. The teacher identified, "Of the 15 boxes, you are only missing these three things." Once the student finished the brochure, he needed to work on the presentation for the project.

A female student entered the classroom visibly frustrated and slightly escalated, followed by a female staff member stating, "You are not in trouble. You just need some space." The student was frustrated by peer interaction as well as teacher interaction. The staff member validated the student's feelings, "You are not wrong." Another female staff entered the room and introduced herself to the student by asking if the student knew her name. The student working on his brochure asked the TA if this was a new counselor. The special education teacher spoke with the

girl to ensure the general education teacher knew where the student went. He said he would call the teacher while she talked to the counselor. He then asked an IA to get the girl's work from the classroom for her to finish when she returned.

The special education teacher returned to the student at his desk. The student asked to check his grades. He also asked to play chess. The teacher continued to review the slide presentation with the student. However, at one point in time, they did pull up the student's grades. The teacher commented, "Look, you are doing just fine. Just fix art." The student wanted good grades for a scholarship. They returned to the slide presentation.

Compass High School (Social-Emotional)

The Compass program utilizes a full-size classroom space with an open area facing the whiteboard and a variety of individual and group seating. A student sat on a gaming-style rocking chair in the front of the room in the open space. One student sat on this chair curled up with his hood over his head. A student was seated at the small table adjacent to the special education teacher's desk. An IA sat at a circle table by herself with her laptop open. One student dropped his bag at a table larger than a traditional student desk. There were several pairs of desks spread throughout the room. A fourth student sat at a desk cluster towards the back of the room near the sink. Along the back of the class was a table with various puzzle boxes on it. Yoga ball seating was also available for students.

One student told the teacher he was doing a puzzle. She asked, "What did we agree to?" The student postured, "I did not agree not to do a puzzle." The teacher clarified, "I did not say you could not do a puzzle. I said you have to do the work you owe first. Then the puzzle." The student continued, "I did not agree to this."

In preparation for Calm Classroom, a school-wide mindfulness program implemented across all buildings district-wide, the teacher directed students, "You need to sit at a desk. Put your phones away. Take your AirPods out." Before starting the video, "Enjoy Doing Nothing for 60 seconds, " she prompted students again, "(Student) head off your desk. (Student) sit down." One student took a yoga ball and sat with his back against the wall. Another student took a blank piece of paper to his desk before sitting. Afterward, she thanked the students who participated.

The student who had his head down returned to the gaming chair. He was trying to sleep. Due to staff absence, this student came to the Compass classroom instead of the cafeteria where his class was. The teacher told him he had English and French work to complete. She stated, "You are here, so you can do it now." He stated, "I could sleep in the cafeteria. That is what my other class is doing." The teacher quietly approached the student, squatting down beside him, saying, "There are two ways we can do this." She then began to whisper to him. Meanwhile, the IA instructed a student to take out his Chromebook, and the student took a puzzle to his desk. The teacher negotiated, "You can do it now. I will give you 15 minutes to chill, then you need to start this," referencing work assigned related to a science text by a teacher from another class. She set a timer on her phone for 15 minutes.

From the back desk, the third student interjected into each of the conversations the teacher previously had with the other two students. To the first student, he said the student could not use his Chromebook facing away from the teacher because he uses it to look at inappropriate sites. For the second student, he called out, "You need to make him say yes, he agrees." The teacher responded that the student had indeed agreed using a universal acknowledgment, "Uh-ha." This student had his Chromebook open, completing Geometry assignments.

A staff member walked into the classroom and approached the IA while the special education teacher spoke to the students. She stopped and spoke quietly to the student in the gaming chair. The teacher then stepped outside for a moment with this professional. The student in the gaming chair began to snore. The teacher woke him up and had him go to the restroom to splash cold water on his face. Upon return, he sat in the game chair again but reoriented the game chair the correct way, facing the board. He had two minutes left before work time. For the student completing the puzzles, the teacher opened his backpack to prepare his work for when his timer finished. The teacher directed him to do his science work, her original instruction at the start of the period. She asked if leaving the puzzle out was too much temptation. He took his Chromebook and yoga ball to the wall, where he did Calm Classroom.

When the timer went off, the IA went to the student in the chair, "I understand you are frustrated and tired." he responded that he was not sleeping. The IA stated, "You were snoring, this is an indication you were sleeping." The teacher took over the interaction getting the student to take off his sweatshirt to be less cozy. The IA returned to her laptop. She then discussed what he could do to keep his brain occupied, and he asked for chess. During this exchange, a student asked how to do a square root on a calculator. His question did not get addressed until the special education teacher circulated again.

Approximately 30 minutes into the lesson, all of the students were engaged in academic-based tasks. The student working on the math assignment needed a study guide from the math teacher. The IA retrieved it for the student because it was in the middle of the period. The teacher circulated the room, offering support and asking questions. While the students got off-topic once, the teacher could quickly engage the students to define Newton's laws. All the students

participated in the discussion about definitions and examples with some facilitation from the teacher for the remainder of the 57 minutes.

- Language-based Programming

Glover Language-Based SLD:

Two students were seated at a table facing the special education teacher for phonics-based instruction. The teacher began the lesson by telling students, "All earners connect their eyes and ears, sounds and letters." To properly form the /f/ sound, the teacher asked questions, from her manual on the desk, about their lip and teeth placement. "Can you see the top teeth and not the bottom teeth? Why? The top teeth are on the bottom lip. The students copied the teacher's model for appropriate sound production. They then wrote the letter and traced the letter. Using visuals of the sounds which had embedded pictures in the letters, the students reviewed the lip-popper sound /p/. Students touched their throats to feel the air pressure difference for voiced and unvoiced sound pairs. After several repetitions, the teacher reminded the students, "There are 14 minutes left in this lesson. You will earn a break before we go. We have two more." The teacher and students reviewed what happens in the mouth when producing the hard c sound, as in cat. She asked questions, and the students responded, "What happens to our mouth?" "It stays open." What does the tongue do? Where does it sit? On what part of our mouth?" "The top." "Yes, it scrapes the top of our mouth." The teacher used a mirror for the students to examine their mouth and tongue placement while producing the target sounds. A multi-sensory approach was used throughout this lesson. Students wrote letters in the air, on the table, and in the sand.

