Wareham Public Schools
Program Evaluation of Services and Settings for Students with Disabilities

EVALUATION REPORT
June 30, 2019

Submitted by:
Arlene Mayer Shainker, Consultant
Elizabeth Nolan Greer, Consultant
John Verre, Director
Walker Consulting
Walker Trieschman Institute
Needham, MA
Table of Contents

Executive Summary 3
Introduction 6
Methodology 7
Focus of the Evaluation 8
Findings and Recommendations 8

1. Appropriateness of academic and behavioral support approaches, programs, or systems 9
2. Definition and implementation of the continuum of placements and array of services 18
3. Adequacy of organizational support structures and processes; e.g. professional development, teaming, supervision 21
4. Student outcomes; i.e., proficiency and progress in academics and social-emotional-behavioral skills 25
5. Status of Interagency Collaboration 34
6. Collaboration with Parents 36

Issues for Further Investigation 47
Compilation of Recommendations 48
Appendices 53
Executive Summary

The Director of Student Services for Wareham Public Schools requested Walker Consulting to conduct a review of the District’s programming and services for students with special needs in each of its schools and across several specialized programs. Walker Consultants hoped to investigate the current status of Wareham’s programs, to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, and to contribute to the planning for improvements in how services are delivered in the future. Walker Consultants collected quantitative and qualitative data, examining the six focus areas that were formulated in collaboration with the Wareham District. Planning was completed in February 2019, data collection in March, and analysis and writing took place in April-May 2019. The findings and recommendations are detailed in this report issued in June 2019, and are summarized here:

Wareham Public Schools, including District Administration such as the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Director of Special Education have made considerable recent efforts to improve student outcomes for both general and special education students. The District’s recent emphasis on targeted support for all students in early literacy has stimulated positive results, both for general ed students and students with special needs, especially in inclusive settings. The rate of literacy has gone up according to second grade assessments, and the rate of referral for special education services in kindergarten has gone down.

Yet, although the results for students with disabilities on MCAS assessments show improvement over past years, the results for students with disabilities on English Language Arts MCAS assessments continue to fall below District scores for all students in Wareham and those of students with disabilities across Massachusetts. Furthermore, where students with disabilities as a whole in Massachusetts struggle in Math as measured by MCAS, students with disabilities in Wareham score lower still than their peers with disabilities across the state.

The District has worked diligently to address and increase graduation rates for students with and without disabilities in Wareham. Together with the Beyond School Time Coordinator, the PASS Program (Pathways to Alternative Student Success) for students with and without special needs was developed as an alternative pathway to meet graduation requirements through work and competency-based endeavors. The recent state report commended the District for alternative opportunities for student engagement such as electives in culinary arts, hotel and tourism, and childcare at the high school level that might encourage students to graduate and be better prepared for work post graduation. In addition, to better prepare students with special needs for the transition into adulthood, the Director of Special Education hopes to hire a job coach. Such efforts are welcomed to offset the graduation rate for students with disabilities in Wareham which continues to fall below 50%.

Wareham suffers from high poverty rates and high levels of transiency. In addition, there are more students diagnosed with Social/Emotional disabilities than state aver-
ages. However, one proactive way in which the District has dealt with this crisis is to allow outside agencies who deliver counseling and family wrap around services to see students and families in school during the school day. In addition, the Director of Special Education organized and sponsored a Mental Health Night for parents to advertise these services and educate parents/guardians. There are also Social Workers, School Psychologists, and School Adjustment Counselors at all levels.

There has also been an emphasis on co-teaching and several examples of appropriate and seamless co-teaching were noted throughout the District. Here, students with and without special needs were supported in mastering the general education curriculum together in the same class.

However, the same access to rigorous instruction was not observed consistently for students in some of the specialized programs. Overall, inconsistent alignment to the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks or the general education curriculum was noted in the ASD and Learning Center classes. There also seemed to be spotty opportunity for inclusion and learning from typical peers. This widens the gap between the substantially separate programs and the general education community, and hampers the ability of these students to someday move to a less restrictive environment. Furthermore, this becomes of even greater concern as students approach graduation and are not prepared to pass MCAS assessments and other graduation requirements.

For students in specialized programs who are not capable of accessing the general education curriculum, the use of alternative research-based, curricula is not uniform. Within specialized tracts such as the ASD program or the Learning Centers, there is sometimes little alignment between school buildings as to philosophical approach and curriculum used.

The Director of Special Education hopes to create descriptions of programs or a handbook to clarify the missions of each program and specify exit and entrance criteria. This will help to diminish a lack of continuity between schools that is apparent when examining IEPs at each level. These descriptions and structures can then be communicated to stakeholders.

This evaluation also considered parent communication and engagement. Staff reported that parent engagement is better at the younger elementary levels, but declines as students get older. At the secondary levels, it was stated that only about 25% of parents attend IEP meetings. SEPAC meetings are poorly attended. Administrators and staff feel frustrated and discouraged by the lack of family engagement and partnership, despite efforts to increase communication.

In turn, although many parents reported feeling satisfied with the communication with special education personnel, an equal number of parents expressed frustration and alienation. Similarly, although many parents reported feeling satisfied with the progress that their students is making, an equal number reported dissatisfaction with the services that their student received.
The results of this evaluation, the detailed findings and specific related recommendations, are organized under each of the six focus areas. In addition, the recommendations are compiled and presented at the end of this report. Walker Consultants also identified issues for further investigation not treated completely in this evaluation, that may expand the depth, breadth, clarity, and/or value of the findings contained in this report.
Introduction

Purpose of the Evaluation

The Director of Student Services for Wareham Public Schools contacted Walker Consulting to conduct a review of the District’s programming and services for students with special needs in each of its schools and across several specialized programs. Specifically, the goal was to observe the current status of Wareham’s programs, to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, and to contribute to the planning for improvements in how services are delivered in the future.

Walker Consulting

The mission of Walker Inc. is to transform the lives of children and youth who are facing complex emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges by partnering with these children and youth, their families, and communities to nurture hope, build strengths, and develop lifelong skills. The Walker Trieschman Institute is committed to improving outcomes for children and adolescents with disabilities by supporting the effectiveness and efficiency of services and settings in schools and other child-serving organizations. Walker Consulting offers a portfolio of services that includes development of organizations, services and settings, leadership and management, and staff capability. Walker Consultants have conducted service and program evaluations in general education and special education school settings, in a wide variety of communities across the country. In the present evaluation, the Consultants planned the content, structure, and process collaboratively with the District, carried out data collection and analysis, and developed this report.
Methodology

The data for analysis in this evaluation include both quantitative and qualitative data collected through document review and analysis; interviews with staff, administrators, and parents; and observations of classes in all the schools and across all programs. In collaboration with the District, Walker Consultants, Arlene Shainker and Elizabeth Nolan Greer, developed and utilized structured formats for this evaluation, including document requests, interview guides, and observation frameworks. Planning was completed in February 2019, data collection in March, and analysis and writing in April-May 2019.

Quantitative data regarding Wareham Public schools, staff, and students were compared with state-level information available from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education where feasible and appropriate. Structured observations covered classroom and whole-program activities across four different strands: inclusion, programs for students on the Autism spectrum (ASD programs), programs for students with intellectual impairment (Learning Center-LC), and programs for students with social/emotional/behavioral disabilities (Therapeutic Learning Center-TLC). Among the interviewees were Central Office and school administrators, special education teachers and team chairs, counselors, and parents.

Utilizing these data sources, the Consultants identified specific issues of concern, investigated inputs, outputs, and outcomes related to these areas, and analyzed the findings on the basis of best practices and experience in related fields.

