



LEADERSHIP | TRUST | ADVOCACY

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL REVIEW

**BAINBRIDGE ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT # 303
SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM**

February 2017

Washington Association of School Administrators
825 Fifth Avenue SE, Olympia, WA 98501

Bainbridge Island School District Management and Operational Review Special Education Program

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SUPPORT OTHERS AS YOU WOULD WISH TO BE SUPPORTED

SPECIAL THANKS

The Review Team extends its appreciation to the Bainbridge Island School District's special education administrators and building principals who gave their time freely to participate in this review.

Further, we want to acknowledge the generous and gracious accommodations provided for our visits with teachers, specialists, paraeducators, and community members. We appreciate their time and willingness to provide candid responses to our questions and inquiries throughout the entire review process.

We want to recognize Ms. Diane Leonetti's extraordinary leadership and care she put forth in organizing the logistics for our visit. Inviting other professionals into your district with the goal of examining self-identified areas of growth is not an easy task and represents the continuous improvement inherent in a quality leader.

Thank you.

I. INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE OPERATIONAL REVIEW PROCESS

The Washington Association of School Administrators (the Association) was contacted by the Bainbridge Island School District (BISD) with a request to evaluate the District's Special Education Program utilizing the Management Review format developed by the Association. Following discussion with the Executive Director of Special Services, the District determined to have an onsite review carried out on February 13–14, 2017.

There will be readers of this report for whom the approach used in this kind of study may be unfamiliar—the following initial section (The Four Phases of a Management Review) is included to introduce the design of a review. A Management Review is intended to provide an objective look at the current operational effectiveness of a district focus area(s) and to produce a report that the district can utilize in planning for the future. The Association has developed the approach over a 16-year period and carried out almost 135 studies in Washington and other states.

A review may be designed to address all major programs in a district or be focused upon a narrower program area. In this case, the BISD was interested in a narrower program review focused on the District's Special Education resources as related to current and anticipated decline in student enrollment.

II. THE FOUR PHASES OF A MANAGEMENT REVIEW

PREPARATION

The initial portion of the review is that of planning. A plan is developed in concert with the school district that includes the specific goals and objectives sought. A Review Team is cooperatively selected and orientation for the team members provided. A meeting is held with key school district personnel to provide accurate input for the team and an introduction to what the review will involve for district employees.

ANALYSIS

The analysis phase involves the on-site activity by the Review Team. Information is collected in the form of relevant school district policies, reports, documents, etc. In addition, interviews are conducted with administrators, staff members, board members, and other district employees as appropriate. Where possible, there are observations of actual activities within the school system.

EVALUATION

An evaluation of the documentation, interviews, observations, and other information takes place next. This involves the members of the team in collective discussion and independent writing. The review is captured in a report that provides a comprehensive description of district functions with specific findings and recommendations.

REPORTING

The final report is presented personally to the Executive Director of Special Services and the recommendations for improvement are explained. The report, in its entirety, provides a springboard for planning and positive direction for the school system. Each report is prepared in such a way that the positive strengths of the school district are acknowledged.

III. MANAGEMENT REVIEW TEAM

MR. DENNIS MATHEWS, MS—PROJECT TEAM LEADER

Dennis started as a school psychologist in Richland and Kennewick school districts in 1974. He finished his career in public education as associate superintendent for Educational Service District 112. He gained experience in administration with a focus in special education operations and functions. He has participated in several WASA Management Reviews.

MR. JEFF BROWN, Ed. S, DIRECTOR, SPECIAL PROGRAMS—SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPERT BURLINGTON-EDISON SCHOOL DISTRICT (B-EDS)

Jeff's career in education began in 1999 when he began teaching special education in various self-contained programs for the Northwest Educational Services District #189. Subsequently in 2005, Jeff began working for the Burlington-Edison School District as a school psychologist and has spent the past nine years as Director of Special Programs. Complementing his work at B-EDS, Jeff is active with local and state committees which focus on special education and early childhood education.

DR. LINDSAY M. MYATICH, BCBA, DIRECTOR SPECIAL EDUCATION—SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPERT MERCER ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

Lindsay has been a member of the Mercer Island School District administration team since 2013. She oversees the district's special education services from birth to 21 and is the compliance director for the Section 504 program. Lindsay is also a member of the Council for Exceptional Children and participated in the ESSA workgroup for students with disabilities in 2016. She earned her Ph.D. in special education from the University of Washington and is a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA).