Glover Language-Based Neurodiverse:

The special education teacher was seated on the rug with one student. In front of them were small colored cones with letters, one per cone. The student had small rings that he would throw

on the cone. As a multi-sensory approach to sound manipulation, cones were used to spell words, moving the letters to form new words. For the word reach, he was asked to "Say reach without the /r/ (each)." The teacher arranged the cones to say race. He was asked to say " race " without the /r/ (ace). The student read sight words on index cards. He needed to read the sight words to get the hoops to throw on the cones. He could read: red, blue, find, said, go, help, jump, and run.

Middle School Foundations Math

The Foundations Math class is a small group, resource room model class designed to meet the instructional need of students performing several years below grade level using the Bridge Intervention curriculum program. This small narrow-sized classroom had two rows of student desks facing a whiteboard. Three students were present, and a fourth student came partway through the lesson taught by a special education teacher. The class started with Calm Classroom, a school-wide mindfulness program implemented across all buildings district-wide. After an all-school reminder on the PA system, the teacher opened the video Energy Hands stating, "If you do not want to participate, you need to stay quiet." Afterward, she asked the students if they felt the energy in their hands.

To start the lesson on fractions, the teacher projected a series of divided and shaded shapes. She prompted the students, "There is no incorrect answer. I want an explanation of which shape does not belong. Thumbs-up when you are ready." The three students identified the pieces were not equal or the same size. They recognized there need to be equal pieces to be a fraction. As students came to the board to identify which one did not belong, the teacher supported students to clarify their thinking by probing, "Remember you are not right or wrong. You picked it for a reason. Why?" or, "I agree with (Student). Help me explain why." After students participated in identifying equal fractions, they completed a paper-pencil worksheet projected onto the board.

As one student solved on the board, the others filled it out on their paper. Through guided repetitious practice, students identified fractions by shading pictures and adding fractions using expanded form and word form. Students concluded the lesson with independent practice.

French Immersion Program

At the third-grade level, the French immersion program is designed for students to have 50% of their instruction in French and 50% of their instruction in English. Each class spends half of their day with one teacher and flips with another class to spend half their day with the other class. The third-grade class observed had approximately 14 students. Prior to third grade, students in first and second grade only speak French. French is considered their native language.

Overview of Observation Findings

The co-taught classrooms, small group instruction, and specialized programs were observed at each school. The observations intended to collect data related to specially designed instruction to support students with disabilities to access the curriculum, the district's inclusion philosophy, programmatic alignment horizontally and vertically, staff ratios and allocations, and curriculum resources.

Across all of the buildings, particularly at the elementary school level, building space needs were evident. Many related services occurred in corners of hallways with and without dividers. Portions of school libraries served as classrooms. In some schools, the enrichment classes such as art or music occur in the student classrooms. Teachers often were in the room for their prep time during this instruction. Multiple service providers shared instructional spaces where two teachers led instruction for different grade levels of students at once. It was reported that a closet was repurposed as an office for a special education team chair to have a confidential space to speak

with families. Special education teachers at the high school level indicated sharing classroom spaces and taking their instructional materials from class to class. Despite these challenges, the spirit of special education instruction was a source of pride for the educators in all facilities.

District Inclusion Programming Observations

Co-Taught Model Elementary

At the elementary level, the co-taught model is a district-specialized program model, where students with the most intensive academic needs are placed in a co-taught classroom instructed by a general education teacher and special education teacher. Their special education teams place students from the other elementary schools in this model. This programmatic model is only at the Glover Elementary School.

The different models of co-teaching were observed in the Glover co-taught classrooms. The general education and special education professionals share the instructional and classroom management expectations. Each teacher took the lead in providing directions, setting expectations, and supporting students at different times during the lessons. The teachers supported one another by adding on to one another to enhance instruction. The teachers shared responsibility for the small groups of mixed readiness. Instruction of all students was seamless and well -orchestrated.

Collaborative Model

The collaborative model of special education is administered at the Collicot, Cunningham, and Tucker elementary schools. The collaborative model resembles a more traditional resource room model. Students are considered close to grade level. The special education teacher will push into classrooms to service students as well as provide small group pull-out services. Observations included both pull-out and push-in service delivery. Depending upon the size of the grade level,

there is one collaborative classroom per grade. There are approximately three full-time special educators per elementary school at the Cunningham and Collicot schools.

Observations seemed consistent across the collaborative model schools. While not co-taught classrooms in the sense of two full-time teachers in the classroom at all times, in-class observations indicate the general education and special education staff maximize support to students. The general education teachers and special education teachers share responsibility for students in the classroom. Using staff to create smaller groups of students in and out of the classroom allows for more instructional contact time for the students.

Co-taught Model Secondary

At the middle and high school levels, for students with disabilities identified as full to partial inclusion, special education services are delivered in the English and Math classes by the general education teacher with support from the special education teacher. The special education teachers support either English or Mathematics. Instructional Assistants may support the implementation of accommodations and modifications in the general education classroom for the core content areas.

At the secondary level, the academic support classes are small group service delivery classes instructed by a special education teacher. At times, an Instructional Assistant is present depending upon students' level of need or size of instructional grouping to comply with DESE regulations. The academic support classes lacked clear and consistent expectations for students. All of the classes support students to receive assistance to complete assignments through individual and small group check-ins about specific assignments. Teachers reported that they have to support all content areas in the academic lab class. However, they are only in ELA or Math, making it

challenging to support students in content areas they do not teach. Teachers reported they might

have students they are case manager/liaison for but do not see in classes.