The results of this program evaluation are organized around the areas of focus and the related critical questions. Each substantive section includes the current status, the Consultants’ perspectives, and recommendations linked to the Focus Areas and critical questions. In some cases, the Consultants also identified issues for further investigation not treated completely in this evaluation that may expand the depth, breadth, clarity and/or value of the findings contained in this report.
Focus of the Evaluation

The Special Education Administrator for the Wareham Public School District, in collaboration with Walker Consultants, identified six areas of focus for the program evaluation. These areas form the specific Focus of the Evaluation:

1. Appropriateness of academic and behavioral support approaches, programs or systems.
2. Definition and implementation of the continuum of placements and array of services.
3. Adequacy of organizational support structures and processes; e.g. professional development, teaming, supervision.
4. Student outcomes; i.e. proficiency and progress in academics and social-emotional-behavioral skills.
5. Status of Interagency Collaboration
6. Collaboration with Parents

Findings and Recommendations

For each Focus Area, the Findings and Recommendations are organized as follows:

- Critical Questions
- Current Status
- Consultants’ Perspectives
- Recommendations for Improvement
Findings and Recommendations

Focus Area 1: Appropriateness of academic and behavioral support approaches, programs, or systems

Critical question:

Given the current population of children in school, are all of Wareham’s academic and behavioral support approaches, programs, and systems meeting all the needs of children with special needs?

Current status:

According to Administration and elementary staff of the Wareham Public Schools, there has been a strong emphasis on targeted support for all students over the past 2 years to ensure that all children are literate and reading at grade level by the end of second grade. Both general education and special education teachers have received training by Kerry Thurston in teaching literacy, and elementary principals have instituted 90 minute literacy blocks so that all teachers devote key periods towards teaching reading and literacy. Such blocks are supported by Special Education teachers and paraprofessionals by pushing into general education classrooms. In addition, some children on IEPs are pulled out for additional reading intervention by Special Educators who are Wilson trained. The Director of Special Education mentioned that in the near future, she hopes to train additional Special Educators in Wilson to bolster the delivery of this service. This approach to literacy seems to be hugely effective in that the Asst. Superintendent of Schools reported that: Whereas 50-60% of all kindergarten students scored below the norm on the FAST assessment for literacy 2 years ago, 63% of these students who are now second graders scored at or above the norm for literacy on the most recent assessments. Furthermore, the rate of referrals for special education evaluations in kindergarten is down by 33%, proving that many students’ literacy needs are being met in inclusion.

At the middle school, the principal has arranged the schedule such that there is an intervention block each day where students can access support for their content area subjects or specialized instruction in English Language Arts or Math. At the high school, the emphasis is on inclusion, rather than pull-out services, and many sections of English Language Arts and Math, as well as Science, are co-taught by a general education teacher and a Special Educator. In fact, several classes were observed where long-standing relationships between a general ed content teacher and a special education teacher contributed to seamless instruction. In short, there seems to have been a recent focus on targeted support for all students and bolstering services for students in inclusion, which seems to have fostered positive results and seems to be meeting the needs of students in inclusion.

In terms of the Learning Center programs, at the elementary levels, teachers report that they implement a morning meeting every day based upon Responsive Classroom tech-
niques to teach prosocial skills such as sitting in a group and attending, listening to one another, and following the daily schedule. In addition, morning meeting is used to introduce math concepts such as calendar work and counting, and English language Arts concepts through reading and reacting to the morning message. Additional specialized reading curricula are utilized such as Fundations to promote literacy. However, based upon observation throughout the Learning Center strand, there seemed to be little alignment to general education curriculum frameworks which would subsequently penalize Learning Center students when measured against district curriculum benchmarks. At the upper elementary and middle school levels, described units in Social Studies and Science did not follow the general education curriculum.

At the high school level, there is a shift in orientation as students are presented with functional academics. Here, students were exposed to literature by listening to the teacher’s reading of ‘Wonder’ to the class. Math is adapted to include functional topics such as equivalent measurements, handling money, etc. History is delivered by following current events through CNN News. Each day, a period of life skill instruction is added to the schedule. Afternoons are spent in vocational training, often outside of school property, with the use of a van funded by the Special Education Department. In addition, next year, the Director of Special Education hopes to hire a Job Coach to strengthen this program even further.

In terms of programming for students on the Autism spectrum, at the preschool and elementary levels, again daily morning meetings are utilized to establish routines, teach prosocial skills, and ready students for participating in a group. Academic goals are derived from the ABLLS (Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills) assessment. The preschool introduces the OWL literacy program and Handwriting without Tears. Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) techniques are used and each day for at least a half hour, students are given individual discrete trial instruction and data is collected regarding progress on discrete trial goals. However, at the middle school level, discrete trial instruction is no longer used and data collection does not appear to be as rigorous. There seems to be little alignment to general education curriculum frameworks, making it difficult to measure students in the ASD program strand against district and Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

A lack of framework alignment is especially problematic as students in the Learning Center and ASD sub separate programs are required to take MCAS assessments. If the curriculum that they are exposed to is not aligned with district and Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, this will not set students up for success when taking MCAS. The lack of aligned curriculum exposure widens the achievement gap between students served in substantially separate programs and general education students and hampers the ability of these students to someday be included.

Although Wareham is a community rich in history, maritime influence, and the cranberry industry, Wareham is also characterized by a high level of poverty and many transient families or transient children who pass through Wareham in foster care. In fact, according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s sta-
statistics, 60.7% of Wareham’s students considered high need and 50.8% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. This is higher than state averages. (See Table 1 in Appendices) Similarly, Wareham seems to have more students diagnosed with social/emotional disabilities than state averages.

According to the Director of Special Education, one proactive way of supporting the complex needs of students and families is for the District to coordinate with outside agencies who deliver counseling and family wrap around services and provide these agencies with space in order to see children and families in school during the school day. Some of these agencies include Gosnold, Inc., JRI, Southeast Family Services, BAMS, Bayview Associates, etc. Without such flexibility, the ability of families to access the support of outside agencies would be much less consistent. In addition, the Director of Special Education organized and sponsored a Mental Health Night for parents to showcase these agencies and provide outreach to parents and families who need support. Furthermore, there are Social Workers who deal with trauma, School Psychologists and School Adjustment counselors who deal with anxiety and depression, at all levels.

In terms of the Therapeutic Learning Center programs to address the needs of students who have been diagnosed with social/emotional disabilities, the Director of Special Education reports that staff have been trained in the use of social thinking curricula such as SuperFlex. Teachers and paraprofessionals are trained in CPI (Crisis Prevention Institute training) and should be applying the same language and methods to de-escalate students. Considerable staff training in PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Systems) has been provided. However, through observation, there seemed to be inconsistency in teacher practice at the elementary levels. At the secondary level, a greater emphasis on aligning academics with general education instruction was also noted.

Critical question:

*Do all children have equal access to instruction and services*?

Current status:

As mentioned before, given the targeted support for all students approach to literacy at the elementary levels, all students in inclusion are being given opportunities for reading and literacy development. At the middle school level, by providing classes that are co-taught and opportunities for pull-out instruction during intervention blocks, all students in inclusion are also provided a wide array of opportunities for instruction and services. At the high school level, in inclusion, students can access co-taught classes in English, Math, and Science. In addition, alternative classes such as Advanced Decision Making Math for non-college bound students are offered.

The same access to instruction is not true in sub separate programs. As mentioned before, the curricula in both the ASD programs and the Learning Center programs do not consistently align with Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and there seemed to be
less of an emphasis on academic goals at the elementary level Therapeutic Learning Centers than at the secondary levels.

Furthermore, differences in access to instruction through inclusive opportunities were noted in the sub separate programs, especially at the older elementary level. At the preschool level, the sub separate ASD class eats lunch with an integrated preschool class to promote models for language development and social skills. At the early elementary level, sub separate programs are paired with general ed classes of the same grade level to allow for inclusion opportunities. However, at the older elementary level, sub separate programs do not integrate with their typical counterparts. Children in sub separate programs attend electives such as art or music as “unified arts” with other special education sub separate classes. According to parent report, students in sub separate classes have attended special school functions such as Field Day at times other than their typical grade level peers. At the middle school level, some students in sub separate programs are included for one or two subjects whereas others spend their whole day in the sub separate class. Some students are also included for electives whereas others take “unified art” classes with students from other sub separate programs. At the high school, some students in sub separate programs are included as well for one or two subjects but there are no “unified art” classes. All students are included for electives.
How often do you think your student learns the same topics as other non-special education students in their grade?