MR. JEFF ROLE, MBA, DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT FOR BUSINESS AND OPERATIONS—BUSINESS AND FINANCE EXPERT YELM COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Jeff has been with Yelm for 17 years. Before that he was an auditor for a CPA firm in Kalispell, Montana for three years. Jeff is a Certified Public Accountant and a certified fraud examiner. His undergraduate degree is in accounting from Eastern Washington University and an MBA from Colorado State University. Jeff participated in two previous Management Reviews.

IV. BACKGROUND

The summary below is intended to provide indicators for points covered in the main report. People are urged to read the report in its entirety to gain a perspective on the work done in the Management Review process.

The BISD can be proud of their outstanding educational system. Statistics per an OSPI 1735T report showed BISD 's total student population (K–12) at 3,725.71, with a special education student population of 436 or 11.7 percent. The OSPI 2015–16 report card showed free and reduced at 7.2 percent and a graduation rate at 93 percent. In 2016, *US News* ranked BISD fifth in Washington State and #274 in its national scorecard.

The Bainbridge Island community has a lengthy history of supporting the district through action and fiscal support. The community has confirmed the District's leaders by passing both an operation and a school technology levy with impressive yes votes of 75 percent and 74 percent respectively. Furthermore, the community culture appears to be willing to seek continuous improvements and to encourage collections of visions for their future.

BISD does have its challenges. First, a 2014 program review and report requested by BISD and conducted by Puget Sound ESD, indicated the District's focus on high academic achievement seems to leave struggling students feeling disenfranchised. Nearly three years later, Bainbridge High School, with support of the Bainbridge Schools Foundation, has made efforts to shift the perception of high school students with disabilities from feeling less capable to feeling more capable in its supported classes for struggling students—both with and without disabilities—that increases students' achievement and confidence in English and math

A second challenge is that BISD's demographics are showing signs of change. The District has experienced a decline in enrollment during the current 2016–17 school year, and further declines in enrollment are anticipated. While enrollment projections are estimates and speculative in nature, districts have a duty to check demographic data regularly and plan accordingly. Drops in student enrollment mean less revenue districtwide, which may impact special education programing when supported by supplemental local funding. Like most, but not all, school districts across the state, BISD supplements the cost of their special education program with general education funds. Since school districts are so complex and variable, it is difficult for comparison between districts. For BISD's special education department, it is wise to work in a team to determine where reduction in resources are possible, not only the hard dollar costs, but benefits in student outcomes. Further, all team members come to the table with a mindset to balance needs with costs. Some, especially those with little school financial management experience might focus too much on the needs regardless of cost. And some, especially those with little school special education management experience, might focus too much on cost regardless of need. The team must question, always: How does this special education request make sense for all individuals and/or program and/or finances.

A cautionary note: An enrollment drop in total student population, in some instances, does not

always mean families with children involved in special education will move out of the district proportionate to their non-disabled peers. That could mean, rather than a corresponding enrollment drop with basic education, enrollment in the special education program could remain stable or even increase. A potential increase in the percentage of students eligible for special education would make dealing with special education resources and costs even more challenging.

The third challenge—some of which will be addressed in the main report—are common perceptions gathered during this current review process. Ultimately, the Review Team believed it is beneficial for the district to know what the community is thinking and willing to express. These perceptions include:

- General education placement (regardless of benefit) is preferential to instruction in a special education setting.
- Families should advocate for paraeducator support so that it will be there if their student needs additional help within the general education classroom.
- Placement in an Integrated Learning Classroom (ILC), especially in the early years, is based more upon the inability for a student to be successful in the inclusion model than a decision to provide access to a specific program/instruction.
- Paraeducators should have more access to training, collaboration with supervising teachers, and IDEA documents.
- The District wants to shift away from 1:1 paraeducator support, but many students still require that level of assistance.
- If student specific paraeducator support is written into the IEP, the service is less likely to be discontinued.
- With limited resources to provide intervention services, teams often advocate for special education services.
- The emphasis on need versus eligibility criteria creates a challenge for those tasked with special education evaluation.

AREA OF FOCUS

BISD's Executive Director of Special Services provided four questions for the Review Team to consider:

1. What services delivery models are used in the region?
2. How are paraeducators utilized in successful service delivery models?
3. How does BISD compare to like-sized districts relative to staff, costs, and student outcomes?
4. How can BISD maintain current rates of student success in a more resource efficient manner?