Across the inclusion models, overall best practices were observed across classrooms, including:

- Share lesson goals with students each day.
- Have students repeat objectives and directions.
- Preview new concepts.
- Explicitly tie the lesson to the main idea of the previous lesson and/or to the overall unit.
- Define clear and consistent expectations.
- Make content relevant to students - using real-world applications
- Use a familiar context when introducing concepts
- Break down tasks into smaller steps, and check/monitor after each step.
- Provide models or exemplars.
- Provide rubrics of expectations
- Make available examples of finished products
- Use study sheets to organize material
- Use of visuals
- Provide students with regular opportunities to engage actively in instruction.
- Check for understanding frequently.
- Incorporate "Wait Time" into lessons.
- Provide students with opportunities to problem-solve individually or in small teams and to share their thinking out loud with others.- have students explain their thinking and then check peer thinking
- Frequently check for accuracy and provide more immediate corrective feedback.
- Check for student progress in relation to lesson goals during or at the end of the lesson/unit.

District Inclusion Program Summary

Across the six schools, observations indicated a well-resourced district related to staff-to-student

ratios in compliance with state and federal regulations. However, observations indicate

inconsistencies in the effective and efficient use of special education staff for both the special

education teachers and instructional aides. As a result, time for learning was not always

maximized. The various inclusion models across the elementary school do not lend themselves to

a side-by-side comparison. The building-based staff indicated the lack of clarity in programmatic

definitions and entrance and exit criteria created inconsistencies in the special education team's

determination of service delivery and placements. As a result, some buildings reported discrepancies in services identified for like disability profiles. Based on the observations, the overarching special education inclusion programming across the district seems to be meeting the needs of students with mild to moderate disabilities to access the general education curriculum by providing appropriate levels of staffing and resources. Most observations indicated best instructional practices in place, which are the foundation of students with disabilities accommodations in the classroom. Some classrooms across the district demonstrated stronger co-teaching practices than others. Not all classrooms demonstrated efficacy in using the special education teacher. At the secondary level, further consideration should be given to training in co-teaching to ensure all licensed professionals are being used to their capacity. At the elementary level, consideration should be given to examining the inclusion models across the four schools to ensure clarity and decrease confusion between the different models.

District Specialized Program Summary:

The MPS has a wide variety of specialized programs, each designed to meet the specific needs related to a disability category. When considering the strengths and needs of the specialized programs, it is essential to consider each continuum vertically to ensure continuing methodology across a student's potential trajectory across their educational experience.

Individual Programmatic Summary

The Autism continuum is supported by New England Center for Children (NECC) from preschool through middle school, providing support to utilize the instructional methodology of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) with continuity and consistency. Based on observations, it was noticeable the staff from NECC versus district hiring. It was reported the high school program would become a NECC program, but the timeline was unclear. At the high school level,

there is a lack of clarity around the Lifeskills, Autism, and Post-Secondary transition program. In the previous year, each program had a special education teacher. This year there were two teachers and a condensation of programming.

The social-emotional program, which starts at the Glover school, continues to the High School level. It was reported the high school Compass program is relatively new. In a therapeutic program, students with intensive needs related to emotional disabilities require integrated support from school adjustment counselors. While the elementary school's Step program seems well-staffed with access to the BCBA and SAC, it does not appear the middle and high school levels are as supported. When the student entered the SMLC due to an escalation, the counseling support person introduced themselves to the student stating they were new. It was unclear if the person was new to the middle school or the program. It was reported the Compass program at the high school had a dedicated counselor the year before; however, the position no longer existed.

The language-based continuum supports the core curriculum areas in inclusion and small group instruction, depending upon the enrollment of student needs and the subject matter. The language-based program has recently undergone a programmatic shift at the elementary school level. The program now has two strands of classes, one for traditional Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and a Neurodiverse class for students with learning disabilities with primary diagnosis in other eligibility categories. However, there is confusion across the district regarding the distinction between the two classes and the eligibility for the program.

Milton Public Schools Literature Review

This section provides MPS with a peer-reviewed literature review that supports the concerns, challenges, and strengths embedded within the school system. This literature review focuses on the data collection of themes and trends revealed through the program review. The purpose of this section of the report is not to assume MPS is not effectively implementing these approaches but rather to support the current best practices MPS provides to meet its students' needs.

Public Law 94–142 was passed by the United States Congress in 1975 and allowed students with disabilities to be integrated into public schools. This law determined that all children are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). It has seen many revisions, including the transformation into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 (U.S. Office of Education, 2007) which requires students who receive special education services to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This revision ensures that after a formal evaluation and qualification for special education services, an IEP is developed and must include how the student: (1) is currently performing in school, (2) can achieve educational goals in the coming year, and (3) will participate in the general education setting. This formal document outlines the instruction, services, and support students will receive to make adequate progress and benefit their education.

It is important to note that balancing free and public education (FAPE) and Least Restrictive

Environment (LRE) mandates has proven difficult and has been found to cause tension in the

planning and delivery of specialized instructions and supports (Brigham, McKenna, Lavin,

Brigham, & Zurawski, 2018). While the law encourages students with disabilities to be taught in

a general education setting as long as that child exhibits satisfactory progress, it also requires the

availability of separate classes and programs to provide the services necessary to maintain

adequate progress. Diverse interpretations of IEP accommodations and support by service

providers, general educators, and special educators can significantly affect how a student is

supported in and out of the classroom (Byrnes, 2008). This, combined with the lack of federal

guidance for identifying special education-eligible students and IEP transitions to and from the

elementary, middle, and high school grades, leaves educators relying on personal instinct,

experience, and belief. A student's needs may change throughout their education, warranting

either an increase or decrease in services, but there exists a disconnect between educator

communication and consistency, especially throughout transition periods.

Resources and Strategies to Support Special Education Programs and Classrooms

Balancing LRE with FAPE can be difficult, but providing the proper support and resources to

students with disabilities is necessary. Hoppey, Black, and Mickelson (2018) conducted a

qualitative case study in two elementary schools to investigate improved outcomes for all

students. The authors examined the transformation of two organizations to become more

inclusive, effective, and efficient in educating students of all abilities to remedy inadequate self-

contained special education classrooms. First, an in-depth review of the literature offered

cultural, organizational, and instructional qualities that best serve students of all abilities within an institution.