The results of the parent/guardian survey indicate that the majority of parents (58.9%) believe their students are always or very frequently accessing grade level curriculum. A quarter of parents/guardians responded, though, that their students only occasionally have full access to grade level curriculum while 16% reported that they think their students rarely, very rarely, or never access grade level curriculum.
The parent survey data further illustrates that a large number of special education parents/guardians do not believe that their students feel like members of the larger school community. A third of parents/guardians responded (28.6%) that their students occasionally or very rarely feel like they are members of the larger school community. Parent interviews supported this data with stories of special education students inconsistently participating in school-wide events due to insufficient staffing or participating in school-wide events at separate times without the inclusion of general education students.

**How often does your student feel like he/she is a member of the larger school community?**

- **Always**: 29%
- **Very Frequently**: 39%
- **Occasionally**: 23%
- **Rarely, Never**: 8%
Critical question:

*Are there any demographic pockets that are underserved?

Current status:

A high rate of poverty and transience in Wareham potentially contribute to difficulties as far as seeing students through to graduation. In fact, the graduation rate of Wareham students during the 2016-2017 school year was 69.4%, as compared to the state at 88.1%. This fell even lower when examining the graduation rate for students with special needs which was only 43.2%. (see Table 4 in Appendices) One proactive measure that Wareham has taken is to offer an alternative work and competency-based program called PASS (Pathways to Academic Student Success), in order to entice students to finish graduation requirements. Several administrators expressed the desire for the high school to expand alternative opportunities for student engagement in areas that might lead to future jobs. According to the most recent 2019 State Review, the high school has explored offering electives in hotel and tourism, business, and childcare.

Given the reliance on sub separate programming, administrators at both the elementary and high school levels indicated that there are a segment of students who are placed in Learning Center programs due to a lack of alternative placements or services, who might be better served in a more inclusive way. Specifically, this would include students who score Below Average on intelligence tests but are socially adept.

Furthermore, staff at the high school expressed the need for a home base for students on the Autism spectrum who are included for large parts of the day. It was discussed that they need social and emotional support, but do not really belong with students with social/emotional and behavioral disabilities. Nor do they fit with students on the Autism spectrum with more severe language and cognitive concerns.

Finally, as social/emotional stress and problems are on the rise and as difficulties with coping with trauma are seen at younger and younger ages, the need for extended evaluations to calm situations down and determine the best course of action is crucial. The Director of Special Education expressed the desire to develop such a capacity within the District, rather than having to send students away for such an eval.

Consultants’ Perspectives:

There are many bright spots in Wareham. There is strong collaboration and admiration between special education and general education administrators such as the Director of Special Education, the Superintendent, and the Principals and as a result, several joint initiatives between special education and general education have proved to be quite successful. These include the targeted support for all students approach, based upon the work of Kerry Thurston, to help all students become literate and read at grade level by grade 2. In addition, as all administrators mentioned mental health as the biggest area of challenge as far as supporting students, it is very positive that there is a support-
ive relationship between outside counseling and family support agencies and the schools. Lastly, some students who are determined to be able to be included in general education classes are supported well by special educators, both in co-taught classes and with some pull-out services.

However, there seems to be an over reliance on sub separate programming. Furthermore, students in sub separate programs are inconsistently included with their typical peers who could serve as language and social models. Additionally, they are not always provided access to the same curriculum that their typical peers are exposed to. This becomes especially problematic when such students become older and are not ready and able to meet graduation requirements.

Recommendations for Improvement:

—Review the flowchart for determining eligibility and state mandated disability categories with preschool staff. Assign Preschool Coordinator to meet with Early Intervention and families to discuss eligibility for preschool services.

—Develop exit/entry criteria for all sub separate programs, and communicate these to all stakeholders including principals, team chairs, special education and general education teachers.

—Consider identifying a space and a person to create a home base for high functioning students on the Autism spectrum.

—Train elective teachers to be able to include students from sub separate programs in their classes.

—Explore alternative curricula for students who are unable to access the general education curriculum such as Lively Letters for younger students, Start-to-Finish Reading for older students, and the Unique Learning System n2y to strengthen the rigor of the curriculum in sub separate programs. Explore alternative Math curricula as well.

—Continue to train teachers and paraprofessionals in ABA to increase capacity and prepare for students as they move up in grade.

—Train preschool, ASD, and TLC staff in social thinking and social skill building curricula such as SuperFlex by Michelle Garcia Winner as well as mindfulness and calming techniques.

—Continue to implement PBIS uniformly and consistently across the District.

—Work with principals to problem solve and ensure that all students with or without special needs are included in all school-sponsored activities with their typical grade level peers.
—Continue to offer Professional Development to special educators around Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and co-teaching strategies and collaboration. This would be especially essential for special educators in separate programs.
Focus Area 2: Definition and implementation of the continuum of placements and array of services

Critical questions:

*Are current policies and processes clearly defined and communicated to all staff and stakeholders?

Current status:

Observation of programs and interview of staff and stakeholders reveal that the current policies and processes are not clearly defined and consistently communicated. For example, at the preschool level, students are diagnosed with disabilities and qualified for preschool programming at a rate that is disproportionate to state expectations. For example, 30.8% of preschool students are referred for separate programming in either an ASD or Learning Center classroom, whereas the state target for separate programming at the preschool level was 12.8%, the last time this data was collected. (see Table 2 in Appendices)

Critical question:

*Are there entry/exit criteria for all programs at all school buildings and levels?

Current status:

The descriptions of programs in Wareham are outdated, and need to be revised. Melissa Fay, Director of Special Education, reflected that this is something she would like to accomplish in the near future. The descriptions of programs will also include updated entry and exit criteria for all programs at all school buildings and levels.

Generally speaking, principals are in agreement that as far as students in the TLC (Therapeutic Learning Center) programs, those that become assaultive or violent should be outplaced. However, there is no agreed upon, universal screening tool used to assess students with social/emotional/behavioral challenges to determine whether they can be supported in inclusion or need a sub separate program. Often, it is difficult to answer the question of whether the student is demonstrating a maladaptive learned behavior or whether he/she is in short term crisis vs. whether the student has a true emotional disability. Without such a tool or criteria, inconsistencies in decision making are bound to occur.
Critical question:

*Are the entry/exit criteria and processes adhered to at all school buildings and levels?*

Current status:

Because entry/exit criteria and processes are not clearly identified, there are many inconsistencies between school buildings and levels as to program classifications and the delivery of services. For example, staff at both the high school and middle school note that students are at times taken off of IEPs prematurely at the elementary levels. Then, when these students move up to the secondary levels and are faced with a greater workload and expected to be more independent, they are put back on IEPs. On the other hand, staff at the high school will often push students who have historically been in sub separate programs back into inclusion when they get to the high school, so that they can have the chance to meet graduation requirements. It would appear that there needs to be work done to calibrate service delivery and entry/exit criteria for sub separate programs in order to increase consistency around programming.