Given the complexities and sheer number of variables associated with each individual district, it is extremely difficult to compare programs within the parameters for WASA's onsite Review Team. However, two excellent reports are already in BISD possession. *Caseload Comparisons (2009)* and *Instructional Support Services Program Review (2014)*, were provided by PSESD. Although the data from these two reports are not current, when included with the Review Team's compilation of interviews, visits, and data analysis, they provide valuable insight. Thus,

the primary focus of this report will address:

- Paraeducator utilization.
- Services models within the District.
- Resources and costs.

V. LOGISTICS OF THE REVIEW

The plan for a review as outlined above, involved the examination and study of documentary information as well as the onsite interviews of many people involved with the school district. The list below represents a sample of the information requested for examination and reviewed for this project and list of people interviewed.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

- Collective Bargaining Agreements (for certificated and classified employees)
- Special education organizational chart
- Special education budget and financial spreadsheet
- Current disability totals by category and building
- Current and previous state and federal student counts
- Staffing report that includes:
 - The number of teachers and class size.
 - The number and type of therapeutic specialists (SLP, OT, PT) and caseload numbers.
 - Where classrooms and services are located by the building.
- *Instructional Support Services Program Review, 2014, PSESD*
- *Caseload Comparisons, 2009. PSESD*
- Individual Education Plans (IEP)

THOSE INTERVIEWED

- Special Services Team: Executive Director, Coordinator
- Resource Room Teachers: Ordway Elementary, Wilkes Elementary, Sakai Intermediate School
- Learning Strategies Teacher: Eagle Harbor High School,
- ILC Teachers: Woodward Middle School
- Differentiation Specialists: Ordway Elementary
- Principal/Assistant Principal: Bainbridge High School, Sakai Middle School, Ordway Elementary
- Business Director
- Board Member
- Parent
- Paraeducator
- Speech Language Pathologist
- School Psychologist

VI. THE REPORT

OVERVIEW

BISD enrollment falls just under 4,000 FTE. Currently, 11.7 percent of the District's students qualify for special education services. Maintaining fewer than 12 percent of the District's student population means that the District receives a state allocation for each student eligible for special education. However, as noted earlier, a decline in student enrollment may impact the percentage of students eligible for special education services and the associated funding.

PROCESS

The Management Review started with calls between BISD's Executive Director of Special Services, Ms. Diane Leonetti; WASA Assistant Executive Director, Mr. Andy Wolf; and Mr. Dennis Mathews, Team Leader, to establish needs and parameters for the review. Appropriate team members were identified and contacted.

Over the course of two days, the Review Team conducted 22 onsite interviews with instructional and administrative staff and held joint conversations with the members of BISD's Special Education Leadership Team. Interviews, conversations, and buildings visits provided team members opportunities to collect a substantial sampling of perspectives related to special education issues.

Review of interviews, various documents, and conversations between and among Review Team members and the Special Education Leadership Team, led to the observations and recommendations included in the report. The report represents the collective understanding of the team members and is intended to support the District in its ongoing improvement efforts. While some recommendations are included, it is understood and expected that the District will implement some while not others due to district needs and realities.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1. LEADERSHIP

Observation 1: The Special Services Executive Director and her leadership team want to calculate and implement necessary efficiency measures to ensure quality services are managed through the depth of issues they will be facing.

Recommendation:

Maintain the leadership team. Strengthen the team through staggered terms, so new faces can join and contribute.

Observation 2: We are encouraged to know that through the Special Services Executive Director's leadership, there is a desire to take this report to assist her leadership team in

the development of a multi-year plan that allows special education to gradually adjust to changes.

Recommendation:

Caution to special education leaders: Avoid what might be considered “quick fixes.” If reduction in force becomes a necessity, especially with a focus on reducing paraeducators, it is unlikely to be a long-term solution without pairing this with professional development that addresses the underlying issues related to special education being overwhelmed by the provision of paraeducators in classrooms. Without addressing root issues that cause schools to need additional staffing, paraeducator numbers will quickly continue to rise after an initial cut. See the literature available from Michael Giangreco, professor at the University of Vermont, who has published incredible work in the field of special education on how to effectively utilize paraeducators along with other articles listed in the appendices of this report, though the list is not exhaustive.

