

# Cambridge Public Schools – Special Education Program Review

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## Background & Purposes

The City of Cambridge issued a request for proposals for an independent agency to conduct a review of the special education programs and services in the Cambridge Public Schools (CPS). Upon completion of the bid process, Learning Innovations at WestEd was selected as the agency to complete the program review. WestEd is an independent, not-for-profit educational research agency, headquartered in San Francisco with offices in Woburn, MA and Williston, VT. Information about WestEd may be found on the agency's Web site at [WestEd.org](http://WestEd.org).

The review was intended to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, and costs of special education programs and services to determine (1) if the district is meeting the needs of students with disabilities, including their entitlement to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and (2) if district resources are being used appropriately and effectively.

Areas of concern that were identified by the district also included: (1) the transition of elementary level students from substantially separate programs to less restrictive settings; (2) declining MCAS scores for special education students (in both English Language Arts and Math); and (3) high numbers of students enrolled in out-of-district placements.

The purpose of the Special Education Program Review was to provide:

- Recommendations for strengthening CPS special education programs (substantially separate and inclusion)
- Recommendations for improving communication with the public in order to build confidence in CPS programming, staffing, and organization around special education
- Recommendations for cost containment measures that do not compromise the quality of services provided
- Recommendations for the development of additional programs to serve students who currently receive services outside of the district
- Clear definitions of educational terminology

WestEd staff Kristin Reedy, Vicki Hornus, and Nancy Hurley led the evaluation process and were supported by a team of WestEd evaluators and special education experts, including Debra Benitez, Stephen Ruffini, George Dowaliby, Lucy Ely Pagán, and others. Biographies and qualifications of WestEd team members are included in Appendix A.

WestEd’s multi-disciplinary team has taken a collaborative approach to this review, engaging stakeholders in a dynamic inquiry process focused on soliciting the perspectives of multiple and diverse constituency groups in reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of local programs and services. Given the varied Cambridge audiences that have a stake in outcomes for students with disabilities, the intent of the evaluation design was to collect information from a range of perspectives using multiple sources of data so that a full and complete picture of the current status of CPS programs and services could be captured within a balanced and neutral approach. The project was designed to offer multiple “lenses” through which to view the district’s programs and services. Stakeholder involvement was a critical component of the review and helped to develop an attitude of data-based inquiry and reflection with an eye to continuous improvement that will ultimately result in improved outcomes for the district’s children and youth with disabilities.

WestEd commends the Cambridge Public Schools for undertaking this external review of special education in the district, which clearly demonstrates the district’s commitment to improving services, systems, and supports for students with disabilities and their families. We especially appreciate the cooperation and support of Dr. Aida Ramos, Executive Director of the Office of Special Education (OSE), during the review process. We also thank Central Office administrators, building-based administrators and staff, and parents for their participation in the various components of the review.

## Evaluation Areas

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The following seven system components were addressed in the review:

- Child Find and Special Education Identification
- Continuum of Services
- Communication with and Perceptions of Stakeholders
- Compliance
- Accountability and Student Outcomes
- Leadership, Staffing, and Management
- Finance, Budget, and Cost Effectiveness





# Methodology

The methodology used for the Cambridge Public Schools Special Education Program Review was a mixed methods design that enabled WestEd to gain a variety of perspectives from multiple sources of data, including interviews, focus groups, an online CPS Educator Survey, a parent survey and focus groups, classroom observations, student record reviews, data analysis, and document review. Table 1 lists the various evaluation activities that were used in the review including dates, participants, and the WestEd team members.

**Table 1 Evaluation Activities**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Team Members</b>
Interviews	May and October 2010	CPS Central Office Administrators Teachers in Charge 12 individual interviews conducted	Reedy, Hurley, Hornus
CPS Staff Focus Groups	May 2010	19 focus groups conducted involving a total of 128 individuals General and special education teachers Principals and Assistant Principals Related services personnel (Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and Speech/Language Pathologists) Superintendent's Cabinet A schedule of Focus Groups conducted is included in Appendix B	Reedy, Hurley, Hornus
CPS Educator Survey	October and November 2010	Online survey of all CPS educator/instructional staff, including administrators, general and special education teachers, related services providers and paraeducators; 312 responses from a potential 833 (response rate of 37%)	Reedy, Hornus, Benitez, Hurley, Ruffini
Parent Survey	October 2010	Parent surveys mailed to all parents; 233 responses from a potential 1,200 (response rate of 19%)	Reedy, Hornus, Hurley
Parent Focus Groups	September 2010	Parents of students receiving special education services, five focus groups conducted, total of 24 participants	Hurley, Pagan
Classroom Observations	October and November 2010	56 separate observations conducted across all schools in settings that included the regular classroom, sub-separate special classes, co-teaching, pull out direct services, etc.	Reedy, Hornus, Benitez, Ruffini
Student Record Review	November 2010	A purposeful sample of 79 student records selected from 109 records for which parents provided consent, request for consent was made to all parents of students on IEPs	Reedy, Hornus, Dowaliby
Document Review	Fall 2010	See list of documents reviewed, Appendix C	Reedy
Data Analysis	Fall 2010	Review and analysis of CPS district-provided and MADESE Web site data in areas, including expenditures, special education indicators for compliance and performance, and student achievement	Phillips, Reedy

## Interviews

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Individual interviews were conducted at the outset of the review with key CPS Central Office administrators, including the Executive Director of the Office of Special Education, the Assistant Director, the Special Education Program Manager, Teachers in Charge, and other administrators responsible for Title I and Affirmative Action, the Chief Financial Officer, and the Superintendent of Schools, as well as other Cabinet members. A standard interview protocol was developed and used across all the interviews. Questions were tailored to the individual, depending upon the unique features of their position. Sample interview protocols are included in Appendix D. Interview protocols were developed collaboratively with the CPS Central Office administrators.

## CPS Staff Focus Groups

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A total of 20 “jobs alike” focus groups were scheduled, and 19 were successfully conducted. The paraeducator focus group was canceled due to lack of response. A schedule of focus groups is included in Appendix B. Focus groups included general and special education teachers, principals and assistant principals, related services personnel, and others. Participation was voluntary and participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. A total of 128 individuals participated across all focus groups, representing a wide range of staff perspectives on the current status of special education programs and services in the district. A sample focus group protocol is included in Appendix D.

Most focus groups were conducted by one WestEd evaluation team member. Notes across all of the focus groups were shared with the other WestEd team members so that all were able to review information from all of the focus groups. Initial analysis of the Spring 2010 focus groups and individual interviews was conducted using accepted qualitative analysis procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Responses were categorized by themes as they emerged from evaluators’ detailed notes. Team members conferred and confirmed both the categories that emerged as well as the resulting themes. A report of the preliminary themes from the interviews and focus groups is included in Appendix E.

## Online Educator Survey

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Development of the online educator/staff survey was completed during the Summer 2010, informed by the themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups conducted in the Spring 2010. WestEd chose the online survey in order to expand the reach to professionals, and because current Web survey research indicates survey respondents prefer (and could be more likely to reply to) online surveys because they appear more anonymous, are easy to access, and quick to complete (Dillman, 2000; Couper, Blair, & Triplett, 1999). The focus group data helped WestEd to understand the issues and concerns that were of importance to CPS administrators and teaching staff and facilitated the content and construction of the survey questions. The timing of the development of the survey after the Spring focus groups was done purposefully to strengthen the validity of the survey questions and to reflect the particular context of the Cambridge Public Schools (Fowler, 1984). Survey items were collaboratively developed by WestEd evaluators with input from CPS Central Office staff. A link to the online survey was emailed by the CPS Central Office to all educators currently employed by the school district, for approximately 833 potential respondents. The response rate was 37%. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Only WestEd evaluators had access to the online survey results.