Critical question:

*What are the current gaps in continuity between the school buildings as far as programming?*

Current status:

A large number of IEPs were examined and analyzed across all school buildings and across the four placement settings of Inclusion, Learning Center, ASD, and Therapeutic Learning Center, to determine how services and programs are represented in IEPs. As mentioned earlier, there seems to be a greater classification in inclusive settings at the lower elementary level than at the upper elementary or middle school levels. Furthermore, in the Learning Center setting, whereas service delivery grids noted instruction in English and Math at the lower elementary and middle school levels, other IEPs listed the Functional Academics and Life Skills at the upper elementary and high school levels. This difference in stated curriculum demonstrates inconsistency as to philosophical orientation in the Learning Center strand. As mentioned before, the same is true in the Autism strand. Whereas early elementary IEPs list ABA as a service, ABA is not represented in the older grades. Finally, overall, the IEPs that were examined did not fully represent all services given. The delivery of counseling or other social skill building services was grossly absent from the sample of IEPs examined, both for students with diagnoses of Autism as well as students with social/emotional disabilities. Yet, students are well supported by Adjustment Counselors, School Psychologists, and Social Workers at every building.
Consultants’ Perspectives:

Melissa Fay, Director of Special Education, is acutely aware of the immediate need to devise clear entrance and exit criteria for all strands of programming in Wareham. This includes criteria for students in inclusion placements, in Learning Center placements, in ASD placements, and in Therapeutic Learning Centers. Issues with clarity around entry qualifications are especially apparent at the preschool level, where an overabundance of children are found eligible for special education programming. Without clear entry and exit criteria, there is an over reliance on sub separate programming throughout the District.

In terms of a continuum of placements, differences in philosophical orientation, spotty use of specialized curricula, and variable orientation towards inclusion contribute to a lack of consistency in specialized programs from school to school. More communication between like sub separate programs in all schools is necessary to promote seamless transitions from one school to another and to promote consistency.

Finally, an examination of sample IEPs at all levels and across the four placement strands reveals a lack of consistency in how services are represented. Generally speaking, the delivery of social/emotional support and skill building is grossly underrepresented across the District, despite a host of services that are offered.

Recommendations for Improvement:

— Involve staff (as a Professional Development offering or through stipend over the summer) in helping to create descriptions and entry and exit criteria for all strands including Inclusion, the Learning Centers, the ASD classes, and the Therapeutic Learning Centers.

— Once the descriptions and entry and exit criteria are completed, distribute copies to all principals and Team Chairs and hold meetings to ensure that all staff are familiar with these descriptions and criteria.

— Organize job-alike meetings for staff working in each strand to meet and to discuss best practices to be used at all levels, as well as differences between programs due to developmental expectations.

— Meet with Team Chairs to develop guidelines and exemplars for writing IEPs at each level and within each strand. Make sure that social/emotional counseling and other skill building services are represented.

— Ensure that Team Chairs communicate changes in placement to Director of Special Education who has to plan for staffing and budgeting. Keep track of over assignment to sub separate programs.

— Revamp the way preschoolers are assessed and meet with the Preschool Director to establish entry and exit criteria and a decision tree for qualifying children.
Focus Area 3: Adequacy of organizational support structures and processes; e.g. professional development, teaming, supervision

Critical question:

“What currently exists as far as organizational support structures and processes; e.g. professional development?

Current status:

The District reportedly has offered training at all schools during the last two years in supporting children who have experienced Trauma in hopes of creating Trauma Sensitive Schools. In addition, many teachers attended a workshop in Collaborative Problem Solving. Significant resources reportedly were devoted to training staff and establishing PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) at all levels. Elementary staff in the ASD programs have been trained in Safety Care, whereas staff in other programs and levels have been trained in behavior de-escalation and intervention by CPI (the Crisis Prevention Institute).

According to the Director of Special Education, the District just completed a two year project to train teachers in Universal Design and in co-teaching methods. Various content specific department meetings have been held by secondary Department chairs including the English, Math, Humanities, Science, and History departments, at the secondary and upper elementary level. Both English and Math data teams meet periodically to review data regarding student progress. It is unclear how many special education personnel attend the content specific department meetings. However, this would be an excellent practice in order to fully understand and align with general education District benchmarks.

The Special Education Department Chair at the high school, in the Fall of 2018, arranged for a collaborative training between general ed and special ed teachers to discuss curriculum modifications to support students when in inclusion. Additionally, the Humanities department collaborated with special ed staff at the secondary level to align instruction and develop a graphic organizer that would be acceptable when taking the MCAS in that area.

Considering MCAS, some special education teachers have attended trainings around administering the MCAS assessments, especially around developing and submitting alternative MCAS-Alt portfolios.

Several paraprofessionals at the elementary levels are trained in ABA, whereas the same is not true at the secondary levels. Staff at the high school level expressed the wish that paraprofessionals could be specifically trained in content areas to be of greater benefit to students.
Critical question:

*What currently exists as far as organizational support structures and processes; e.g. for collaboration?

Current status:

Organizational support structures and processes exist at all levels within the District to a certain extent, depending upon the unique scheduling demands of each school. At the preschool level, special education teachers are able to use Friday afternoons to collaborate with each other as well as with service providers, as no classes are scheduled at that time. At Decas, staff meet to discuss literacy outcomes and supporting students during reading blocks. At the upper elementary level, special education teachers meet after school with general education teachers to talk about specific students on Mondays and Wednesdays; on Tuesdays, the upper elementary teachers meet either at grade levels or to collaborate about specific subject areas. No overarching Special Education Department meetings are scheduled at the elementary levels. In contrast, at the middle school, the Special Education Department meets twice a month to discuss current issues unique to special education. Special education teachers are also invited to attend data team meetings for Math and English on a monthly basis. At the high school, the whole faculty meets once a month; subject specific departments also meet once a month; however, these meetings occur at the same time that the Special Education department meets. The principal reported that he tries to schedule general education and special education teachers that are co-teaching in such a way as to allow for at least one prep period in common. Yet, one common and ongoing theme is that there is “never enough time for co-planning and collaboration” between general education staff and special education professionals.

As far as transition meetings to alert receiving schools as to the needs of the students that will be entering, the elementary principals remarked that many meetings are held in the Spring and that the transitions are smooth. The same was stated by the secondary Special Education Department heads. Both mentioned that they speak frequently and that the transition from middle to high school is a smooth one for most students. However, the principals added that 2018 was an anomaly. Last year, a decision was made late in May to move the eighth grade to the high school. As a result, there was not enough time to hold many transition meetings to adequately prepare high school staff. In addition, the high school principal added that each year, students from transient situations like foster care and group homes arrive at the high school on the first day without advance notice, unregistered and unplanned for.

Finally, Melissa Fay, Director of Special Education, meets with all the Team Chairs and Special Education Department heads twice a month to discuss issues unique to special education. She meets with District Administration including the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and all school principals every other week as well. There is a monthly job-alike meeting between the Social Workers, School Adjustment Counselors, School Psychologists, and BCBAs to address mental health service delivery issues.
Critical question:

*Is there anything that can be done to abate the turnover of staff, teachers, and administrators in the school system, especially the special ed department?*

Current status:

Several staff suggested that the teacher salaries in Wareham are not commensurate with salaries in neighboring towns. They further remarked that teachers and administrators are often lost to other towns because of this pay differential. Staff added that often, it is difficult to attract high quality staff with experience, especially in the TLC programs, due to the lower salaries. It was reported that less qualified teachers are then hired who, because of a lack of adequate preparation and skills, leave right away. Wareham Public Schools did try to close the wage gap by offering a 3% increase in salaries over 3 years. An analysis of teacher salaries in surrounding towns from 2016-2017, though, shows that Wareham teacher salaries fell within the mean for salaries in surrounding towns, demonstrating that Wareham did not pay the lowest salary, but did pay below the average. (See Table 3 in Appendices).

Consultants’ Perspectives:

Recently, the District has expanded its Professional Development offerings to include Trauma training, Collaborative Problem Solving, and PBIS (positive behavioral interventions and supports). In addition, an initiative to train teachers in Universal Design for Learning and co-teaching was just completed. Subject specific general education department trainings have been held to investigate a variety of curricula and examine data in those areas. The special education departments at the secondary levels have offered trainings for general educators on curriculum modifications and adaptations to promote successful inclusion and align with what general educators are teaching. All these professional development opportunities seem to be extremely worthwhile and will benefit all students. However, to improve consistency of instruction, they must be repeated and extended to teachers that may have missed these trainings again. Also, where possible, paraprofessionals should also have access to these professional development opportunities to improve and expand upon their practice.