Note: Paired professional development refers to identifying the skills the student does not presently have and developing a plan to teach those skills, so the student can be more independent in accessing the school day without 1:1 support. Many times, the provision of a 1:1 paraeducator who serves as the student "guide"... and the student is successful but isn't learning how to increase his or her own independence. Essentially, the support/accommodation of having an adult, needs to be paired with intentional specially designed instruction in the areas of deficit that have required an adult support to be an appropriate option in the first place. When 1:1 paraeducators are assigned, it is critical for the paraeducator to receive training and understanding that they want to essentially "work themselves out of a job." Their goal is: Get that student to not need the 1:1 paraeducator assignment.

Observation 3: Develop a staff manual/handbook to increase the compliance of special education paperwork.

Recommendations:

- A staff manual or handbook should be developed to lead the department in both executing compliant special education paperwork and as a resource for frequently asked questions and problems of practice. The manual is likely to become a proactive tool to reduce certificated workload—reducing the need for staff to revise IEPs and other special education paperwork for compliance issues, and answering questions that would otherwise result in time wasted in email or phone correspondence. Finally, it would be helpful to develop a companion “executive” supplement for building principals to support their special education staff through the processes.

Costs associated with creating a handbook are minimal. A copy of the Mercer Island School District Handbook and permission to modify the content to meet Bainbridge Island School District needs is available.

- A departmentwide, optional training day for all certificated staff prior to the start of the school year. Consider compensating certificated staff as money well spent to begin a successful year.

Potential sections for the handbook may include:

- Orientation/summary of relevant district policies, procedures, and forms
- Description of special education programs and personnel
- Planning an IEP meeting
- Writing an IEP
- Conducting an IEP meeting
- After the meeting
- Prior written notice
- Progress reporting
- Amending an IEP
- Create program descriptions with clear procedures for entry and exit—a sample protocol was sent electronically to the Special Services Executive Director.

SECTION 2: SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL FOR RELATED SERVICE

Observation: BISD’s speech and language pathologists (SLP) currently provide therapy individually or to small groups of students within the speech therapy room and/or in the classroom setting (special education classroom, preschool room, or general education classroom). Service delivery is based on the student’s needs and may include a combination of therapy settings. District SLPs may follow the 3:1 model [endorsed by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)], used by many school districts in our region. The concept of 3:1 is that direct services (DS) are provided for three (3) consecutive weeks of the month. This is followed by a fourth week of related services (RS) such as student assessment for evaluations, individual student progress monitoring, student observations, parent communication, consultation, and classroom teaming. Therapists use the 3:1 model as needed to fit the caseload of the specific school site.

Recommendation:

A transition to a related service delivery model that allows for services to be flexible and delivered on a continuum of least to most restrictive is recommended. The SLP or other therapeutic specialist (e.g., OT/PT) collaborates with the special education teacher to write team goals and often delivers services in the resource or high-need classroom. The therapist can provide training to the classroom teacher and other service providers as part of the minutes of service and can support groups of students in the educational setting where they spend most of the day. Because of this, the SLP or other related service provider is often better able to assess *adverse educational* impact related to the communication disorder and to recommend appropriate goals, accommodations, and/or modifications.

The costs to change to a related service model would be minimal. Because the department already meets quarterly, the director or designee could facilitate the development and implementation of program changes within a year. Long term, the

benefits would likely include a more reasonable workload for SLP/OT/PT staff, fewer issues related to scheduling for all stakeholders, and increased access to weekly services for students.

One of the electronic documents provided to the Executive Director of Special Services, are references on the continuum of services that a related service staff member can provide per the Washington Administrative Codes (WACs), with examples of common activities.

Observation: An evaluation group considers referrals to special education, and when necessary, an evaluation will begin. Comparable to some other districts, the school psychologist “chairs” the evaluation group process through to its conclusion. And, like other districts, the school psychologist completes, as needed, cognitive assessments, academic testing, observations, and social/emotional/adaptive sections. However, in the BISD, the school psychologists’ initial and reassessments workloads seem high and are underutilized for other direct and indirect services.

Recommendations:

- Focus the psychologists where their skills are needed—that may not be the initial evaluation and/or re-evaluation.
- Utilize certified teachers’ assessment and observation skills and talents.
- Determine what information within the review of records can be properly used to document continued eligibility and reduce redundancy.

SECTION 3: ESTABLISH PROCEDURES FOR ASSIGNING AND FADING 1:1 PARAEDUCATORS

Observation: The Executive Director may initiate some costs controls with 1:1 paraeducators’ assignments. The role of the paraeducator in education, particularly special education, can be difficult for teams to identify. The provision of a 1:1 paraeducator, particularly when a student or team is in crisis, is often considered the quickest short-term solution. However, the assignment of a 1:1 without paired, intentional student instruction to improve behavioral skills, and consideration of other environmental factors contributing to the challenging behavior, will ultimately result in the continued need for this staff to maintain stability.