In addition to short answer demographic information, the educator survey included 39 four-point Likert-scale items intended to capture the degree to which respondents perceived that a particular practice or procedure was being implemented, reflecting their experience with special education programs and services in the district. As such, the scale represents a “continuum of implementation.” The use of a Likert-scale brought a quantitative component to the review in that respondents were asked to select one of four possible responses to each of a total of 39 affirmative statements. Rating choices were as follows: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Seldom/Rarely, 3 = Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4 = To a great extent. A “Don’t Know” option was also provided. A sample survey is included in Appendix F.

The educator survey was designed to address the following seven areas:

- Special education procedures and practices related to access to the general education curriculum, staff expectations, accommodations, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) services
- Continuum of services in the district
- General education capacity to support all students
- Staff roles and responsibilities
- Communication and collaboration
- Professional development

- Parent and community involvement

In addition to demographic information and the Likert-scaled items, the survey also contained four open-ended questions: (1) What do you think is most needed to close the achievement gap for students with disabilities; (2) Are there any gaps in the continuum of services within the Cambridge Public Schools; (3) What in your experience has been the biggest barrier to involving parents in their children's education; and (4) What is the most successful strategy you have used to engage and involve parents? Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using standard qualitative analysis procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

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## Parent Focus Groups

Five focus groups were conducted on September 27 and 28, 2010, for parents of children on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Notification and an invitation to participate in the focus groups were mailed in hard copy by the Cambridge Central Office from the Executive Director, Office of Special Education, in the "welcome back" newsletter, September 1, 2010. Further communication was sent encouraging principals to remind parents to attend the focus groups. The invitation was also posted on the CPS Web site and the Web site for the Cambridge Parent Advisory Council on Special Education (C-PAC).

Focus group locations, accommodations, and logistics were handled by OSE and included in the notice to parents. Groups were offered at various times, during the school day, after school, and in the evening to accommodate parent schedules. Language interpreters and child care were provided. Two WestEd staff members conducted each group, one to facilitate and the other to take notes. A total of 24 parents participated across the five focus groups. Notes from the focus groups were compiled and shared by the WestEd facilitators with the WestEd Project Director, summarized and coded using standard qualitative analysis procedures. The team reviewed and agreed upon the themes that emerged from the parent focus group comments. Information from the focus groups helped to inform the development of the parent survey. The focus group protocol is included in Appendix D.

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## Parent Survey

A four-page parent survey was mailed in hard copy to all parents of students receiving special education services in the CPS database using mailing labels provided by the district. A postage-

paid, pre-addressed return envelope was included. Responses were returned by mail directly to the WestEd Vermont office. A cover letter (Appendix F) was included with the survey. Respondents were assured of confidentiality of their responses. There were 233 surveys returned for an overall response rate of approximately 19%.

The development of the parent survey was informed by the parent focus groups held by WestEd as described above. The focus groups helped WestEd to understand the issues and concerns that were of importance to Cambridge parents and facilitated the content and construction of the survey questions. Involvement of the focus groups was intended to strengthen the validity of the survey questions (Fowler, 1984).

The parent survey was organized to address the following areas: (1) Special Education Progress and Placement; (2) Communication with District and School Teachers and Administrators; and (3) School Community. There were a total of 23 Likert-scaled items. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a positive statement. The use of a Likert-scale brought a quantitative component to the review in that respondents were asked to select one of four possible responses. Rating choices were as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree. There was also a “Don’t Know” option provided for respondents. A sample survey is included in Appendix F.

In addition to demographic information and the Likert-scaled items, the survey also contained one open-ended question: “What suggestions do you have for strengthening/improving special education programs and services in the Cambridge Public Schools?” Responses to the open-ended question were analyzed using standard qualitative analysis procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## **Classroom Observations**

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Classroom observations were conducted across 100% of schools in the district by four members of the WestEd evaluation team using a standard protocol (Appendix G). The schedule was developed to provide a range of settings across schools and grade levels, including the regular classroom, co-teaching classrooms, substantially separate classes, and pull-out individual or small group direct services. Observers took narrative notes of what they observed during each observation and subsequently scored the observation using the protocol of Likert-scaled items organized into two categories: Direct Instruction (11 items) and Overall Classroom Climate and Support (15 items). Items were rated using a four-point scale according to the following continuum of the extent to which a particular practice was observed: 0 = No Evidence, 1 = Little Evidence, 2 = Moderate

Evidence, and 3 = Extensive Evidence. In addition, there was a “Not Applicable” response option. Each observation was between 30–45 minutes in length.

## Individual Student Records

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Cambridge Office of Special Education policy requires that no student records shall be made available to WestEd evaluators absent written parental consent. For this reason, the CPS Central Office mailed a consent form to all parents of students currently receiving special education services requesting their consent to have their child’s record reviewed. The estimated number of potential respondents was 1,131 (as of October 2010) based upon the information provided to WestEd by the district. Consent was provided by 109 parents. Of the 109 records for which parents provided consent, 79 records were reviewed by a three-person WestEd evaluation team, representing 72% of records for whom consent was granted, and approximately 7% of the total population of students with disabilities served by CPS. Records were purposefully selected (purposive selection) to provide a distribution across all schools and included out-of-district placements, grade levels from preschool (7 records), elementary (29 records), middle school (21 records), and high school (22 records) and a wide range of disability categories. Table 2 shows the number of records reviewed in each disability category and the percent of total records reviewed compared to the percent of students with disabilities in that category served in Cambridge.

The purpose of the record reviews was not to determine compliance with the federal and state regulations but rather to assess the degree to which eligibility decisions are being made appropriately, and the degree to which IEPs are aligned with the evaluation results, IEP Team-determined student needs, and the general education curriculum. As a result, only the student’s current IEP and most recent comprehensive evaluation information were reviewed. A special education compliance review was completed in 2009 by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE). This report may be reviewed at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2009/0049.pdf>.

Records were reviewed at the CPS Office of Special Education and were not removed from the office. No copies of records were made. A copy of the letter requesting parent consent and the record review protocol are included in Appendix H.

**Table 2**      **Number and Percent of Records Reviewed by Disability Category**

<b>Primary Disability Category</b>	<b>Number Records Reviewed</b>	<b>Percent Records Reviewed</b>	<b>% Total Population of Students with Disabilities in Cambridge (2009 Child Count)</b>
Developmental Delay	11	14%	16%
Emotional	5	6%	7%
Specific Learning	27	34%	44%
Autism	10	13%	8%
Communication	3	4%	9%
Intellectual	3	4%	4%
Multiple Disabilities	5	6%	>1%
Health	10	13%	8%
Sensory: Hearing	1	0.1%	>1%
Neurological	2	2.5%	2%
Physical	2	2.5	2%
Total	79	99.1%	

## **District Data Analysis**

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To provide the necessary background to inform the CPS Special Education Program Review, an analysis of eight CPS information areas was completed. The eight information areas examined were: (1) special education enrollment; (2) disability distribution; (3) least restrictive environment (LRE); (4) disproportionality; (5) Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) proficiency; (6) graduation and dropout rates; (7) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) compliance; and (8) per pupil spending. To provide meaningful context for the analysis, CPS data in these informational areas was compared, whenever possible, to 10 other Massachusetts districts deemed to be comparable to CPS by MADESE based on student enrollment and demographics. Publicly available information from the MADESE “District Analysis and Review



Tool” (DART), the MADESE School and District Profiles, as well as additional student-level data provided by CPS were utilized to complete the analysis for each information area.