Similarly, each school appears to offer some organizational structures and processes to promote collaboration and collegiality. Yet, a common theme of all special educators is that there is never enough time devoted to meeting amongst each other or with general education peers or paraprofessionals. Principals should take great care when scheduling to allow for more co-planning time. Also, at the elementary levels, time should be allotted for the special education staff to meet together as a department.
Finally, the hiring and retaining of qualified teachers remains a problem for the Special Education Department, especially in some key positions such as in the Therapeutic Learning Centers. A comparison of salaries in neighboring districts illustrates that there still remains a slight disparity between what Wareham pays its staff vs. other towns. Recently, the District tried to respond to this by offering a 3% pay increase over 3 years. The District may also want to consider offering additional perks to entice qualified staff such as a strong Professional Development program and free training for job advancement, school choice where working parents can have their children attend Wareham schools, etc.

**Recommendations for Improvement:**

—Choose certain initiatives to span all grade levels such as aligning Special Education instruction to General Education instruction, or PBIS and arrange Professional Development opportunities or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to meet periodically throughout the year to develop guidelines and present products to faculty.

—Consider involving paraprofessionals in such Professional Development opportunities. If outside of their contracts, consider offering stipends for their involvement.

—Offer additional Professional Development opportunities around Executive Function skills in the classroom, Social Thinking curricula such as SuperFlex, and the SCERTS model, etc.

—Investigate different methods of scheduling used by other schools and districts which allow for co-planning and collaboration between special educators and general educators, special educators and paraprofessionals, and special educators and service providers.

—Team chairs at the elementary levels should initiate department meetings to build collegiality and a sense of shared responsibility.

—Investigate and consider other benefits that the District can offer its teachers besides financial compensation. A strong support network, additional professional training, and flexibility around enrolling children in Wareham schools are some options.
Focus Area 4: Student outcomes; i.e., proficiency and progress in academics and social-emotional-behavioral skills

Critical question:

*Are students making appropriate progress in academics and social-emotional-behavioral skills?

Current status:

As mentioned before, there has been a strong emphasis on targeted student support for all children over the past 2 years to ensure that all children, with or without special needs, are literate and reading at grade level by the end of second grade. This approach to literacy seems to be hugely effective for all students, in that whereas 50-60% of all kindergarten students scored below the norm on the FAST assessment for literacy 2 years ago, 63% of these students who are now second graders scored at or above the norm for literacy on the most recent assessments.

All students, with or without disabilities, are given periodic assessments to track progress at the elementary levels including the FAST (Functional Assessment Screening Tool), DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment), and DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). At the secondary levels, curriculum benchmark assessments are used. However, at this point, MCAS data is the most readily available to examine progress across grade levels 3-10. Below are graphs which display the comparisons between the results of 1) students with disabilities in Wareham as compared to 2) students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts, as well as 3) students in Wareham with and without disabilities, and 4) students across the state of Massachusetts with or without disabilities:
Based upon these findings, it would appear that at third grade, most students with disabilities in Wareham score within the Partially Meets Expectations category. More students with disabilities in Massachusetts score within the Exceeds Expectations or Meets Expectations passing range than those with disabilities in Wareham. The majority of all students in Wareham, with or without disabilities, also score within the Partially Meets Expectations category, though many also score within the Meets Expectations range.
The results are more concerning in Math. At the third grade level, it appears that most students with disabilities in Wareham score within the Does Not Meet Expectations category. This is significantly lower than most students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts, who score within the Partially Meets Expectations category. This is also significantly lower than all students in Wareham who score within the Partially Meets Expectations category.
At sixth grade, the results on the English Language Arts MCAS prove to be similar to those at Third grade. Most students with disabilities in Wareham score within the Partially Meets Expectations range as do students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts. The same is true for all students in Wareham Public Schools, with or without disabilities, where most score within the Partially Exceeds Expectations range.
Again, the results for sixth grade students who take the Math MCAS are similar to those of third grade students who take the Math MCAS. Unfortunately, half of the students with disabilities who take the Sixth grade Math MCAS fall within the Does Not Meet Expectations range. This is significantly lower than the state average for students with disabilities, most of whom score within the Partially Meets Expectations range. This is also significantly lower than all students in Wareham, most of who also score within the Partially Meets Expectations level.
The results of the 10th grade English Language Arts MCAS are much more positive. The majority of students with disabilities in Wareham score within the Proficient range on the English Language Arts MCAS. This is comparable to other students with disabilities across the state who also largely score within the Proficient range. However, there is a marked contrast when comparing students with disabilities in Wareham against their typical peers, where the vast majority of students score either in the Proficient or Advanced category.
In contrast, as far as the 10th grade Math MCAS, the gap between students with disabilities both in Wareham and across the state, and their typical peers in Wareham and across the state, widens significantly by tenth grade. Although all students in Wareham still score below state averages, the vast majority of students in Wareham score within either the Advanced or Proficient categories and pass the Math MCAS. Unfortunately, less than half of the students with disabilities in Wareham score either in the Advanced or Proficient categories, with most scoring within the Needs Improvement category and many Failing. The same is true for students with disabilities across the state.

In terms of social-emotional-behavioral growth, according to staff, the middle and high school keep data on individual benchmarks that are set for students in terms of PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports). However, the same type of data was not observed at the elementary levels. According to the Superintendent, the schools collect and utilize SWIS data regarding social/emotional progress and submit regular
reports to her for discussion at regular meetings. The Director of Special Education reported that SWIS data is used to inform decisions at team meetings as well.

District measures from the 2016-2017 school year demonstrated that the rate of students with disabilities graduating from Wareham schools was lower than the state average and less than half. (See Table 4 in Appendices) Similarly, during the 2016-2017 school year, for students with disabilities in Wareham, the number of students who dropped out was especially high and much higher than state averages. (See Table 5 in Appendices)

Finally, District measures from the 2016-2017 school year were indicative of an overall over-reliance on suspensions as disciplinary action for students with special needs. Wareham’s district rate for serious suspensions greater than 10 days far exceeded that of state averages. (See Table 6 in Appendices) However, Melissa Fay, Director of Special Education, reported that steps have been taken since to reduce the over-reliance on suspensions for students with and without special needs. To reduce this number, Melissa Fay held trainings with district principals around alternative methods of handling behavioral issues.

**Consultants’ Perspectives:**

Wareham Public Schools has focused recently upon increasing the literacy of elementary students and ensuring that all students, with or without disabilities, can read by second grade. The results have been very promising in that 63% of the second graders scored at or above the norm for literacy on the most recent assessments.

An analysis of 2018 English Language Arts MCAS scores reveals that students with disabilities in Wareham fall below state averages for all students with disabilities in Massachusetts in English Language Arts at the third, sixth, and tenth grades. However, although the results fall below state averages, it is somewhat encouraging that at the tenth grade level, 65% of the students with disabilities in Wareham score in the Advanced or Proficient range on the English Language Arts MCAS assessment, which is a requirement for graduation.

The results are more concerning in Math. An analysis of the 2018 Math MCAS scores reveals that the gap between students with disabilities in Wareham and their typical peers or students with disabilities across the state of Massachusetts widens. At the third and sixth grades, the majority of students with disabilities in Wareham score within the ‘Does Not Meet Expectations’ range on the Math MCAS. At the tenth grade, where passing MCAS is a graduation requirement, less than half of the students with disabilities in Wareham score either in the Advanced or Proficient categories, with most scoring within the Needs Improvement category and many Failing.

Finally, District measures from the 2016-2017 school year demonstrated that generally, the graduation rate for students with disabilities in Wareham fell below the graduation
rate for students with disabilities across Massachusetts. Similarly, the drop out rate for students in Wareham was higher than the drop out rate for students with disabilities across Massachusetts. Efforts are being made by Administration to offer alternatives such as the PASS program and other alternative opportunities for student engagement to keep students in school and help them graduate. However, the gap for students with disabilities as far as graduation is of concern when one considers that during the 2016-2017 school year, less than half of the students with disabilities graduated, according to data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website.