Recommendations:

Considering the following steps:

- Identify all students in the District with an individually assigned paraeducator (include paraeducators committed in the IEP and those assigned, but not committed).
- *For existing students with a 1:1 paraeducator:* Review the IEPs and patterns of service delivery for those students, observe students, and interview case managers and other service delivery providers. The IEP should describe how the student is learning to improve independence, behavior, or other areas that would allow them to access a less restrictive environment—that is, an environment without a 1:1 paraeducator next to them. If the IEP does not clearly

describe this, begin to meet with teams to develop fade plans and discuss how they will be incorporated into the IEP. The autism coordinator and school psychologists are likely to be staff members with the expertise to support this work. Focus groups or professional learning communities (PLCs) may be an additional option to get stakeholder input regarding how teams begin to develop fade plans and to concurrently teach skills that promote student independence.

- *For future requests for 1:1 paraeducators:* Consider controlling costs by allocating temporary, rather than permanent, staff when crises present. This would free up the experienced, permanent staff to work with the student in crisis while the temporary staff covers the other students. As soon as the temporary staff is allocated, a team would be assembled to identify the behaviors or skills the student is lacking and how specially designed instruction and/or other supports and accommodations will be developed to address those deficits. Adult support, in the form of a 1:1 paraeducator *may* be part of this plan, but should not be the totality of the plan. A structured team agenda could be developed where the team determines:
 - Is the IEP being implemented as written? *
 - Is the IEP appropriate now, or does it need to be revised?
 - What other school resources can be utilized to provide the temporary supports that are needed?
 - What are the missing skills or behaviors that need to be addressed?
 - What is the role of each team member, including the temporary staff member, in providing the necessary instruction or supports?
 - What is the plan for fading adult support? How will the student be supported in increasing independence?

** This can often be where the discussion “stops.” When a student is experiencing a challenging behavior, it can often be the result of well-intentioned adults not implementing the plan as written. Reviewing the plan and ensuring fidelity of implementation is the first step before adding additional resources or making any programmatic changes.*

SECTION 4: PARAEDUCATOR ASSIGNMENTS

Observation: Often paraeducators are split among multiple staff. This poses a challenge to fidelity implementation and a need for multiple paraeducators to communicate to special and general education teachers. Plans that do not have strong fidelity of implementation are less likely to be able to successfully fade 1:1 services.

Recommendations:

- Keep 1:1 assignments limited to a split between no more than two paraeducators. In the alternative, consider an outside agency paraeducator to staff these positions. For example, Rehab without Walls provides 7-hour paraeducators who work continuously through lunch and breaks as part of the contract agreement for students who need a highly-trained paraeducator for safety and/or behavior. Note: Contracted costs for behaviorally trained paraeducators are eligible expenses for a Safety Net application.

- When contacting with outside agencies and expenses become difficult to justify, request the agency—along with or instead of direct services—offer training for staff and consultation as needed.

SECTION 5: INCREASE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES UTILIZING EXISTING OR LOW COST RESOURCES

Building Administrator Training

Observation: Building administrators attend more IEP and related team meetings for students than the director and coordinator. As previously mentioned, it could be helpful to develop a supplement to the special education handbook specifically for building administrators.

Recommendations:

- Include the District Procedure 2161: Special Education and Related Services for Eligible Students when developing a principal training manual. The procedure identifies several responsibilities that the building administrator has, as well as responsibilities of central office administrators and certificated staff. This manual should address access to IEPs, as well as access to documentation regarding students' accommodations and modifications (e.g., bus drivers, coaches, etc.). (Note: See responsibilities crosswalk Mercer Island School District created as a reference you can use to develop a training tool.)
- Develop a common, district process for defining when students need additional paraeducator support. Include in the process, conversations with families about the impact of having a paraeducator assigned to their student.
- Require FBA and BIP when necessary to guide the role of the paraeducator.
- Create more flexibility within the structure of IEPs that may allow special education to do more with the same or fewer paraeducators by identifying services that paraeducators can provide within the general education setting such as supplemental aides and services.
- Identify specific periods/times when collaboration between special education teachers and paraeducators can occur.