Hoppey, Black, and Mickelson (2018) suggested the importance of a unifying vision that includes a positive tone for inclusion, promoting shared values, and clear school-wide goals that welcome students of all identities, backgrounds, and experiences. They advised that the role of a principal should include building teacher capacity by fostering collaboration, shared decision-making, and distributed leadership. Another necessary quality cited by the authors was the focus on data-informed problem-solving to increase teacher problem-solving capacity and provide an opportunity to analyze and adjust strategies and practice quickly. An essential organizational quality was an efficient and flexible use of resources, such as redefining teaching roles for shared responsibility, flexible scheduling for targeted instruction, and collaborative planning time. High-quality instruction and learner-centered high-quality professional development were the two instructional qualities highlighted by the researchers. They offered the importance of research-based instructional practices driving daily routines and the need for well-designed and thoughtfully planned lessons containing differentiated goals and activities to meet all needs. Professional development through coaching, professional learning communities, and study groups should be embedded into the workday to build teacher capacity and achieve success in these areas.

Hoppey, Black, and Mickelson (2018) found that unifying a vision must be collaborative, take significant time and planning, and requires effort. One of the schools was in the process of restructuring their self-contained special education classrooms and discussed the need for a

unification of efforts to identify proper placement and support for students. Administrators and teacher-leaders promoted collaborative teaching, planning, and scheduling to help create the vision that it was possible to provide every student with grade level curriculum. This was achieved by prioritizing time to address concerns and questions regarding instructional impacts and decisions based on collected data.

The second emergent theme was the development of collaborative structures to listen to, analyze and address staff concerns and questions. The change from blanketed professional development across the district to more targeted support based on school needs to be helped one of the participating schools build capacity and expertise around inclusive practices and strategies. The addition of academic coaches prompted positive instructional changes. Flexibility in assigning paraprofessional and teacher roles helped reallocate resources to students and classrooms with the highest need. One school restructured placement by moving away from a support facilitation model that clustered and consolidated requirements into classrooms toward more natural proportions where staff could better utilize resources. Fewer children needing individual attention in classrooms provided the special education teachers an increased ability to provide IEP services effectively. The other participating school reported changing to the clustering approach and consolidating students with similar needs. This resulted in special education staff needing to support fewer classrooms and being better able to work alongside classroom teachers to differentiate the curriculum effectively. The authors note that the willingness to reflect on and change structures collaboratively made their reforms successful in both participating schools.

Hoppey, Black, and Mickelson (2018) reported that a shift to more inclusive settings became harder to dispute as data-driven practices yielded positive outcomes for all students. Not only did data expose where the needs were, but it also provided staff with positive feedback on their changes to instruction. The staff at both schools reported the benefit of implementing a Response to Intervention (RTI) model to help with data-informed decision-making practices. Teachers explained that with RTI, all students, not just those identified with disabilities, benefitted from access to ongoing support and progress monitoring. An essential part of implementing RTI successfully was allowing the opportunity to discuss problems, set goals, and provide feedback on classroom progress and climate. Targeted professional development provided the support necessary for staff to sustain changes to their practice while staying committed to research-based methods.

The researchers discussed the intricacies of maintaining self-contained special education classrooms in an inclusive school, what happens to students who are successful after transitioning to a general education setting, and what happens to students referred out of the district for more adequate services. Both participating schools used formative assessments for the placement of students. If a child was two or more grade levels behind, they were recommended for a sub-separate program because the supports in an inclusive classroom were not adequate for their level of need. Both schools also reported fear and concern regarding loss of personnel or support if fewer and fewer children were identified as having a disability. One school had already lost a special education teacher due to a decreased population of students in special education and a reallocation of an interventionist to aid in RTI. To sustain success,

principals stressed the need for district funding to align with more inclusive models that provided more significant support in general education classrooms.

Criteria for Placement in Sub-Separate Classrooms

Self-contained special education classrooms and programs serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and cognitive disabilities. Studies suggest that students in restricted settings may experience less rigorous and engaging instruction, be exposed to distracting environments, and be denied access to effective communication and learning partners (Bacon, Rood and Ferri, 2016; Kurth et al., 2016). States can determine benchmarks and goals for student progress in LRE, affecting which disability categories are most often placed in self-contained classrooms and the academic rigor in these settings. Entrance and exit criteria are essential to establish at the inception of a school's programming to provide stricter guidelines for which individuals necessitate a sub-separate classroom.

Brock (2018) investigated 40 years of educational placement trends for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the United States. He described a lack of current analysis regarding the rate of LRE placements for students with ID and investigated longitudinal trends among students with ID across all placement categories. Data from students educated outside and inside of regular public schools over three periods was collected to ensure accuracy and consistency with changing definitions and placement categories.

Brock (2018) found an overall lack of change in placement rates and increasingly restrictive environment placements between 2001 and 2007. The author suggested this is due to a lack of commitment to LRE and was surprised that such a large population of students with ID was still

placed in restrictive settings given the legal mandates of accessing general education classrooms when possible. He postulated that IEP teams identify students based on individual needs and believe that adequate support can only be provided outside the general education classroom. Brock (2018) also noted the discrepancies among schools within a given state. For example, he found that urban school districts in Ohio were more restrictive than rural districts and that the most significant urban districts were the most restrictive. Individual student characteristics could not account for this large discrepancy, and Brock (2018) offered that other factors, such as school staff and administrator commitment to inclusion, family involvement and advocacy, socioeconomic status, ethnic and racial diversity, driving placement (as found in Brock & Schaefer, 2015).