**Recommendations for Improvement:**

—Ensure that special education teachers are well trained in the current Math curriculum. Investigate alternative Math curricula for students who are unable to access the general education curriculum.

—Establish an inter-departmental work group to address improving outcomes for students with disabilities in terms of graduation.
Focus Area 5: Status of Interagency Collaboration

Critical question:

*What and who are the agencies that Wareham Schools collaborate with?*

Current status:

The Wareham Public School District is heavily impacted by the high level of poverty that exists in Wareham, along with the large number of transient families and children. Group homes and many foster families in Wareham take in children that are court involved or have relationships with DCF (Department of Children and Families). It was reported that the School Adjustment Counselor at the middle school has a background in foster care, and maintains a strong relationship with DCF.

With high poverty and a high level of transience in Wareham, many children have experienced trauma. There are a number of agencies in the Wareham vicinity who work with Wareham families and children around trauma and other mental health issues, such as JRI (the Justice Resource Institute) and Gosnold, Inc. In order to improve the accessibility of children and families to outpatient mental health services, Wareham Public Schools have partnered with these agencies, providing space for children and families to be seen in counseling at school during the school day. This has proven to be a beneficial practice.

Furthermore, students who are under the age of 21, have been diagnosed with a serious emotional disturbance, and are eligible for MassHealth may also be referred by school personnel to Child and Family Services or BAMSI (Brockton Area Multi Services, Inc.) for Intensive Care Coordination (ICC). Here, an ICC (Intensive Care Coordinator) uses a wraparound care planning process to coordinate multiple services and supports such as home assessments; assembling a team of counselors, school personnel, family, and friends to determine an individual care plan; assigning a family partner; and helping the student and family access self-help and support groups.

School personnel also access BAMSI and Bayview Associates, Counseling for mobile crisis intervention when necessary. Staff at both the elementary and secondary levels voiced the concern that when students have had to be admitted to mental health facilities, communication between these facilities and the schools is poor or even nonexistent. At times, students have arrived back to school from mental health facilities with little planning or the communication needed to allow for smoother transitions.

Consultants’ Perspectives:

The Wareham Public School District is impacted by a high level of poverty and a large number of transient families and children. There are several group homes which are housed in Wareham as well as many foster families who take in children for various amounts of time. Early exposure to trauma on the part of children is a common concern
that is noted by Wareham staff and trainings have been held to help teachers and mental health staff better prepare for dealing with the effects of trauma on children.

Fortunately, there are many available agencies and organizations in the Wareham vicinity to work with children and families and offer a variety of services and support. These include DCF, JRI, Gosnold, Inc., Child & Family Services, BAMSi, and Bayview Associates. Supports and services include individual and family counseling, intensive care coordination of wrap around services, family partnering, and referrals to self-help and other support groups. In an innovative way, the Wareham Public Schools encouraged JRI and Gosnold, Inc. to see children and families for counseling in school and during the school day, to increase attendance at mental health services.

However, more needs to be done to increase communication between outside agencies and organizations to promote the accomplishment of mutual goals and increase collaborative efforts. By meeting on a regular basis, agencies and organizations will understand each others’ role and the role of the schools in improving mental health outcomes.

**Recommendations for Improvement:**

—Host monthly meetings for mental health agencies and organizations together with school personnel to report on progress, allow for case consultation, clarify roles, and set goals for mental health growth in Wareham.

—Help agencies and organizations develop flow charts, exit and entrance criteria, and illuminate procedures for working with students in Wareham.

—Educate agencies and organizations as to programs and services in the Wareham Public Schools.

—Continue to offer Mental Health programs for parents/guardians such as the one held in April 2019.
Focus Area 6: Collaboration with Parents

Critical questions:

*Where do parents feel their needs and those of their children are/are not being met?*

*What can be done to develop a stronger bond between the Special Ed Department and the parents of students that are served by the Special Ed Department?*

Methodology:

The final focus area of Parent/Guardian Collaboration centered on two areas: parent/guardian engagement and communication. Consultants looked to gather information regarding parent/guardian and staff perspective in these areas. Upon the guidance of the Special Education Director, Walker consultants did not hold a parent/guardian forum. Attendance at both nightly/daily parent/guardian events has been historically low across most of the district. One exception has been at the DECAS events, wherein principal reported that the majority of parents/guardians attend school functions. In an effort to reach all special education parents/guardians in a non-invasive manner, a 9 question (7 multiple choice, 2 open response) survey was created. The survey was first sent out on March 5, 2019, via email to the addresses of parents/guardians of special education students (N:400). The survey was re-sent on March 25, 2019. Survey responses were collected until April 15, 2019. A total of Fifty-six responses (14%) were submitted and analyzed.

Survey respondents were first asked to use a 1-5 Likert scale to respond to the following questions:

*How satisfied are you with the progress your student is making in school?*

*How often do you think your student is receiving the specialized instruction that he/she might need (examples of specialized instruction: special reading instruction, special math instruction, etc).*

*How often do you think your student learns the same topics as other nonspecial education students in their grade? (In other words, how often do you think your student has full access to grade level curriculum?)

*How often does your student feel like he/she is a member of the larger school community? (In other words, how often is your student integrated into his/her school? )

*How would you rate the collaboration and communication between families and staff of the Wareham public schools special education department?*

Parents/Guardians were then asked to respond to two open-response questions:

*In your opinion, are the needs of your student being met by the teachers and staff of the Wareham special education department? Why/Why not?
In your opinion, how could the special education department continue to develop and enhance its relationship with families?

Fifty-four of the fifty-six (96%) of respondents included short answer responses.

Parent/Guardians were finally given the option to indicate the grade level and placement setting of their student(s). The question was explicitly noted as optional, yet 54 of 56 (96%) total survey respondents indicated their student’s current special education placement. These included 68.5% inclusion placement, 27.8% sub separate placement and 3.7% out of district placement.

**Placement Settings of Students (54 responses)**

- **Inclusion**: 69%
- **Sub separate**: 28%
- **Out-of-District**: 4%
Though parents/guardians of all ages of students completed the survey, a large percentage of the parents/guardians currently have students at the earliest grades (Pre-K to 2) or the High School (8-12).

Additionally, the Special Education Director provided Walker consultants with the names and contact information of 5 parents/guardians to contact to interview. Of the 5 families contacted via phone and email, 4 responses were received and those parents/guardians were interviewed via phone over the weeks of April 1, 2019, and April 22, 2019. School staff were also interviewed and asked to respond to the questions: How do parents/guardians participate in the academic lives of their students and How is progress communicated to parents/guardians?

**Staff Perspective of Engagement and Communication with Parents/Guardians**

**Parent Engagement and Collaboration:**

When considering parent engagement staff response across the district was varied. Interestingly, at DECAS the principal reports that there are no communication barriers regarding parent engagement. While participation by parents/guardians of students in the
earliest grades was reported as robust and frequent, in other areas of the district, staff members revealed challenges in reaching parents/guardians and fostering active partnership. One staff questioned parent/guardian understanding of the process of IEP development. She questioned whether low literacy levels of some parents/guardians coupled with their own feelings of alienation from school affect parent engagement. At the secondary level specifically, staff members reported that a significant percentage of parents/guardians are disengaged in the academic lives of their students. Though IEP meetings are one opportunity for parents/guardians to engage in student academic lives it was stated that approximately 25% of parents/guardians do not attend meetings. The transient nature of the student population due to DCF custody, foster care, and state-run programming seemingly results in students facing a lack of consistent academic support at home. One rationale given for parent disengagement at the secondary level was the natural and developmentally appropriate pushing away by adolescents (i.e. the belief that students in adolescence often do not want their parents/guardians to volunteer at school).