Other Staff Training and Professional Development

Observation: One of the recurring themes during interviews was a common desire from certificated and classified staff for increased opportunities for training and professional development. Some staff training can be provided either without incurring additional costs for the department, or with minimal costs.

Recommendations:

Based on data collected during the interviews, the following options could be considered:

- Utilize the autism coordinator to provide professional development to certificated and classified staff. The elementary special education teachers

interviewed indicated they do not have regular, predictable access to the autism coordinator. For special education programs with a high prevalence of students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, schedule routine visits to the programs to offer in-situation training and feedback to the teachers and paraeducator regarding the implementation of effective instructional strategies for this population. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM) provide incredible resources that can be effectively implemented in schools. See:

<http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/evidence-based-practices>.

- Utilize school psychologist for training, data collection, and direct services.
- Fund lead teacher positions. A similar stipend as provided to the heads of departments could be provided to a group of certificated special education staff who could serve as *Compliance Leads*. Executive Director Leonetti shared results of noncompliance through the most recent WISM monitoring by OSPI. Each lead could participate in the 30-hour compliance training through OSPI (compensated through this stipend) and use the existing OSPI compliance checklist to conduct peer reviews of the IEPs for a team of case managers. (Note: See Mercer Island School District compliance cover sheets and the state Safety Net review form for reference A sample template was sent electronically to the Special Services Executive Director.)
- Provide professional development for certificated educational staff associates (ESAs), specifically SLP, OT, PT and School Psychologists, during periodic meetings. The director or coordinator could participate in these trainings.
- LRP publishes monthly newsletters for different special education audiences. *The Special Educator*, *Today's School Psychologist*, and *The Early Childhood Report* provide relevant professional development to special education staff. For example, in the January 2017 edition of *The Special Educator*, topics included addressing problem behavior on the school bus, appropriate transition plans, and contentious IEP meetings. The resource is inexpensive (approximately \$300 for an annual subscription). See http://www.shoplrp.com/Education_s/1819.htm.
- Create free or low cost training opportunities for paraeducators. Since a professional development fund has been earmarked for classified staff training, send a survey to special education paraeducators, teachers, and general education teachers that seek to understand what types of training paraeducators want and/or need. This information could then be used to develop a calendar of training opportunities for the 2017–18 school years that paraeducators could attend.
- Based on the interviews with principals, teachers, and paraeducators, a “Special Education 101” training for all paraeducators specific to the unique strengths and challenges of the position and to help some of them understand what “SDI, accommodations or modifications” mean may be well received.
- Create ways for special education teachers and the paraeducators to collaborate and communicate. A building administrator indicated that it can be difficult to find the money and time to do so. Consider collaborating with building administrators to use some of the District’s general training fund for all

paraeducators to attend at least one monthly meeting facilitated by the lead teacher in the special education program where they are assigned, or to attend a district-sponsored training as described in the bullet point above.

- Create ways for paraeducators to attend relevant faculty meetings or other opportunities, because it can be difficult to get approval to attend and be compensated by the time they hear about meetings.
- Explore the efficacy of “4:1 Model.” In this model, at the elementary level, students participate in special education through the resource room for academic specially designed instruction four days per week, and only access special education resource room for social skills instruction on the fifth day. The fifth day, the special education teacher reviews student data and provides paraeducator training. To be able to discuss the effectiveness of this model special education could collect additional data driven measures (e.g., number of students that exited special education, state and district assessments, curriculum based assessments, and paraeducator training). Concurrently, select a comparable elementary program, apply the model’s data collection measures, then compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative results.
- Make sure paraeducators understand what “specially designed instruction (SDI), accommodations or modifications” mean and how these fit into their roles.

SECTION 6: RESOURCE ROOM AND INTEGRATED LEARNING CLASSROOM (ILC) SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

Observation: BISD’s special education program practices an encouraging “Integration” approach. While the application of an integrated service delivery model varies across the District, all staff and parents interviewed clearly articulated that BISD wants all students with disabilities to be integrated in the general education classrooms to the maximum extent possible.

Bainbridge High School (BHS)’s ILC model is an example of an approach to redesign and implement, with the support of staff, parents, and community, ways to include students in general education, and to ensure there is an identified course of study that supports secondary outcomes.

By defining the ILC program, implementing a specific curriculum (Styer-Fitzgerald Program) that supports IEP goals and provides thoughtful planning of the courses for integration, ILC at BHS appears to be an example of what was envisioned for an ILC.