These findings provide implications for all those on the IEP team, including special education teachers, general education teachers, families, students, school administrators, and related service personnel. The researcher offered three guiding principles to help schools with the best placement for students with ID. First, the general education classroom should be identified as the default placement unless there is overwhelming evidence that a self-contained classroom would better deliver services to the student. Second, the placement of students should be based exclusively on support needs and not on factors such as convenience or precedence. The last suggestion offered by Brock (2018) is that there should be a fair amount of caution used when placing students in self-contained classrooms due to the lack of access to the general curriculum and social skill interaction and development. It is noted that there is a lack of evidence that students' academic progress is negatively impacted by the presence of special education students in the general classroom. Research shows that inclusion can improve the academic scores of

both the general and special education populations. Evidence-based practices such as peer support arrangements have positively affected both populations. Brock (2018) stated that "the goal is to provide an individualized high-quality education that promotes optimal outcomes for each student with ID. IEP teams should continue to make individualized decisions about how to include a given student to ''the maximum degree appropriate" (p.312).

Agran et al. (2020) examined rationales for student placement outside the general education classroom. The authors analyzed why students with severe disabilities are placed primarily in segregated settings. First, they explored perspectives on placement as a factor in student learning and if there was an effect on student outcomes. After discussing how placements are decided for students with disabilities, Argan et al. (2020) suggested that these decisions are rarely made based on the individual's needs. After providing strategies for more calculated and tailored placement, the authors discussed how to create sustainable change and possible federal reforms that could impact special education.

The authors found that sociocultural and capacity factors had more to do with the placement of students than educational needs. These factors were: a) perceptions of competence and resulting placement policies, (b) economic and demographic stratification, (c) biases, (d) teacher preparation and experience, (e) lack of resources and capacity, and (f) absence of knowledge of current research. Fear that the curriculum is too challenging or that the general education environment is too demanding creates a belief that special education students fall into more generic categories than their individual disabilities warrant. As a result, districts place students with certain disability levels in classrooms with teachers with particular educational

backgrounds. This one size fits all model is not practical or efficient and leads educators to believe that perhaps general education is a better placement. Argan et al. (2020) offered the influence of socio-economic background and bias when placing students into LRE. Teachers' fear about working with specific disabilities and the overrepresentation of minority students in special education shows the lack of consistency in placing students in proper settings. Less experienced teachers or teachers with particular backgrounds may not understand the benefit of an inclusive classroom and advocate for a separate environment for a child for whom a general education classroom would be advantageous. Lack of resources, capacity, and little knowledge of current research impact the placement of students due to time and personnel constraints, attrition, and curriculum and class management comfort level.

Argan et al. (2020) suggested that "developing an organizational vision, operationalizing the changes, encouraging commitment to the changes, and developing team structures for communication and accountability"(p.8) will aid teachers and staff in creating consistent and streamlined placement policies. Federal and research initiatives such as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) provide rigorous screening and interventions for students to ensure proper placements. Data collection and analysis help guide practice and lead staff toward informed decisions about what to do for individuals and whether there needs to be a change in placement. Consistency with guidelines, commitment to a shared vision, and adoption of research-based practices can aid districts in correctly placing individuals into programs beneficial to their disabilities.

Best Practice and Goals

Maggin (2011) reports that one percent of children with disabilities in the United States are educated in substantially separate educational settings, and many of these students exhibit EBD. They highlight that federal guidelines only require that Individualized Education Plans (IEP) indicate how the student will participate in the general education curriculum, not the general education classroom, resulting in placements in self-contained classrooms where deficits persist. Maggin (2011) investigated the effectiveness of strategies and practices used in classrooms where students are supposed to thrive due to the structural benefits of self-contained classrooms.

The authors defined effective instructional strategies as an opportunity to respond (OTR), rate of teacher praise, and amount of time teachers provide active instruction. They described effective instructional practices as the broader decisions on curriculum and content. They noted a failure to provide evidence-based practices to address deficits in reading which tend to be prevalent in students with emotional and behavioral disorders. One hundred and eleven teachers from kindergarten to fourth grade were sampled. Thirty-four were self-contained special education classrooms, and data was collected using observations and self-report measures. General results suggested that students in restrictive settings were less academically capable than their general education peers, and in these settings, there were higher rates of classroom disruption. Although there was no difference in the time students in general and special education classrooms spent academically engaged, students in self-contained classrooms provided more active responses to teacher instructional statements.

Three research questions were employed to give insight into teacher use of discrete instructional behaviors, evidence-based content during instruction, and the format in which education is

provided to students. While the benefit of small group instruction found in sub-separate

programming increases the individual attention a student receives,   Maggin (2011) found a

discrepancy when observing effective instructional strategies or content rates. The low rates of

OTR, praise, and reliance on instructional content that is not evidence-based were prevalent in all

observed classrooms. The authors concluded that small-group instruction alone is inadequate for

individuals in separate settings. For students in these settings to make gains, there must be

increased attention to instructional content and practices beyond those in general education

settings. Maggin (2011) argued that the results of this study indicated that self-contained

teachers have the flexibility to provide more focused instruction and that the goals of this

instruction should include optimal use of OTR and praise, as well as providing evidence-based

content. Providing carefully designed curricula and higher-quality of education in restrictive

settings can aid academic improvements for students with EBD.

Teacher-paraeducator interactions are an essential element of any self-contained classroom.

Cipriano et al. (2016) explored this relationship and its impact on student outcomes and

suggested methods and strategies to promote positive collaboration and contributions from both

parties. The authors presented data on teacher-student relationships' effect on student outcomes,

investigated how teacher-paraeducator interactions support student learning and provided models

of positive interaction styles. Drawing from various literature, the authors first described the

characteristics of quality cooperative teaching in a classroom. Data suggested that mutual

respect, clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, adequate time for collaborative planning

and preparation, regular communication and support from administration, and collegiality among

staff are essential to quality co-teaching relationships.