**Staff Communication with Parents/Guardians:**

Communication with parents/guardians varies across the district. Some administrators send out weekly memos to all parents/guardians to keep parents/guardians informed regarding what is happening in the school community. Staff indicate that to a great extent, the IEP drives communication with special education parents/guardians, mostly through in-person meetings and progress reports. Daily communication and general updates regarding academic and social-emotional progress are varied based on school and placement. Parents/Guardians in grades Pre-K-2 are provided with official student progress data in the form of IEP progress reports, DRA reports, FAST assessment results, and report cards. Day to day communication, (for example in the ASD program) is provided through software such as Class Dojo, emails, and phone calls. It was noted at the pre-K-2 level that annual family nights like Literacy Night and International Night help foster communication and participation.

In grades 3 and 4 IEP meeting invitations are sent out and calls are made to remind parents/guardians of upcoming IEP meetings. Teacher communication is varied; some classroom teachers use Class Dojo, but there is not a clear expectation of how often communication occurs. Additionally, the principal writes a monthly newsletter that is sent to parents/guardians and she moderates a school wide facebook page that is frequently used to disseminate information.

At the middle school, TLC teachers make a call each week and send home point sheets that report on academic and social-emotional progress. The ASD classes use Class Dojo to communicate. The Learning Center teachers and inclusion teachers call and email. The principal sends a weekly newsletter to all parents/guardians.

At the high school level parent communication is tracked school wide. Staff are asked to input all parent communication into a spreadsheet that indicates the type of communication (email, phone, parent conference). One staff member shared that, he “tries very
hard” to contact parents/guardians, but that the immediate response to phone calls or emails is approximately 25%. He reports that 50% of parents/guardians of students on his caseload aren’t consistently reached. Inclusion students are given their own progress notes and asked to bring them home to parents/guardians. There is no further follow up expected to be done by the inclusion teacher to ensure that parents/guardians have received the document. At the high school, there are nights dedicated to parents and parent education, but it is reported that few parents/guardians attend. Teachers have a school wide document that tracks parent engagement. It was stated that parents/guardians who are involved are very involved, but often guardians of students who are part of transient populations (DCF involved, group home etc) seem to lack consistent investment and rarely attend events. However, it was also repeatedly noted, that though parents on a whole are not proactively communicative, once teachers figure out the best way to reach parents/guardians they become more active in their child’s educational life.

**Parent Perspective of Communication, Collaboration and Effectiveness of Special Education Services**

**Communication and Collaboration with Parents:**

The response of parents/guardians regarding their perspective on communication and collaboration by special education staff was wide-ranging. Almost an identical percentage of parents/guardians who responded to the given survey viewed communication and collaboration by the WPS special education department as favorable as unfavorable. Over 39% (39.2) of parents/guardians who completed the survey, responded favorably when asked how they would rate the collaboration and communication between families and staff of the Wareham Public Schools Special Education Department. One interviewed parent spoke of the responsiveness of the Special Education Director and expressed his feeling that his concerns were actively listened to by the current special education leadership. However, this parent also mentioned, feeling as if others in leadership positions were less communicative. More than ⅓ of survey participants (39.3%) rated collaboration and communication as needing improvement or very poor. Common themes in the response section included communication not being consistent/timely and an overall lack of communication.

There is an officially established SEPAC in Wareham that meets monthly. Attendance at meetings, however, is limited to non existent. Multiple parents/guardians noted that the nightly meeting times are difficult based on childcare and work schedules. Desperation to have parents sign IEPs resulted in one school asking parents to sign IEPs during Field Day. The parents affected reported a feeling of intrusion. The remarks describing school and district administration were similarly diverse. Some administrators were described as “open” and willing to think “out of the box” while others were described as “lacking warmth, dishonest and unapproachable.”
How would you rate the collaboration and communication between families and staff of the Wareham Public Schools’ Special Education Department? (56 responses)

**Students Needs Being Met:**

The responses of the survey participants and interviewed parent/guardians varied greatly when considering the staff, structures and service delivery provided to special education students across the district. When asked: In your opinion, are the needs of your student being met by the teachers and staff of the Wareham Special Education Department? Why/Why not? 37% of survey respondents commented favorably that the needs of their students were being met by special education staff. Favorable responses included statements of satisfaction regarding the services being provided. For example, one parent/guardian wrote, “My son’s teachers have gone above and beyond for him. They’ve shown him ways to communicate without being able to use his words, and he’s made so much progress in other areas, now that he can communicate his needs more clearly.” Another stated, “Yes, her teachers always go above and beyond to help her.” A third commented, “This year, the school is very attentive to my student's needs.” Finally, one parent/guardian expressed a large sense of gratitude towards the special education staff writing, “My son’s needs are being met in my opinion. His needs change frequently, we communicate and work on them through many different forms of communication daily. We work as a team to make forward progress. (Including his needs and challenges at home. Which are also ever changing). His special educator's suggestions and support on the school end propel us as a family forward. It’s just so much more than I could have ever expected. She has been an amazing resource for our family. Her support for
my son has changed everything for him and our family. She is teaching him and us at the same time. I couldn’t happier or more grateful.” The advocacy efforts of general education and special education teachers in the early grades were commended by parents.

Conversely, 35% of the parents/guardians who replied, communicated discontent towards the meeting of their student’s needs. Comments included, “I don’t think he is getting enough time in the classroom for his needs. I think when the IEP was written they gave him what was available (not what he needed).” A repeated concern involved adequate progress and promotion. Multiple parents reflected feelings that their children were being “passed along” without making adequate progress. “The teachers are great and are always responsive to my emails and calls but I just feel that my child is being passed along without making progress to get near their grade level.” Additionally, a common theme in responses by parents/guardians was the perspective that funding dictates the services being offered and implemented versus the services being a result of student need. “A lack of funding in Wareham has also played a big role in whether my child got the amount of services he needs.”

The majority of special education parents/guardians who responded to the March survey are satisfied with the progress that their student is making in school. Nearly half (48.2%) of respondents indicated being very satisfied or satisfied when asked about student progress. Of note, over a quarter (30.4%) feel a sense of dissatisfaction with their student’s progress. The question asked did not differentiate whether the student progress was in classes where the student received special education services, it is noted that the response may have been more or less favorable if the question was posed in that way.
How satisfied are you with the progress your student is making in school? (56 responses)

How satisfied are you with the progress your student is making in school? (56 responses)

- Very Satisfied: 21%
- Satisfied: 27%
- Not Satisfied or Dissatisfied: 21%
- Dissatisfied: 16%
- Strongly Dissatisfied: 14%

Title

Very Satisfied
Satisfied
Not Satisfied or Dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Strongly Dissatisfied
The parent/guardian survey data illustrates that over half (60.7%) of parents/guardians who responded believe that their student always or very frequently receives the specialized instruction that he/she may need. Just over one-quarter of respondents (28.6%) believe that their student only occasionally receives specialized services. Slightly over 10% of respondents indicated that they think that their student rarely or very rarely receives the specialized instruction that he/she needs.

**How often do you think your student is receiving the specialized instruction that he/she might need?**

- **23%** Always
- **38%** Very Frequently
- **29%** Occasionally
- **9%** Rarely
- **2%** Very Rarely
Consultants' Perspective:

Parents and staff alike believe there is an opportunity for growth in the area of parent engagement and collaboration. Though there are pockets of wide participation by parents/guardians, most schools find that their efforts to engage and collaborate are largely unsuccessful. Administrators and staff largely feel discouraged and frustrated by the lack of parent/guardians partnership, which became increasingly evident in listening to staff through interviews and discussions. One administrator expressed a belief that parents/guardians are apathetic to the educational lives of their students. Another said that he/she believed that many parents struggle with their own needs and therefore, avoid responsibility. A third reported, “No matter what we do, parents don’t engage.” Administrators and staff seem to genuinely want to create more collaboration, yet have been largely unable to consistently and broadly engage parents. Parents, in turn, expressed various degrees to which they feel comfortable participating in the academic life of their children. Some parents reported feeling overwhelmed stating though they had a desire to partner with the school, they find it difficult to understand how best to do so. Though a challenging undertaking, Wareham Public Schools Special Education must continue to and increase their efforts in establishing and maintaining parent/guardian partnerships.