## **Document Review**

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A variety of documents were collected from the CPS Central Office or downloaded from the CPS Web site. Documents included data on special education programs and services, presentations on the status of special education programs and services, CPS policies and procedures, budget documents, the MADESE Coordinated Program Review report, communications with schools and the public, etc. A list of documents reviewed is provided in Appendix C.



# Results

This section reports the results of the various evaluation activities. It begins with an overview of how the district is structured and organized, based on the document review and interviews with administrators, and it reports on what was learned in the analysis of CPS data. This section also reports the results of the Spring 2010 interviews and focus groups, the educator and parent surveys, classroom observations, and record reviews.

## **Overview of the District**

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The Cambridge Public School District is comprised of 13 schools: 12 elementary/middle schools and 1 high school, the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS). There is also a High School Extension Program (HSEP) and a vocational/technical center, the Rindge School of Technical Arts. Total student enrollment, as of September 2010 in the district for the 2010–11 school year is 5,845 students in grades Pre-Kindergarten (PK) through 12. This includes students placed outside the district. Twenty-one percent of these students were students with disabilities receiving services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as defined under the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).<sup>1</sup> Nearly 44% of Cambridge’s students were classified as low-income — defined by MADESE as a student who is eligible for free or reduced price lunch or receives Transitional Aid to Families benefits or is eligible for food stamps.<sup>2</sup> Just under 6% of Cambridge students are Limited English Proficient (LEP) or students “whose first language is a language other than English who are unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English.”<sup>3</sup>

Table 3 contains a summary of this information for Cambridge, the state, and for 10 other districts determined by MADESE to be comparable to Cambridge in terms of grade span, enrollment, and special population.<sup>4</sup> For a detailed explanation of the selection methodology for similar districts created by MADESE, go to: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/userguide.pdf>, page 20. Note that the 10 districts utilized for this analysis were deemed comparable by MADESE based on 2009 – 2010 school year data. Table 3 contains information for these districts (and the state) that has been updated with October 2010 data from the MADESE DART site for the 2010 – 2011 school year.

## Controlled Choice Plan

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There are 11 PK–8 elementary-middle schools and one PK-6 school in Cambridge. Each has its own full-time principal and assistant principal. Each school has its own unique characteristics and culture, differences that are celebrated across the community and which give parents a choice of schools, within the constraints of the CPS “controlled choice” system.<sup>5</sup> The plan was first implemented in 1980 and reviewed in 2000. The goal of the plan is to “provide all students with equitable educational opportunities, improved achievement and the opportunity to attend school with students of diverse backgrounds” (CPS Controlled Choice Plan, 2001, p.1).

The Controlled Choice Plan purposefully sets up a competitive dynamic between schools in the district. Enrollment numbers are compared across schools and used to gauge program quality. “One of the major features of controlled choice is program improvement; an indicator that program improvement may be necessary is whether a school is consistently under chosen.” The 2000 review

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<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE), “District Analysis and Review Tool (DART),” retrieved on February 23, 2011 from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/>.

<sup>2</sup> MADESE, “Profiles Help — About the Data,” retrieved on December 21, 2010, from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/help/data.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> Same as above.

<sup>4</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE), “District Analysis and Review Tool (DART),” retrieved on February 23, 2011 from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/>. State data retrieved from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00000000&orgtypecode=0&leftNavId=305&>

<sup>5</sup> See the Cambridge Public Schools Controlled Choice Policy at <http://www.cpsd.us/web/PubInfo/ControlledChoice.pdf>.

**Table 3 Cambridge Demographics in Comparison to Similar Districts—October 2010**

<b>Educational Entity</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Special Education (% Enrollment)</b>	<b>Low-Income (% Enrollment)</b>	<b>Limited English Proficient (% Enrollment)</b>
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>6,019</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>5.7</b>
Fitchburg	4,881	21.4	67.9	12.4
Framingham	8,182	21.5	32.9	16.6
Haverhill	6,804	21.7	40.3	7.0
Marlborough	4,573	21.0	38.1	11.6
New Bedford	12,538	19.8	71.2	4.1
Pittsfield	5,978	17.0	54.7	4.2
Salem	4,565	23.9	55.1	11.2
Somerville	4,855	21.1	68.3	18.0
Waltham	4,796	21.6	34.3	10.6
West Springfield	3,932	20.3	46.4	7.4
State	955,563	17.0	34.2	7.2

based recommendations on research that indicates that “high concentrations of students in poverty in a school may have a negative impact on achievement of students of poverty within that school.” The Controlled Choice Plan was intended to reduce high concentrations of poverty in some Cambridge City Schools, to achieve a more equitable distribution across the city.

The 2000 review of the plan resulted in strategies to recruit students to schools and to expand the factors used to assign students to schools. Free and reduced lunch status was used as a “proxy” for socioeconomic status when placing students. A program improvement process was implemented for those schools not meeting the district’s student achievement goals and/or not drawing diverse student enrollments.

A student’s special education status may be considered as a “diversity factor” in the controlled choice placement process. CPS “wants to make sure that special education students have equitable access to all schools in CPS, to the extent that the needs of special education students can be accommodated at a particular school” (p.10). There was also interest in limiting the numbers of special education students in a single school because special education students “will not have the

same opportunity to be mainstreamed” with students who are not receiving special education services. The goal has been to begin to balance the distribution of special education students across schools so that the school population approximates the percentage of special education students in the district as a whole.

The document further indicates that OSE may override the normal placement process if it determines that a special education student’s needs cannot be addressed in a particular school. An IEP meeting is convened with the student’s parents to discuss options and the student’s needs. However, if the student “requires a specialized program that is not available in one of the schools requested by the parents/guardians, then the Office of Special Education will designate a school to which the student will be assigned that will meet the student’s IEP” (p.13).

## **Goals for the District 2010–12**

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Cambridge has an ambitious mission statement that provides evidence of the district’s commitment to diversity and high achievement for all students: “The Cambridge Public Schools will be a diverse urban school system that works with families and the community to successfully educate all of its students at high levels.” “All students” includes, by definition, students with disabilities, whether they have an IEP through special education or a Section 504 Accommodation Plan. The CPS administration and school committee have identified three focus areas: (1) improving achievement for all students; (2) building a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment in schools; and (3) instituting long-range planning for budgetary and programmatic decision-making. The second goal includes specific activities to strengthen school/family communication and involvement (Cambridge Public Schools Goals for 2010–12).

## **Office of Special Education Administrative Structure**

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The CPS Office of Special Education (OSE) is led by an Executive Director for Special Education who reports to the Superintendent of Schools and is a member of the Superintendent’s Cabinet. (Note that the CPS School Committee Web page indicates that “The School Committee employs the Superintendent, School Committee Attorney and the Director of Special Education.”)