The authors developed a mixed-methods approach to conduct observations and interviews to help inform a framework that promotes positive and effective teacher-paraeducator interactions. Results provided four elements that promote the unity of purpose, a positive emotional climate, and precise classroom management and instructional strategies. Solidarity was the first element identified and is described as essential in special education classrooms where students may be more likely to challenge authority. Rather than second-guessing one another, educators must be seen deferring to one another and reinforcing and restating each other. Team decisions and solidarity create consistency and structure for students. The second element is staff delegation, which involves the incorporation of paraeducators in administrative, clerical, and instructional tasks where the lead teacher is not directly involved. Verbal and physical cueing functions can do delegation of tasks. Although incorporating the paraeducator depends on the classroom's needs, it maximizes availability to provide students with instructional support. Respect is the third element on which successful collaboration hinges. Educators should positively acknowledge each other's work, make eye contact, display manners, and use warm tones when interacting. These positive interactions provide prosocial models for students in self-contained classrooms with a propensity for students with EBD.

On the other hand, disrespect (element four) can undermine collaboration and be detrimental in a classroom with a population of students with EBD. This study showed that disrespectful actions such as eye-rolling, negative tones, head shaking, or frowning promoted further negative actions by students, such as calling out, academic work stoppage, and getting out of seats and laughing. Teachers and paraeducators must create a constructive environment through positive interactions

to provide quality instruction for students. These four elements provided by Cipriano et al. (2016) make a framework that informs teacher and paraeducator interactions and promotes a positive learning environment for staff and students to thrive.

While academic outcomes and success are a significant concern in self-contained special education classrooms, there should also be a priority placed on the student's sense of belonging and school connectedness. Libbey (2004) defines belonging as when students "feel close to, a part of, and happy at school; feel that teachers care about students and treat them fairly; get along with teachers and other students and feel safe at school." Hattie (2009) confirmed this definition and acknowledged the importance of student-teacher relationships and how schools could create positive change in students' lives. They stressed the importance of having a sense of belonging in school because it is the second life experience children are exposed to with the feeling they are connected to a part of a system or an environment.

Research shows that individuals who experience a sense of belonging are more likely to exhibit positive psychological functioning such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction and be protected against psychopathology and stress. Allen and Bowles (2012) discussed the negative implications of social isolation on adolescents, including chronic health conditions and behavioral, social, or psychological difficulties. Educational settings that promote student belonging are found to yield higher academic outcomes, positively affect motivation and effort, and encourage low absenteeism. There appears to be a decreased rate of disruptiveness, emotional distress, risk-taking behaviors, and sexualization in schools that can promote school connectedness.

Schoger (2006) reviewed a program created by a special education teacher to bring social interaction opportunities to students in self-contained special education classrooms. Schoger (2006) discussed how interaction with non-disabled peers is essential to increase awareness and responsiveness, skill acquisition, communication skills, friendships development, and a sense of belonging in students educated in sub-separate environments. Social interactions teach students what is expected, appropriate and acceptable behaviors and actions. The author also explained the numerous benefits students in general education classes have when interacting with children with disabilities. These include practicing respect, increasing understanding, and developing empathy for people of all abilities and differences. Finding time in the school day to create these peer interactions organically is difficult. Still, attempts at starting inclusive opportunities are essential to all students' social and emotional well-being.

Schoger (2006) described the "Reverse Inclusion" program developed by a special education teacher in a large suburban elementary school. The program involved taking students out of the general education classroom and having them interact with students being educated in a self-contained special education classroom. The program's success depended on proper recruitment and preparation of general education students, effective scheduling of interactions, identification and selection of appropriate activities, and the development of measurable program goals. Students were selected through teacher recommendations and met with the special education teacher for preparation and information about the sub-separate program and the students involved. Interactions were scheduled during recess and free choice periods to avoid missing instructional time. Activities such as adapted art projects, stories with coordinated activities,

board games, activity-based games, science experiments, music, and cooking were selected to achieve the goals of students working together equally to create reciprocal friendships. Plans for the program were established and evaluated to ensure success. These goals were: (1) greet group members appropriately, (2) choose activities with appropriate choice-making skills, (3) take turns, (4) participate in activities and respond appropriately to peers, (5) share and request materials appropriately, (6) praise peer accomplishments and (7) say goodbye to group members in an appropriate way.

After 18 weeks, the program was evaluated, and there was a marked improvement in the students with special needs' appropriate social interaction, initiation of interactions, participation, and communication skills. The general education students also showed growth and reported they had learned that just because a peer looks or acts differently does not mean they cannot have fun together and be friends. The students in the special education class began to see the general education students as friends. It was reported that two students with disabilities had hung out with their new friends outside of school and had been invited to birthday parties.

Some challenges with implementing this type of program include consistency, such as reminding students to attend the sessions and reschedule if a session was missed. It was challenging to add planning activities to the already hectic job of the special educator, so collaboration with general education teachers for activity ideas and materials was necessary. Paraprofessionals were trained to facilitate activities and accurately report on problems and successes and how to handle negative or inappropriate behaviors. Schoger (2006) also reported other recommendations that would help successfully implement a social interaction program between special and general

education students. She stressed the need for a commitment to make inclusion a priority and

explained that although it seems overwhelming in terms of time constraints, it is necessary to

stay with the program. The author also noted the importance of facilitating communication for

those students who cannot communicate readily. The final recommendation for success in this

kind of program implementation was to promote ownership of the program by the participants.

Finding common interests, allowing students to choose activities, and finding ways to highlight

talents were all helpful in successfully operating a social interaction program.

Assessment of Milton Public Schools Special Education Department

MPS contacted Academic Discoveries, LLC to review the district's programming for students within the substantially separate program, called the "ALL" program. This program supports students with disabilities who require more intensive educational support beyond the general education classroom. The program review focused on four main questions outlined in the findings section of the report. Using a multi-dimensional program review model, these questions were researched using data collected by the district and evaluator, peer-reviewed research, observations, and interviews. This section of the report explains some of the findings from the review.