In identifying courses that support students’ post-secondary outcomes, and scheduling these students early and in groups to allow for appropriate supports when needed, students in the ILC are receiving both social and educational benefit from periods of inclusion in the general education setting. Also, with the enhanced focus on the Styer-Fitzgerald Program, the purpose and benefit of the differentiated instruction in the special education setting is better understood, and placement in a special education setting appears appreciated by the teachers, parents, and families.

Students at BHS who require special education services, but not the support of an ILC program, are more often in general education classrooms, with direct special education services occurring solely in Learning Strategies classrooms staffed by 2.5 special education teachers. While students are often supported in the general education classes by shared special education funded paraeducators, the apparent success of this model speaks to the general education programs ability/willingness to support a diverse population of learners.

BHS is clearly working to refine the core curriculum and create accessibility to all students. In time, this should decrease the need to provide intervention via specially designed instruction (special education); and it may result in a lower special education percentage at that site. BHS has also articulated a range of services available to students, dependent on their individualized need.

Based upon interviews, it appears placement and programs in the ILCs become less consistent moving down grade levels. Within the 5–6 and 7–8 grade buildings, a greater level of consistency exists given a single school serves each of the two grade bands. More discrepancy is present in the three P/K through Grade 4 sites.

For example, those interviewed at Ordway and Wilkes ILC programs, were unable to articulate a common program design or the process for determining placement in the ILC. The common theme for placement, centered on students not disrupting the general education classroom, and if their special education needs were not being met with the inclusion model at the individual site.

Adding to the complexity of determining placement in an ILC, based partially on the success of an inclusion model, is there inconsistency in the implementation of inclusion of all students with special education needs between the three P/K–4 sites? For example, within the Resource Room model at Wilke, all specially designed instruction is provided within the special education site; and paraeducators are utilized within that setting to facilitate groups under the supervision of the special education teacher. At Ordway, within the Resource Room model, the special education services are primarily provided by the special education teacher with some support from the paraeducator staff. However, a significant amount of paraeducator time is being utilized to support IDEA eligible students in accessing the general education classroom in the provision of providing accommodations, modifications, and general support. Additionally, most direct special education services are provided four days per week at Wilkes, opposed to the five days per week at Ordway, to ensure collaboration and planning between the special education teacher, paraeducators, and general education teachers.

Also, when asked to define what the inclusion model looks like at their sites, no one interviewed could identify specific instructional models adopted by the District to support special education instruction within the general education setting. Rather, inclusion appears to indicate a preference for minimizing the time spent out of the general education classroom receiving specially designed instruction. In the absence of a formal model, an increase in paraeducator staff has been required to help students maintain functioning within the general education setting.

It was also interesting that teachers and parent(s) noted that students often feel anxious and need a great deal of support to feel safe and able to succeed in the general education classrooms. One individual shared a phrase expressed around the District, “The illusion of inclusion.” This referenced the focus and push for inclusion in the general education setting at the risk of not meeting all students’ needs. The culture of inclusion appears to be coming from multiple parties (i.e., parents who want their student in the general education classroom in the absence of a clearly identified alternative, and staff who feel the district model is inclusion).

Recommendations:

Consider the following:

- Learning from the BHS experience and more clearly articulating the ILC program design. In crafting a program to support the needs of a specific student population, a consistent curriculum can be adopted/created to meet the needs of the students.
- Working with the general education teachers to identify periods of instruction that are most appropriate and accessible to student in the ILC programs for integration. Ensure time is set aside for regular planning between the special and general education teachers to consider modification and accommodations to core content.
- Implementing an inclusion model with a greater level of fidelity, consider partnering willing teachers, and begin learning about Co-Teaching models. Marilyn Friend is a well-known author and speaker who has many resources that could be helpful in setting common expectations, structures, and supports to implement inclusion of special education within the general education setting. As BISD explores further into inclusion and co-teacher, recognize that inclusion is difficult to do well and requires much of a district. Dr. Friend writes of this in her article, [“Co-Teaching: A Simple Solution That Isn't Simple After All.”](#)
- Given BISD’s size, continuing to operate “district-level” programs for placement purposes makes sense.