In addition, there are two full-time Central Office/OSE administrative positions: an Assistant Director and a Program Manager — Special Education, OSE Finance and Operations; both report to the Executive Director. The Assistant Director is responsible for supervision of all school

psychologists and school adjustment counselors. For 2010–11, there are seven full-time “Teachers in Charge.” These are 10-month positions, considered to be part of the Central Office OSE staff and supervised by either the Executive Director or Assistant Director. Teachers in Charge are evaluated by the Executive Director and are responsible for supervision and coordination of services under their categorical areas: (1) Related Service Providers/Basic Academics Skills Classrooms; (2) CRLS Teacher in Charge; (3) Out-of-District Team Leader; (4) Special Start/Preschool; (5) Inclusion: Special Educators, Inclusion Specialists, and Learning Disability Classrooms; (6) Structured Academics: Behavior Specialists/Behavior Classrooms, and (7) Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)/ASD/Autism Programs/ABA Specialists. (See the OSE Organizational Chart, Appendix I.) Both the Teacher in Charge for the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Program and the Teacher in Charge for Structured Academics are new positions for 2010–11. According to a description of the role provided by the district, Teachers in Charge are not required to have a background in administration or supervision as a prerequisite or job qualification (CPS Special Education Executive Summary, September 2009) nor are they necessarily required to have a specialty in the area to which they are assigned. Teachers in Charge are not building-based, that is, they move from building to building depending upon where programs or staff for which they are responsible are located. For example, the Teacher in Charge for Inclusion travels among all PK–8 schools.

## Building-based Staffing

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District-wide special education staffing data provided by OSE for 2010–11 show that there are 134 full-time equivalent special education teachers including teachers in sub-separate classrooms. Based on a child count of 1,131 special education students (as of October 2010), the ratio of special education teachers to students is 1 teacher for every 8.4 students. If related services professional staff (83) are included, the ratio drops to 1 to 5.2. Schools that house sub-separate or special class programs have understandably higher levels of staffing than those without. For 2010–11, there are 107 instructional paraeducators (aides) employed across the district, approximately 1 paraeducator for every 11 students on IEPs. Note: Cambridge teacher-student ratios overall (1 to 10.5 for 2009–10) are somewhat lower than the state average of 1 to 13.7. (See MADESE Web site at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/teacher.aspx?orgcode=00490000&orgtypecode=5&leftNavId=814&>.) Table 4 shows Cambridge Special Education Building-based staffing by school for 2010–11.

**Table 4 CPS Special Education Building-based Staffing by School FY 11**

School Name	Enrollment	# of SpEd Students	% of SpEd Students	OSE Staffing 2010–11			
				Teachers	Aides	Related Services	Total FTE
Amigos	326	47	14.4%	4.50	2.00	3.83	10.33
Baldwin	375	66	17.6%	5.67	1.00	3.80	10.47
Cambridgeport	292	38	13.0%	5.00	3.00	3.50	11.50
CRLS	1,592	275	17.3%	29.00	11.00	10.90	50.90
Fletcher Maynard Academy	218	73	33.5%	9.67	16.00	8.30	33.97
Graham & Parks	428	66	15.4%	5.40	3.00	4.40	12.80
Haggerty	269	55	20.4%	8.00	13.00	6.47	27.47
Kennedy-Longfellow	387	68	17.6%	9.75	9.00	5.00	23.75
King	268	47	17.5%	5.50	3.00	3.64	12.14
King Open	498	111	22.3%	10.60	13.00	7.30	30.90
Morse	403	96	23.8%	8.67	8.00	6.50	23.17
Peabody	518	115	22.2%	11.67	10.00	6.87	28.54
Tobin	271	74	27.3%	9.60	10.00	6.80	26.40
Upton Street				3.00	5.00	5.14	13.14
OSE				8.00		1.00	9.00
<b>Total Enrolment</b>	<b>5,845</b>	<b>1,131</b>	<b>19.3%</b>	<b>134.03</b>	<b>107.00</b>	<b>83.45</b>	<b>324.48</b>

When comparing staffing patterns across schools, it is important to consider that the location of sub-separate classrooms in particular schools increases the level of staffing needed. Some schools have multiple sub-separate classrooms (e.g., Fletcher Maynard) while others have none (e.g., Graham and Parks). Table 5 shows the number of full-time equivalent building-based special education staff (teachers, aides, and related services personnel) employed in each school across the district compared to the number of students identified for special education services as a percentage of total enrollment minus students and staff for the sub-separate classrooms located in that building. Students and staff in sub-separate classrooms located in each building have been subtracted in Table 5 in order to provide a valid comparison across schools. There is a good deal of variability across schools in terms of the percentage of students identified for special education services and the level of staffing. Child count as a percentage of enrollment ranges from a low of 12.1% in

Cambridgeport to a high of 23.3% at the Fletcher Maynard Academy. Special education teacher to special education student ratios range from a ratio of 1 teacher for every 7 students at Kennedy/Longfellow and Haggerty to a ratio of 1 teacher for every 13 special education students at Baldwin. Haggerty has the highest total staffing at 25.80 FTEs with 51 special education students while King School has the lowest staffing level at 8.14 FTEs with 31 special education students.

**Table 5 CPS Special Education Building-based Staffing by School FY 11 Minus Sub-Separate Students and Staffing**

School Name	Enrollment	# of SpEd Students	% of SpEd Students	OSE Staffing 2010–11 (Minus Sub Separate Students and Staffing)			
				Teachers	Aides	Related Services	Total FTE
Amigos	320	41	12.8%	3.50	1.00	3.83	8.33
Baldwin	371	62	16.7%	4.67	0.00	3.80	8.47
Cambridgeport	289	35	12.1%	4.00	2.00	3.50	9.50
CRLS	1,578	261	16.5%	26.00	8.00	10.90	44.90
*Fletcher Maynard Academy	189	44	23.3%	4.67	4.00	8.30	16.97
Graham & Parks	428	66	15.4%	5.40	3.00	4.40	12.80
Haggerty	265	51	19.2%	7.00	12.00	6.80	25.80
* Kennedy/Longfellow	364	45	12.4%	6.75	6.00	5.00	17.75
King	252	31	12.3%	3.50	1.00	3.64	8.14
King Open	480	93	19.4%	7.60	7.00	7.30	21.90
*Morse	393	86	21.90%	7.67	7.00	6.50	21.17
*Peabody	508	105	20.7%	8.67	6.00	6.87	21.54
*Tobin	253	56	22.1%	6.60	5.00	6.80	18.40
*Upton Street				1.00	3.00	5.14	9.14
OSE				8.00		1.00	9.00
<b>Total Enrolment</b>	<b>5,690</b>	<b>976</b>	<b>17.2%</b>	<b>105.03</b>	<b>65.00</b>	<b>83.78</b>	<b>253.81</b>
<b>*Includes Special Start Programs</b>							



### **School Adjustment Counselors**

Every K–8 school has one full-time equivalent “school adjustment counselor,” and the high school has four such positions. These direct services staff work with students with disabilities as well as other “struggling students.” They provide counseling services to students both with and without IEPs.

### **Inclusion Specialists K–8**

The OSE description of the Inclusion Specialist’s role indicates that these full-time special educators serve in a consultant role to the general education classroom teachers and to special education teachers to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular classroom environment. They also consult on “at risk” students.

### **Behavior Specialists**

Pre-Kindergarten-8 (PK-8) schools have access to part-time Behavior Specialists who consult with classroom teachers, administrators, and other school staff regarding individual students or whole classroom behavior plans. There are a total of four full-time equivalent Behavior Specialists employed to serve the elementary-middle schools in 2010–11. In addition, there are two Applied Behavior Analysis Therapists that work with the Autism Program.

### **Related Services**

Occupational, physical and speech/language therapy, Applied Behavior Analysis, and Assistive Technology services are provided in schools on an itinerant basis; that is, staff work in several different schools and provide both direct and consultation services as part of a school-based special education team.