MPS employs highly qualified professional educators in the general education and special education staff. Their staff, overall, has proven longevity and commitment to the district, community, and students at large. In addition, the administration and staff expressed their appreciation for the dedication and commitment MPS demonstrates in supporting all students. Several areas of strength were evident across all 24 classroom observations conducted. Identifying strengths included the 5-10 minute informal "pop-in" observations, not part of the formal observations. Based on observations and pop-ins, the MPS staff are well-versed in the needs of their students. The interactions with the students indicate the relationships between students and teachers. The teachers know their students well to meet student needs of the students at the moment. Teachers asked detailed questions of students demonstrating a knowledge of the student's interests in and out of school. Relationships are foundational to growing trust and mutual respect necessary to tackle more challenging academic and school aspects. The curriculum activities matched the students' educational, social, emotional, or

behavioral needs in the various classrooms. In the moment, teachers differentiated instruction to support a student's frustration level, ability to regulate physically or emotionally, or understanding the curriculum concept. Using best practices, the special education and general education teachers ensure students access the curriculum concepts instructed commensurate with the student's abilities.

Participants of this review illustrated appreciation and value of the importance of providing specialized educational services to students with disabilities in MPS. Overwhelmingly, we heard from participants that they would appreciate more clarification and understanding of the various special education program offerings the district provides. While some processes and procedures are written, it seems as though not all educators are familiar with the expectations outlined in the documents. They are uncertain of entrance and exit criteria for these programs along with program descriptions. There was expressed concern about supporting students within MPS due to the lack of resources or specialized training for ALL staff within the district. In addition, there is a lack of consistency in communication to best ensure special education protocols and procedures are implemented with fidelity.

 Based on observations, each program is staffed well over the staff-to-student ratios to comply with state and federal regulations. Observations identify inconsistencies in the effective and efficient use of special education instructional aides. In some instances, the IAs did not provide or provided little instructional support to the students. In other classrooms, more staff than students were present for the lesson. Additionally, the skill set of the IAs varied by individual.

Educators were observed using curriculum resources such as Bridges Mathematics Intervention, BoomCards, News2You, Lexia Power-Up, and Linda-Mood Bell LiPS. Therefore, the specialized programs do have access to curriculum resources.

Special education teachers have strong relationships with the students across all programs. Special education teachers are competent in leading student instruction and matching lessons to the student's academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs. Based on observations, students accessed the curriculum frameworks commensurate with their potential. The changes in program structures, services, and staffing have created confusion and inconsistencies, impacting the cohesiveness of programming vertically across all of the specialized programs.

When referencing the first review question, "*How are resources, such as staffing, curriculum, and programming aligned to meet the needs of students with disabilities?",* the overarching responses from administration was contradicted by the educators. Although administration reported they currently staffed much better than in the past, the educators reported that administration have not necessarily hired individuals who can best support the programmatic needs. Additionally, the administration and educators reported that curriculum tools have been purchased, however, the district has not provided comprehensive professional development to implement the curriculum with fidelity. The special education programs are a hot topic of conversation among staff and parents. There appears to be a lack of communication and, or understanding regarding the descriptions of programs, and which programs are offered throughout the district. In fact, some have claimed that the details of these programs are "secretative" and information is only shared to a select few.

The second review question, *"What are the roles and responsibilities of special education and general education staff who support students with disabilities?"*, resulted in a bit of confusion as to who is responsible for various aspects of the IEP process. It appears that the roles and responsibilities of general education, special education, and paraprofessional support staff may require additional discussion among all staff.

The third review question, *"How is staff allocation determined and recognized within the special education department to support student achievement of IEP goals and objectives?"*, revealed a lack of clarity among the staff. In fact, many reported that they did not know how staffing was determined, and it was not shared with them. Others reported that building-based administration tried to support educators in understanding allocation. However, understanding why particular individuals were placed in certain roles remained a mystery among the staff, as a whole.

The final review question, *"How is communication with parents, students, and staff regarding special education protocols, procedures, and student IEPs?",* identified an area of weakness among the district. Although the district offers a link on the website, provides documentation at IEP meetings, the parents reported that it is too much information at one time and they mostly rely on information provided by the teachers. Parents reported that in order to understand protocols, and the IEP process, they have had to rely on their SEPAC for support or research information independently. Parents would value more frequent communication throughout the IEP process and in between progress reports so they can best support their children.

Staff reported that their building-based administrators provide information but they may not have

a background in special education and the information may be inaccurate at times. In addition, the central office administration provides information to the teamchairs, which has been challenging, given the turnover in these positions. Furthermore, some buildings do not have special education leadership in their buildings and the information is not consistently being provided to all schools equally. Furthermore, staff and parents were not clear as to which building offers specialized programs for students with disabilities.

Missed Opportunites

The theme of missed opportunities relies on the programmatic structure and resource utilization. When considering the vertical articulation of programs, it was challenging to identify a cohesive philosophy that started at the elementary school and consistently translated through the upper-level programs. The missed opportunities apply to the inclusion model and the substantially separate programming. While the talents of the educators did not go unnoticed, observations indicate that training in the methodologies specific to each of the program strands is required to create cohesion within the classroom, across the school, and throughout the district program. The Instructional Assistants (IA)s were underutilized in many observations impacting time on learning, consistency of expectations, and efficient use of resources. Instructional Assistants needed more direction, initiative, and knowledge of best practices to support students effectively and efficiently.

Additional Findings

There appears to be concerns from parents regarding the district's transparency about which special education program offerings are available throughout the district. The staff expressed

concerns about availability of students attending specialized programs when they are located in another school building.

It is recommended the French Immersion program be reviewed for equitable access and services from a special education standpoint. Across all of the schools, particularly the elementary level, concerns were raised with regard to the following:

- Students are not identified as special education until English instruction starts at the third grade, missing early identification and intervention.
- Given the students are speaking French, it is considered their native language, therefore evaluations and interventions should be done in French.
- Students with more significant disabilities are precluded from participation as the schools do not have specialized supports of that intensity.
- The French Immersion classes create cliques and silos of students as some buildings have only one classroom per grade.
- The overall emphasis on the French Immerison program deteracts form students with disabilities as their needs are unable to be met, therefore it is an exclusionary program.
- When students and staff require consultation and support from a specialized field such as vision or hearing impaired, the consultants very often do not speak French. This creates a challenge for the service provider to support the student to access the curriculum.