Recommendations for Improvement:

—Establish working groups to share best practices for parent engagement. At each job-alike meeting, dedicate time to the discussion about what is working and what is not with the parents/guardian of special education students. Celebrate the bright spots of success and try to replicate them across all schools.

—Enlist other parents/guardians to help with communicating general information to other parents. Find ‘point person’ parents who can help communicate about special nights or about parent conferences.

—Explore additional ways beyond calls/emails to communicate information about events and parent education (ads in local businesses, text messages sent from a work line, robocalls).

—Hold parent meetings in places outside of school but convenient to target audiences such as community rooms in housing developments, restaurants, libraries, Knights of Columbus halls, etc. that might be more attractive and less threatening than schools.

—Immerse Special Education staff in community activities outside of school with parents/guardians and students to build bridges. For example, if there is a town fair, find a way to be a presence. Consider starting opportunities for students with special needs such as a Challenger Baseball League.

—Consider creating a specific plan for engagement with DCF/Group Home Staff to open lines of communication. Consider creating specific education nights/events for guardians of transient communities held at a central location.
—Continue to implement school-wide tracking of teacher communication data and analyze trends.

—Continue to incorporate mental health, trauma and cultural competence professional development for ALL teachers.
Issues for Further Investigation

In the process of collecting and analyzing data for this report, the Consultants have identified a few issues that exceed the scope of this evaluation, but are closely related to the areas of focus and the recommendations for improvement.

**Issue: Closing the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their typical peers.**

Further examination might entail researching professional articles, investigating curricula that other districts are using, and seeking out guidance from specialists on how to close this achievement gap for students in special education, especially in Math.

**Issue: What factors contribute to the over reliance on sub separate programming?**

Further investigation might entail examining student profiles and at what age levels students are being recommended to sub separate programming.

**Issue: Increasing parent engagement in their student’s education and in special education meetings.**

It would be important to learn about Wareham culture, places that residents congregate, significant holidays or traditions that are observed, etc. What resources are/are not available to parents of students with special needs? What would they most like to see?

**Issue: Establishing additional supports and classes for 1) students with mild cognitive impairment who are socially adept; and 2) students with ASD who are included but need a home base.**

It may be possible to address the needs of both groups of students by examining and shifting existing resources.
Compilation of Recommendations

Articulation of Programs and Services:

—Review the flowchart for determining eligibility and state mandated disability categories with preschool staff. Assign Preschool Coordinator to meet with Early Intervention and families to discuss eligibility for preschool services.

—Involve staff (as a Professional Development offering or through stipend over the summer) in helping to create descriptions and entry and exit criteria for all strands including Inclusion, the Learning Centers, the ASD classes, and the Therapeutic Learning Centers.

—Once the descriptions and entry and exit criteria are completed, distribute copies to all principals and Team Chairs and hold meetings to ensure that all staff are familiar with these descriptions and criteria.

—Help outside agencies and organizations develop flow charts, exit and entrance criteria, and illuminate procedures for working with students in Wareham.

—Educate agencies and organizations as to programs and services in the Wareham Public Schools.

Alignment:

—Organize job-alike meetings for staff working in each strand to meet and to discuss best practices to be used at all levels, as well as differences between programs due to developmental expectations.

—Meet with Team Chairs to develop guidelines and exemplars for writing IEPs at each level and within each strand. Make sure that social/emotional counseling and other skill building services are represented.
—Ensure that Team Chairs communicate changes in placement to Director of Special Education who has to plan for staffing and budgeting. Keep track of over assignment to sub separate programs.

**New Programs and Services:**

—Consider identifying a space and a person to create a home base for high functioning students on the Autism spectrum at the high school.

**Inclusive Practices:**

—Train elective teachers to be able to include students from sub separate programs in their classes.

—Work with principals to problem solve and ensure that all students with or without special needs are included in all school-sponsored activities with their typical grade level peers.

**Curriculum:**

—Explore curricula based upon the principles of UDL (Universal Design for Learning) to support access for students with disabilities and others who can’t access the core curriculum. Consider adding alternative curricula such as Lively Letters for younger students, Start-to-Finish Reading for older students, and the Unique Learning System n2y to strengthen the rigor of the curriculum in sub separate programs. Investigate alternative Math curricula which approximate general education standards for learners who cannot access the core curriculum.

**Training:**

—Continue to train teachers and paraprofessionals in ABA to increase capacity and prepare for students as they move up in grade.
—Train preschool, ASD, and TLC staff in social thinking and social skill building curricula such as SuperFlex by Michelle Garcia Winner and in mindfulness and calming techniques.

—Continue to offer Professional Development to all special educators, including those in sub separate programs, together with general educators around:

  a. The Massachusetts curriculum frameworks;
  
  b. Universal Design for Learning;
  
  c. Co-teaching strategies and collaboration;

—Consider involving paraprofessionals in such Professional Development opportunities. If outside of their contracts, consider offering stipends for their involvement.

**Collaboration:**

—Choose certain initiatives to span all grade levels such as aligning Special Education instruction to General Education instruction, or PBIS and arrange Professional Development opportunities or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to meet periodically throughout the year to develop guidelines and present products to faculty.

—Consider establishing an inter-departmental work group to address improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

—Investigate different methods of scheduling used by other schools and districts which allow for co-planning and collaboration between special educators and general educators, special educators and paraprofessionals, and special educators and service providers.
—Team chairs at the elementary levels should initiate department meetings to build collegiality and a sense of shared responsibility.

—Host monthly meetings for mental health agencies and organizations together with school personnel to report on progress, allow for case consultation, clarify roles, and set goals for mental health growth in Wareham.

—Continue to offer Mental Health programs for parents/guardians such as the one held in April 2019.

**Parent Engagement:**

—Establish working groups to share best practices for parent engagement. At each job-alike meeting, dedicate time to the discussion about what is working and what is not with the parents/guardian of special education students.

—Enlist other parents/guardians to help with communicating general information to other parents. Find some ‘point person’ parents who can help communicate about special nights or about parent conferences.

—Explore additional ways beyond calls/emails to communicate information about events and parent education (ads in local businesses, text messages sent from a work line, robocalls).

—Hold parent meetings in places outside of school but convenient to target audiences such as community rooms in housing developments, restaurants, libraries, Knights of Columbus halls, etc. that might be more attractive and less threatening than schools.

—Immerse Special Education staff in community activities outside of school with parents/guardians and students to build
bridges. For example, if there is a town fair, find a way to be a presence. Consider starting opportunities for students with special needs such as a Challenger Baseball League.

—Consider creating a specific plan for engagement with DCF/Group Home Staff to open lines of communication. Consider creating specific education nights/events for guardians of transient communities held at a central location.
Appendices

Table 1: Wareham Selected Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>% of District (2019)</th>
<th>% of State (2016-2017)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Language not English</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students With Disabilities</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Needs</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Current Preschool Placements vs. State Targets for 2016-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>District % (2019)</th>
<th>State Target % (2016-2017)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # preschool IEPs: 81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># preschoolers in inclusion: 49</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># preschoolers in subseparate programs: 25</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Comparison of Teacher Salaries in Neighboring Towns 2016-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carver</td>
<td>$68,504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>$70,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleboro</td>
<td>$71,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wareham</td>
<td>$73,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>$84,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne</td>
<td>$84,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>$94,209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average salary: $81,356

Table 4: Graduation Rates 2016-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported</th>
<th>Cohort 2017 Graduates</th>
<th># of Students in 2017 Cohort</th>
<th>District Rate</th>
<th>State Rate</th>
<th>State Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEPs</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ed</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>91.8%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Drop-Out Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported</th>
<th>2017 Dropouts</th>
<th>Students Enrolled in Grades 9-12</th>
<th>District Rate</th>
<th>State Rate</th>
<th>State Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEPs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Suspensions Greater Than 10 Days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reported</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FY2014</td>
<td>FY2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Students</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Students Suspended for Greater than 10 days</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Rate</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Rate</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Target</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>