### **School Psychologists/Team Chairpersons**

Each K–8 school has a full-time school psychologist. There are three positions at the high school and an additional school psychologist that assists with compliance. These staff report directly to the Assistant Director of Special Education in the Central Office. Their role is to conduct special education evaluations and to serve as evaluation team chairpersons for all special education initial eligibility evaluations and reevaluations. They are also charged with oversight of special education compliance in their assigned schools and provide consultation to school staff.

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## Professional Development Initiatives

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OSE provided professional development to staff in the following areas in 2009–10:

- Empowering Multicultural Initiatives (offered to all district staff)
- High Performing Inclusion Secondary School: A Leadership Institute
- Nonviolent Crisis Intervention
- Meeting the needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an inclusive classroom
- Meeting the needs of students with language issues
- Meeting the needs of students with fine motor, gross motor, and sensory integration issues
- Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD) and implications for the classroom
- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) in the Special Education Classroom Transdisciplinary Program

## Continuum of Services

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Cambridge Public Schools offers a continuum of special education services and programs from preschool through high school. Students whose needs cannot be addressed appropriately within the district are placed in out-of-district day or residential public or private schools/programs. Preschool services include outreach to children served in community placements (e.g., child care) and school-based classrooms, including the Integrated Preschool Classroom (full inclusion) and Sub-Separate Classrooms for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Special Start Integrated PK Programs are located in six different buildings. There is an Integrated Kindergarten classroom at the Kennedy/Longfellow School. The Special Start Sub-separate classrooms are located in four schools.

School-age programs include sub-separate classes for ASD, Basic Academics/Developmental Delay Programs (for students with moderate cognitive and developmental delays), Functional Academics/Developmental Delay Programs (for students with moderate to severe intellectual impairment, grades 5–8), Learning Disabilities Programs/Academics Classrooms (for children with Specific Learning Disabilities, grades 3–8), Structured Academics/Behavior Programs and the Academic Strategies Services (for children on IEPs struggling to meet the demands of the general education curriculum, grades K–8) (CPS Special Education Programs and Locations, 2009–10).

All of these specialized/categorical self-contained programs serve only students with disabilities and are located at various school buildings across the district. That is, substantially separate program “strands” are not located in single schools. Students must move from school to school as they move on through the grades. For example, the ASD Program classrooms are located in three different schools, and assuming that placement categories remain constant, children transfer from school to school as they grow older. A child might begin at Fletcher Maynard for Kindergarten, move to King Open for grades 1–2, then to Haggerty School for grade 3. For the Behavior Program, classes for grades 1–4 are at Peabody, grades 5–6 at Cambridgeport, and grades 7–8 at Baldwin.

Placement options also include “full inclusion” in the regular classroom, co-teaching classrooms where a special educator and general education teacher team up to work with a class comprised of both disabled and nondisabled children, pull-out direct services, and consulting services.

### **High School Special Education**

CRLS also has a continuum of services for grades 9–12, including co-taught classes, the Academics Program (for students with Specific Learning Disabilities) and the following sub-separate classes: the Basic Academics Program (for students with Intellectual Impairments), Structured Academics (for students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities), and the Functional Academics Programs (for students with Intellectual Impairments).

### **Out-of-District Placements**

According to data provided by the district, as of August 2010, Cambridge had 177 students in out-of-district placements, representing approximately 13% of the students on IEPs (1,131) served by the district. Total numbers of out-placements have increased in recent years from 147 students in 2007–08 to 177 in 2010–11, a 20% increase in four years. One hundred-six of the out-placed students were in grades 9–12, showing that 60% of out-of-district placements are at the high school level. Updated data from the district indicates that as of September 2010, out-of-district placements were reduced by 10 students. This reduction may be due, in part, to recently graduated students or students who moved outside the district. Table 6 shows the updated breakdown of out-of-district placements by disability category. Students with Emotional Disabilities comprise the largest category of out-placed students, followed by students with Specific Learning Disabilities and children with Autism.

**Table 6 Out-of District Placements by Disability Category — Number and Percent**

<b>Primary Disability Type</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Autism	24	14%
Emotional Disability	73	44%
Intellectual Impairment	13	7%
Specific Learning Disability	27	16%
Neurological	10	6%
Sensory: Hearing	4	3%
Sensory: Vision	6	4%
Multiple Disabilities	6	4%
Health	4	2%
Total	167	100%

Note: Updated September 2010 data provided by the district.

## Results of the Document Review

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A variety of documents were collected from the Cambridge Public Schools Central Office and downloaded from the CPS Web site. Documents included data and presentations on the status of special education programs and services, CPS policies and procedures, budget documents, the MADESE Coordinated Program Review report, communications with schools and the public, etc. A list of documents reviewed is provided in Appendix C. Various documents are referenced in appropriate sections throughout this report. This section will report on the results of the review of CPS policies and guidelines with regard to special education services. Table 7 indicates the type of document, title, and reviewer comments.

**Table 7 Partial List of CPS Documents Reviewed**

Type	Document	Review
MADESE CPR Report	Cambridge Public Schools CPR Report (2009). <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2009/0049.pdf">http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2009/0049.pdf</a>	Two issues to be addressed re: Child Find and Parent Consent. All other issues rated as implemented.
Guidelines	CRLS School Handbook 2010–11 <a href="http://www.cpsd.us/CRLS/publications/CRLS_HANDBOOK_2010-11.pdf">http://www.cpsd.us/CRLS/publications/CRLS_HANDBOOK_2010-11.pdf</a>	Assessments p.9 accommodations. Office of Special Ed. p.34. OSE phone numbers. 504 Accommodations Plans also addressed, p.34. Discipline re: students with disabilities, p.98.
Guidelines	Cambridge Public Schools Guide to Policies for Students and Parents (August 2009)	FERPA p. 2. Behavior/Discipline p.4. Physical Restraint p.3. Special Education p.13 with notice re: right to FAPE and to request an evaluation. No contact person is listed. Section 504 p.12
Guidelines	Cambridge Public Schools Guide to Policies — Staff Edition (June 2010)	Special Education p. 14 with notice re: right to FAPE and to request an evaluation. No contact person is listed.
Policy	Cambridge Public Schools Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Disability (June, 2009).	Pertains to students and staff. References requirements under ADA and Section 504. Indicates that CPS shall inform parents and students of their rights under Section 504.
Policy	Cambridge Public Schools Controlled Choice Plan, December 18, 2001	Plan first implemented 1980.

## Results of the District Data Analysis

To provide the necessary background information to inform the CPS Special Education Program Review, an analysis of eight CPS information areas was completed. The eight information areas examined were: (1) special education enrollment; (2) disability distribution; (3) least restrictive environment (LRE); (4) disproportionality; (5) Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) proficiency; (6) graduation and dropout rates; (7) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) compliance; and (8) per pupil spending.

### Special Education Enrollment

Tables 8 and 9 show Cambridge special education child count as a percentage of total enrollment compared to the state as a whole. The data for Tables 8 and 9 are from the MADESE District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) thus data may not conform exactly to CPS updated district data. Table 8 shows that since the 2005–06 school year, the special education population of Cambridge has grown slightly from approximately 20% in 2005-06 to 22% in 2010-11.