SECTION 7: BUDGETING AND FINANCE

Observation: Over the past 5-year period (2012/13 to 2016/17), special education staff is growing at a rate substantially faster than the special education student enrollment. Special education enrollment through this 5-year period increased by 1.47 percent; during the same time, certificated staff increased by 24.78 percent and classified staff increased by 42.88 percent. Certificated staff increase during this time-period was due, in part, to the implementation of a behaviorally-based ILC program at the elementary, intermediate, and middle school levels. Increase in classified staff was commensurate with this increase in programming based on the certificated collective bargaining agreement. The bottom line: special education’s deficit is 67.87 percent. Most school districts rely on support from district funds to meet special education’s program needs.

Note: The data above was taken directly from the BISD's OSPI reports, the student enrollment from the 1735T and the special education staffing from the F-195. However, for staffing, only program 21 was used to keep the focus on state funding. The calculation was a simple change in percent over the 5-year period specified. The data indicated that staff is being increased faster than student enrollment is increasing. To keep costs closer to the revenue base, the special education department should see the percentages growing at a similar rate. The age 3–21 student enrollment increased 6.8 FTE over the 5-year span and certificated and classified staffing increased 18.65 FTE. That is approximately 2.7 staff members per student added over five years.

However, it is incumbent upon the District and its special education program to determine when this deficit trend—increases in staffing, coupled with possibilities of declining enrollment—of special education's reliance on basic education funds is disproportionate. Although the collective bargaining agreement language lays out special education staff's caseloads, coverage, and paraeducator support, enrollment numbers between 2012 and 2017 were not commensurate with an increase in staffing levels. A net student enrollment increase (6.8 FTE students) expanded certified and classified staff, 6.06 and 12.59, respectively.

Further, when an increase is due to adding staff, behavioral and autism services for example, were there comparable reduction somewhere else? Not containing staffing increases, especially when student enrollment is not growing, will result in increased costs. Sometimes there is no choice but to add staff and no way to reduce somewhere else. All districts face this dilemma, and most districts support special education by way of local funds.

Recommendations:

First things first business, human resources, and special education team up to:

- Perform a full reconciliation of certificated and classified staffing, compare to the requirements in the collective bargaining agreement, and adjust or reduce staffing as necessary.
 - Reconcile the staff list—line up all certified and classified staff over the past years.
 - Then recreate all staff adds: What was added and why; any adds that could have been avoided; and, were there times staff should have been reduced?
- Investigate why there was a significant increase in staffing when enrollment has been relatively flat.
- Reduce staff through attrition or follow the language stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement for staff reduction.
- Ensure that BISD is moving staff between programs to follow the enrollment.
- Adds without accompanying reduction is a team decision.

When the above reductions are not enough, business, human resources and special education team up to:

- Consider meeting with the union leaders and the Special Education Leadership Team to discuss a letter of agreement for language amendments. Those discussions could include:
 - Fix 75 percent caseload language to adjust for declining student enrollment.
 - Increase to related service (PT, OT and SLP) caseloads with flexibility to adjust based on severity of students served.
 - Reduce school psychologist FTE through attrition and assign other staff to conduct reassessments.
 - Does existing paraeducator staff exceeds CBA requirements?

Observation: Special education needs to evaluate office-staffing levels and consider combining duties and positions.

Recommendation:

- Compare office support levels to other districts of similar size to determine if staffing levels are adequate based upon students served and duties.

VII. APPENDICES

Documents in the Appendices section were sent electronically to Executive Director of Special Services Diane Leonetti.

1. Procedures and Protocol for Students Receiving SPED Services in Behavior to a More Restrictive Placement
2. Special Education: Certificated Instructional Support Specialists Department Manual
 - Appendix A: Complete Definition of Related Service
 - Appendix B: Examples of Accommodations and Modifications
 - Appendix C: Documentation of Service Logs
 - Appendix D: Progress Report Form
 - Appendix E: Individual Activity Matrix
 - Appendix F: Concurrent Services
 - Appendix G: Assessment Revision Process in IEP Online
 - Appendix H: Levels of Service for Therapists
 - Appendix I: Mercer Island School District Service Delivery Options
 - Appendix J: Timeline for WAC 392-172a
 - Appendix K: OT/PT IEP Template
3. Special Education IEP Compliance Checklist
4. Amendment IEP Compliance Checklist
5. Assessment Revision Compliance Checklist
6. Discontinue/Exit Compliance Checklist
7. ESY IEP Compliance Checklist
8. School-Based Screening to Determine Overreliance on Paraprofessionals
9. Precarious or Purposeful? Proactively Building Inclusive Special Education Service Delivery on Solid Ground
10. The Golden Rule of Providing Support in Inclusive Classrooms: Support Others as You Would Wish to Be Supported