The next section of this report offers recommendations based on the information gathered from interviews, document review, and classroom observations.

Recommendations

The program review for the MPS consisted of interviewing administration, teaching staff, and

parents. The evaluator also reviewed statewide and districtwide data, and classroom

observations. This program review was completed over approximately two months. As a result

of this program review, it is essential to recognize the number of highly qualified staff

throughout the district and their dedication and commitment to the students they serve.

Furthermore, the review identified many positive attributes of the district's programming for

students with disabilities. The study included a focused literature review supporting many

practices the district provides. As a result of this review, Academic Discoveries, LLC is

including the following recommendations for consideration. As special education is the shared

responsibility of all stakeholders, the district should consider utilizing already established

stakeholder collaboration opportunities or develop a stakeholder council to review the

recommendations to develop collaborative actions plans. The proposals have been broken into

three categories; communication, professional development, and systemic approaches.

Communication

Between Central Office, School Building Staff, and Parents:
Given the responses from interview participants and document review, it appears that the district
has procedures and protocols in place to support the special education department. However,
this information is not consistently shared among all stakeholders. It is the recommendation of
the evaluators to create a committee to review communication practices that best support the
district's infrastructure.

Importance of Special Education Programs:
It is clear that the district is currently challenged by the lack of awareness among the staff and
administration as to which special education programs are offered and available to students
throughou the district. Therefore it is the recommendation that the district creates a central

database for staff and administration to have viewing access and can observe availability within each program across the district.

Professional Development

General Education and Special Education Staff

- **Special Education Programs:**

It is recommended that after the establishment and clarification of programming, professional learning for the various stakeholder groups be conducted in the specialized methodologies that the program strand supports. Professional learning must include Instructional Assistants. Professional learning should provide an overview of the programs for each building. It must contain the data-driven process to enter/exit a program, roles and responsibilities for general education, special education, and administration. Professional learning should occur with the co-teaching teams to clarify expectations and understand best practices. The specialized programs require time as vertical teams for cohesion across programs for a unified student experience across buildings. As new staff members are on-boarded, consideration should be given to how these new members can be trained in the set expectations to continue implementing program methodologies.

- **Inclusion:**

After reviewing the learning environments of students for MPS in comparison to the state average, reviewing responses by participants, and observing classrooms, it is evident that the district is inconsistent in delivering education to students in the least restrictive environment. There appears to be a concern about specialized programs within the district. When, in fact, some schools offer an inclusive co-teaching model. There is a concern from the evaluators that the district may over compensate for the loss of co-teaching by creating too many additional substantially separate programs. Therefore, it is the recommendation that MPS offers extensive professional development to support inclusive practices in ALL classroom settings. This training should be provided to general education and special education professionals collectively. This is a multi-year process in which the culture of inclusion needs to be recognized and supported throughout the district to regularly include students of ALL abilities in the general education classrooms.

Systemic Approaches

Development of Entrance/Exit Criteria & Program Descriptions

It is recommended that the special education department establish clear, well-articulated entrance and exit criteria for all special education programming with specific data collection and analysis expectations as part of this process. Once determined, the overarching program descriptions should be provided to the MPS community, including families. The special education department should provide the special education teams with a programmatic guide with greater specificity to

guide the data-driven discussions to support the teams to develop the Individual Education Programs (IEP)s to meet students' needs within the established frameworks to maintain fidelity with programs.

Annual Training

Administration and educators collectively reported that it would be in the best interest of MPS to establish professional development on an annual basis that is required for all educators, including general and special educators. This annual training should consist of frequent updates on special education rather than only occurring once or twice a year. This recommendation aims to ensure a cohesive and consistent approach to supporting the procedures and protocols of special education. This training and delivery of content should be developed and delivered collboaratively with the general education and special education leaders.

Strategic Plan

It is recommended that MPS develop a strategic plan that includes, but is not limited, to, the creation of a communcation plan; defining roles and responsibilities of general education, special education, and paraprofessionals; creating special education program descriptions, and establishing entrance and exit criteria. This strategic planning may require an outside consultant to ensure all special education components are fully addressed.

Special Education Programs

Some expressed concerns regarding the organization and implementation of the high school work program for special education students. There also appears to be inconsistency regarding the co-teaching model throughout the district. Furthermore, there has been expressed concern regarding the lack of equity in the French Immersion program. Many stated their frustration around the lack of availability for students to enroll in a specialized program within the MPS district, resulting in potential for being recommended for and out-of-district placement. Therefore, the evaluators are recommending a special education review committee to ensure consistency, equitable access, and a comprehensive special education program development and/or refinement while simultaneously consider approaches to support inclusive classrooms.
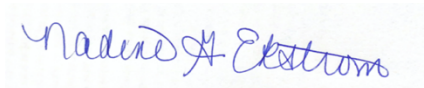
Staffing Caseloads

It is the recommendation that the administrative team review the caseloads of special education staff, based upon student need rather than number of students per staff. For example, some students may require minimal supports while other students may require high level of interventions. The students' service delivery grids should reflect the staffing needs in a building. Training should be conducted to further strengthen the capacity of the paraprofessionals. Training for general and special education staff should include the role and purpose of the paraprofessional to include the expectations from DESE..

In conclusion, this review has provided some significant recommendations. It would be best for the MPS administration to review them and determine what should be prioritized, as it is
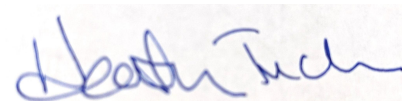
impossible to implement all recommendations within one year. Our advice is, to begin with, paraprofessional training and developing a strategic plan for the special education department.

It has been a pleasure working with Milton Public Schools. We thank you for the opportunity and respect all your district's daily work to provide the best education for your students.

Respectfully Submitted,

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