**Table 8 Cambridge Special Education Population as a Percentage of Total Enrollment**

Cambridge	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010-11
All Student Enrollment	5,803	5,599	5,682	5,770	5,950	6,019
Special Education Enrollment	1,150	1,143	1,132	1,237	1,327	1,318
Special Education as % of Enrollment	20%	20%	20%	21%	22%	22%

Note: CPS total enrollment does not include out-of-district placements

To provide context for comparison purposes, Table 9 contains a summary of the changes in special education enrollment in Massachusetts as a whole since 2006. A comparison of Tables 8 and 9 shows that Cambridge has maintained a percentage of students in special education that is approximately 25–29% above the state average. Data for this table are from the MADESE School/District Profiles web site at:

<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00000000&orgtypecode=0&>

**Table 9 Statewide Special Education Population as a Percentage of Overall Enrollment**

State	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010-11
All Student Enrollment	972,371	968,661	962,806	958,910	957,053	955,563
Special Education Enrollment	151,061	153,900	155,467	158,752	159,247	162,445
Special Education as % of Enrollment	16%	16%	16%	17%	17%	17%

Table 10 contains a summary of the percentage of special education students by Cambridge school. In Table 10, “Enrollment” for 2010-11 has been included to provide reference to the relative size of

the schools in the district. The “Trend” column shows the five-year trend in the increase or decrease in percentage points in the percentage of special education students in 2010-11 compared to the percentage of special education students reported in 2006-07. Note that children in sub-separate classrooms in each school are included in the calculations. Table 10 shows that a substantial increase appears to have occurred in Fletcher Maynard (+14.4 points), due primarily to the location of sub-separated classrooms in that building. Data show that there have been decreases in the percentage of children identified in eight out of 13 schools. The location of sub-separate classrooms in particular schools may account for some of the variability. This is particularly true for Fletcher Maynard where new sub-separate classrooms have recently opened.

### **Disability Distribution**

Table 11 contains a summary of the percentage of students in each disability category served in special education, as reported during the 2009-10 school year. District, state, and national percentages are included in the last three rows of the table to provide context to the school percentages.

Table 11 shows that, overall, the distribution of children identified in particular categories of disability across Cambridge Public Schools is mostly in line with state norms, with the exception of Specific Learning (SL) Disabilities, which is 11 percentage points higher than the state average. CRLS stands out in this category particularly: 63% of the students receiving special education services grades 9–12 are eligible as Specific Learning Disabled. This is 17 percentage points greater than the district’s 46%, and 28 percentage points greater than the state’s 35%. Other data points that stand out: 32% of Fletcher Maynard’s IEP students are eligible in the category of Autism. However, this reflects the ASD program located at this school. At Martin Luther King, Jr., 17% of students are receiving IEP services for Intellectual Disabilities, compared to 6% in the district and 7% across the state. Again, this is may be due to the placement of sub-separate Basic Academics classrooms. Note that data in Table 11 are 2009-10 and have not been updated for 2010-11.

**Table 10 Cambridge Public School Special Education Population as a Percentage of Total Enrollment by School**

Schools	Grades	Enrollment (2010-11)	2006– 07	2007– 08	2008– 09	2009– 10	2010- 11	Trend
Amigos	PK–8	326	13.2%	15.9%	15.8%	16.5%	14.4%	1.2
Baldwin	PK–8	375	18.2%	16.5%	17.1%	14.3%	17.6%	-.6
Cambridgeport	PK–8	292	16.5%	17.0%	18.2%	15.3%	13.0%	-3.5
CRLS	9–12	1,592	18.2%	16.4%	16.6%	18.7%	17.3%	-.9
Fletcher Maynard	PK–8	218	19.1%	23.4%	21.2%	23.8%	33.5%	<b>14.4</b>
Graham & Parks	PK–8	428	20.7%	18.3%	17.8%	16.8%	15.4%	-5.3
Haggerty	PK–6	269	25.1%	26.0%	20.0%	21.0%	20.4%	-4.70
Kennedy/ Longfellow	PK–8	387	20.8%	21.0%	19.7%	15.2%	17.6%	-3.2
King	PK–8	268	17.0%	22.1%	20.7%	18.2%	17.5%	.5
King Open	PK–8	498	19.7%	21.5%	19.5%	21.3%	22.3%	2.6
Morse	PK–8	403	24.3%	25.6%	21.0%	19.4%	23.8%	.5
Peabody	PK–8	518	23.2%	24.5%	20.2%	19.2%	22.2%	-1
Tobin	PK–8	271	18.8%	18.7%	17.8%	19.0%	27.3%	<b>8.5</b>
District		5,845	19.4%	19.7%	18.4%	18.4%	19.3%	-.1



**Table 11 Percent of Students Receiving Special Education Services by Category of Disability by School**

<b>Educational Entity</b>	<b>AU</b>	<b>DD</b>	<b>IN</b>	<b>HR</b>	<b>VS</b>	<b>DB</b>	<b>NL</b>	<b>EM</b>	<b>CO</b>	<b>PH</b>	<b>SL</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>MD</b>
Amigos	4%	18%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	10%	2%	49%	8%	0%
Baldwin	5%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	9%	11%	4%	50%	4%	0%
Cambridgeport	4%	9%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	17%	9%	7%	43%	11%	0%
CRLS	2%	0%	11%	0%	0%	0%	1%	9%	3%	0%	<b>63%</b>	9%	1%
Fletcher Maynard	<b>32%</b>	25%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%	4%	12%	2%	18%	5%	0%
Graham & Parks	3%	24%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	12%	5%	41%	7%	0%
Haggerty	14%	22%	5%	0%	0%	0%	3%	5%	11%	5%	25%	10%	0%
Kennedy-Longfellow	5%	13%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%	7%	9%	4%	54%	5%	0%
King	2%	17%	<b>17%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	12%	10%	2%	31%	10%	0%
King Open	8%	31%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	6%	7%	1%	38%	7%	0%
Morse (Inc Upton St)	5%	21%	5%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	14%	5%	38%	8%	0%
Peabody	8%	15%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	6%	16%	4%	40%	7%	0%
Tobin (inc Tobin Mont)	8%	19%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	10%	5%	53%	2%	0%
District *	<b>6%</b>	14%	<b>6%</b>	0%	0%	0%	1%	7%	9%	3%	<b>46%</b>	7%	0%
State**	<b>6%</b>	10%	<b>7%</b>	1%	0%	0%	4%	8%	18%	1%	<b>35%</b>	7%	3%
Nation***	<b>5%</b>	2%	<b>8%</b>	1%	0%	0%	0%	7%	19%	1%	<b>43%</b>	11%	2%

\*Data from Cambridge Public Schools

\*\*Data from MADESE School/District Profiles at: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>. State numbers do not total exactly 100% due to reporting discrepancies.

\*\*\*Data from IDEAdata.org; 2008–09 school year.

Note: AU = Autism; DD = Developmental Delay; IN = Intellectual; HR = Sensory, Hearing; VS = Sensory, Vision; DB = Sensory, Deaf Blind; NL = Neurological; EM = Emotional; CO = Communication; PH = Physical; SL = Specific Learning; HE = Health; MD = Multiple Disabilities.

### Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Table 12 contains a summary of the least restrictive environment placement data for Cambridge Public Schools from the 2009–10 school year.<sup>6</sup> To provide additional context for this information, 10 comparable districts, as selected by MADESE based on enrollment and demographics, have been included with overall state figures.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 12 Percent of Students in Particular Categories of Placement — Comparable Districts**

<b>EDUCATIONAL ENTITY</b>	<b>FULL INCLUSION</b> (% outside of general education classroom <21%)	<b>PARTIAL INCLUSION</b> (% outside of general education classroom 21%–60%)	<b>SUBSTANTIALLY SEPARATE</b> (% outside of general education classroom >60%)	<b>OUT OF DISTRICT</b> (% Separate School or Residential Facility)
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>70.2%</b>	<b>5.5%</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>13%</b>
Fitchburg	33.8	37.5	19	9.7
Framingham	49.2	19.4	23	8.4
Haverhill	42.7	30.5	16.6	10.2
Marlborough	55.0	13.6	22.7	8.7
New Bedford	64.6	12.3	19	4.1
Pittsfield	57.9	16.6	20.8	4.7
Salem	57.1	13.8	20.9	8.1
Somerville	62.5	5.1	20.4	11.9
Waltham	15.4	39	39.1	6.4
West Springfield	29.6	47.5	14.1	8.8
State	56.8	21.1	15.4	6.8

Table 12 shows that CPS is substantially above the state percentage of children placed in “full inclusion” (70.2% versus 56.8%) and has the highest percentage in inclusive environments of any comparable district. CPS places nearly twice as many of its students in out-of-district placements than does the state on average, and has the highest percentage in these restrictive environments of

<sup>6</sup> Data retrieved from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/search/search.aspx?leftNavId=11238> on December 27, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the MADESE comparable district selection process, see: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/userguide.pdf>.

any comparable district. This is not a new trend: Since the 2004–05 school year, statewide out-of-district placements have hovered under 7%, while CPS’ out-of-district placements have consistently been near 13%. CPS also has the second lowest percentage of students in partially inclusive environments (5.5%) compared to other districts. This may suggest a lack of supports for students whose needs require additional time outside of the regular classroom environment but for whom an out-of-district placement or substantially separate class placement may not be required.

### **Disproportionality**

One element to be addressed in the CPS Special Education Program Review was the issue of over-representation of minorities in special education. Specifically, the Steering Committee was interested in recommendations about reducing disproportionality in CPS. As a first step necessary to inform these recommendations, a disproportionality analysis of CPS was completed for this project.

The goal of this analysis was to identify those schools within CPS that appear to have substantial over-representation of specific racial or ethnic categories. A weighted risk ratio was used for this purpose. The weighted risk ratio is often utilized for examining disproportionality because it accommodates for the unique race/ethnicity distribution of the particular district being analyzed and allows for a meaningful comparison among schools within the district. This methodology is often recommended by the U.S. Department of Education for state-to-federal reporting of special education disproportionality.<sup>8</sup>

Because weighted risk ratios are subject to extreme variations when working with small numbers, an additional criterion was added to this analysis: Specific race/ethnicity categories in schools were removed from the analysis in those instances where the expected count of students in a special education race/ethnicity category was within ten students of the actual count of special education students in that category. The expected count is calculated by multiplying the percentage of a specific race/ethnicity category in the overall school student population by the overall number of special education students in the school.

Taken together, the weighted risk ratio and the expected/actual count criterion for analysis provide a methodology designed to:

- Provide a meaningful overview of the representation of racial and ethnic groups receiving special education services in the schools in relationship to the representation of racial and ethnic groups in the district as a whole; and

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<sup>8</sup> Methods for Assessing Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: A Technical Assistance Guide. Westat, July 2007.

- Help to identify and prioritize those schools most likely to have challenges with disproportionality.

CPS provided enrollment and race/ethnicity information for school level analysis; additional district and state data were retrieved from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education School/District Profile site at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/> and [www.ideadata.org](http://www.ideadata.org). Five race/ethnicity categories were analyzed: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and “Other” as provided by CPS. “Other” includes Native American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Multi-Racial, Non-Hispanic.

**District Results:** At the district level, CPS does not appear to be substantially disproportionate in any one race/ethnicity category. Asians, Other, and Whites are somewhat under-represented (Risk Ratios between .35–.67), while Hispanics and Blacks are somewhat over-represented (Risk Ratios between 1.41–1.74). That CPS does not appear particularly disproportionate is supported by the annual analysis of disproportionality completed for the IDEA-required Annual Performance Report (APR) by MADESE. Cambridge has not been identified by MADESE as having disproportionate representation by race/ethnicity in special education or by race/ethnicity by disability category as of the 2008–09 school year.<sup>9</sup>

**School Results:** At the school level King Open emerged as having potential challenges with over-representation of Black students in special education and Amigos emerged as having potential challenges with over-representation of Hispanic students in special education. Tables 13 and 14, on the next page, contain summaries of this information.

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<sup>9</sup> Retrieved August 10, 2010, from [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/gis/sped\\_map.aspx?orgcode=00490000&](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/gis/sped_map.aspx?orgcode=00490000&).

**Table 13 Potential Over-representation Challenges — Black**

	Black		
School Name	% Black of Total Enrollment	Actual % of SpEd Enrollment	Weighted Risk Ratio*
King Open	24.85%	45.79%	2.62
<b>District</b>	<b>33.59%</b>	<b>46.64%</b>	<b>1.74**</b>

\*Interpreted as: The race/ethnicity group being examined is "x" times more (>1) or less (<1) likely than all other students in the school to be in special education.

\*\* Unweighted risk ratio for the district as a whole.

Table 13 shows that at King Open, Black students are over two and one-half times as likely as all other students in the school to be identified for special education when the risk ratio is weighted according to the race/ethnicity demographics of CPS.

**Table 14 Potential Over-representation Challenges — Hispanic**

	Hispanic		
School Name	% Hispanic of Total Enrollment	Actual % of SpEd Enrollment	Weighted Risk Ratio*
Amigos	54.40%	76.47%	2.22
<b>District</b>	<b>14.10%</b>	<b>18.73%</b>	<b>1.41**</b>

Table 14 shows that at Amigos, Hispanic students are over two times more likely than all other students in the school to be identified for special education when the risk ratio is weighted according to the race/ethnicity demographics of CPS.

This analysis has shown that in CPS overall, disproportionality is within state norms. However, the school-level analysis has shown that when accounting for the race/ethnicity make-up of the district, challenges exist within Amigos and King Open respectively in terms of over-representation of Hispanic and Black students in special education. These schools would be the first place to focus those improvement activities designed to reduce disproportionality.

## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Proficiency

According to the Cambridge Public School's annual *MCAS and Adequate Yearly Progress Report* (2010), the performance of CPS White and Asian students has been consistently above the state targets for several years in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. This year, low-income students in Cambridge in both ELA and Math progressed at a rate that was higher than the aggregate and higher than other subgroups. However, achievement gaps persist both for this subgroup and especially for Black and students with disabilities subgroups. The biggest gaps for the students with disabilities subgroup as compared to proficiency/advanced rates for all students are found in ELA for grades 5, 7, and 10 and Math for grade 5, all showing over 40 points discrepancy. CPS "action steps" to close the achievement gap include a focus on differentiated instruction across the schools, revised/updated School Improvement Plans, implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI), establishing school-based Instructional Leadership Teams, professional development in English Language Arts and mathematics, and cross-school, cross-grade curriculum alignment (*MCAS and Adequate Yearly Progress Report*, 2010).

**NCLB Accountability Status:** In ELA, in spite of significant improvements overall, for the second year in a row, the district did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all subgroups. Current status is Improvement Year 1 for subgroups. Similarly, the district's performance in Mathematics improved significantly, but not all subgroups made AYP targets. The district's status is now Improvement Year 2 for Subgroups. The following individual schools did not make AYP for the students with disabilities subgroup in either ELA, Math, or both: Baldwin, Graham and Parks, Haggerty, Kennedy/Longfellow, King Open, Martin Luther King, Morse, Peabody, and Tobin. Amigos, Cambridgeport, Fletcher Maynard, and CRLS made AYP for the students with disabilities subgroup in both ELA and Math (*MCAS and Adequate Yearly Progress Report*, 2010).

**Proficiency Rates for the Students with Disabilities Subgroup:** Table 15 contains a summary of 2009–10 English Language Arts and Mathematics MCAS results combined for grades 3–8 and 10 for children receiving IEP services (MADESE Web site).<sup>10</sup> To provide additional context for this information, 10 comparable districts, as selected by MADESE based on enrollment and demographics, have been included with overall state results.<sup>11</sup>

Table 15 shows that at 27% proficiency or higher for English Language Arts and 20% proficiency or higher for Math, CPS is just below the state averages of 28% and 21% respectively. In terms of comparable districts, CPS is near the top: Only two districts had a higher percentage of students scoring at the proficient level or above in English Language Arts (Framingham at 28% and Waltham at 32%) and only two districts had higher percentages of students scoring proficient or above in Math (Framingham at 23%, and Pittsfield at 24%).

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<sup>10</sup> Data retrieved from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/search/search.aspx?leftNavId=11238> on December 27, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the MADESE comparable district selection process, see: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/userguide.pdf>.

**Table 15**      **Percent of Students with Disabilities Scoring Proficient or Above on MCAS in ELA and Math Compared to Similar Districts**

<b>Educational Entity</b>	<b>English Language Arts: % Proficient and Above</b>	<b>Math: % Proficient and Above</b>
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>20</b>
Fitchburg	13	11
Framingham	28	23
Haverhill	13	10
Marlborough	27	15
New Bedford	14	16
Pittsfield	23	24
Salem	19	12
Somerville	17	14
Waltham	32	19
West Springfield	16	16
State	28	21

### **Graduation and Dropout Rates**

Table 16 contains a summary of the graduation rates of the 2008–09 cohort of students with IEPs and the dropout rates of students with IEPs in grades 9–12.<sup>12</sup> To provide context for these results, 10 comparable districts, as selected by MADESE based on enrollment and demographics, have been included with the overall state results.<sup>13</sup>

Table 16 shows that 72% of students receiving IEP services in Cambridge who were in the 2008–09 cohort graduated with a regular diploma. Table 16 also shows that less than half of one percent of IEP students in grades 9–12 were reported as dropping out of school. This stands out in comparison to both the state and similar district rates for graduation and dropout. CPS exceeds the state graduation rate by 7 percentage points and is 4.5 percentage points higher than the next highest

<sup>12</sup> Data retrieved from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/search/search.aspx?leftNavId=11238> on December 27, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the MADESE comparable district selection process, see: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/userguide.pdf>.



comparable district (Somerville at 67.5%). CPS' dropout rate of 0.4% is much lower than the state dropout rate of 5.0% and is the lowest dropout rate of any comparable district.

**Table 16 Graduation and Dropout Rates for Cambridge Students with Disabilities Compared to Similar Districts 2008–09**

<b>Educational Entity</b>	<b>2008–09 IEP Student Cohort: % Graduation Rate</b>	<b>IEP Students in Grades 9–12: % Dropout</b>
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>0.4</b>
Fitchburg	54.9	3.6
Framingham	65.1	1.9
Haverhill	40.3	0.6
Marlborough	55.3	4.1
New Bedford	26.1	10.8
Pittsfield	53.6	8.5
Salem	55.2	10.4
Somerville	67.5	7.1
Waltham	59.3	5.1
West Springfield	39.3	7.4
State	64.9	5.0

### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Compliance**

MADESE reports annually on compliance with the IDEA to the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The most recent information available is from the 2008–09 school year. A full report with explanation is available at [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/gis/sped\\_map.aspx?orgcode=00490000&fycode=2009](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/gis/sped_map.aspx?orgcode=00490000&fycode=2009). Table 17 provides a summary of CPS' rate of compliance on selected indicators in the Massachusetts State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) in relationship to the state and comparable districts (as selected by MADESE) for three IDEA compliance indicators: (1) appropriate and timely transition from early intervention (0–3) to preschool special education at age three; (2) timely completion of all initial special education evaluations; and (3) appropriate post-

secondary transition planning documented in student IEPs for students preparing to graduate from high school.<sup>14,15</sup>

Table 17 shows that CPS was 100% compliant with specific IDEA requirements surrounding all three IDEA compliance indicators. This compares to the state averages of 88.5%, 98.2%, and 99.5% respectively. Only 3 of the 10 comparable districts performed as well as CPS in terms of early childhood transition: Haverhill, New Bedford, and Pittsfield. Only two performed as well as CPS in terms of timely initial IEP evaluations: Marlborough and Somerville. All comparable districts for whom data were available in terms of post-secondary transition planning also were 100% compliant.

The MADESE report of the Cambridge Public Schools Coordinated Program Review (CPR) (2009) was reviewed to identify any areas of previously identified noncompliance. (The Cambridge 2009 CPR report is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2009/0049.pdf>.) There were two areas/issues noted in the report that were judged to be “partially implemented” and which required a response from the district: (1) with regard to Child Find — outreach by the school district to identify, locate, and evaluate children with disabilities; and (2) regarding parent consent. For Child Find, the finding was that “documentation indicated that the district performs extensive outreach for pre-school and homeless populations, but does not provide child find notices to private

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<sup>14</sup> Data retrieved from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/search/search.aspx?leftNavId=11238> on December 27, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the MADESE comparable district selection process, see: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/userguide.pdf>.

**Table 17 Cambridge Compliance with Indicators on Early Childhood Transition, Initial Evaluation Timelines, and Post-secondary Transition Compared to Similar Districts 2008–09**

<b>Educational Entity</b>	<b>Early Childhood Transition from Part C to Part B — % with IEP by 3<sup>rd</sup> Birthday</b>	<b>Initial IEP Evaluations — % Complete Within Timeline</b>	<b>Post-secondary Transition — % IEP Students with Appropriate Transition Plan</b>
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Fitchburg	96.6	No Data for 2008–09	No Data for 2008–09
Framingham	72.0	No Data for 2008–09	No Data for 2008–09
Haverhill	100	No Data for 2008–09	No Data for 2008–09
Marlborough	75.0	100	100
New Bedford	94	97.5	100
Pittsfield	100	No Data for 2008–09	No Data for 2008–09
Salem	76.3	No Data for 2008–09	No Data for 2008–09
Somerville	66.7	100	100
Waltham	95	No Data for 2008–09	No Data for 2008–09
West Springfield	100	No Data for 2008–09	No Data for 2008–09
State	88.5	98.2	99.5

and parochial schools.” For parent consent, the finding stated that “student records and staff interviews indicated that some district schools evaluate students using achievement assessments as part of the annual review without obtaining parental consent.” According to the CPR report, all

other compliance criteria reviewed by the Department received either an “implemented” or “not applicable” rating.

### Per Pupil Spending

The following section draws from both district-submitted budget documents as well as from publicly available information on the MADESE Web site.

**Revenue Sources and Expenditures:** The FY 2011 Adopted General Fund Budget for the Cambridge Public Schools is \$137.5 million. Funding sources for the CPS General Fund Budget are local property taxes (82%), State Aid (16%) and other revenues (2%). Approximately 26% (\$36.7 million) of the General Fund budget supports special education services, including transportation. In addition, federal grant funds of \$3.1 and State Circuit Breaker funds of \$1.7 million are budgeted for special education services. In total, approximately \$41.6 million is budgeted in FY 2011 for special education.

**Table 18 Special Education Funding Sources**

	FY 2011 Adopted Budget
<b>General Fund</b>	\$36,734,634
<b>Circuit Breaker (State)</b>	\$1,743,910
<b>IDEA Grant (Federal)</b>	\$3,158,096
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$41,636,640</b>

**Table 19 Total Special Education Expenditures (All Funding Sources)**

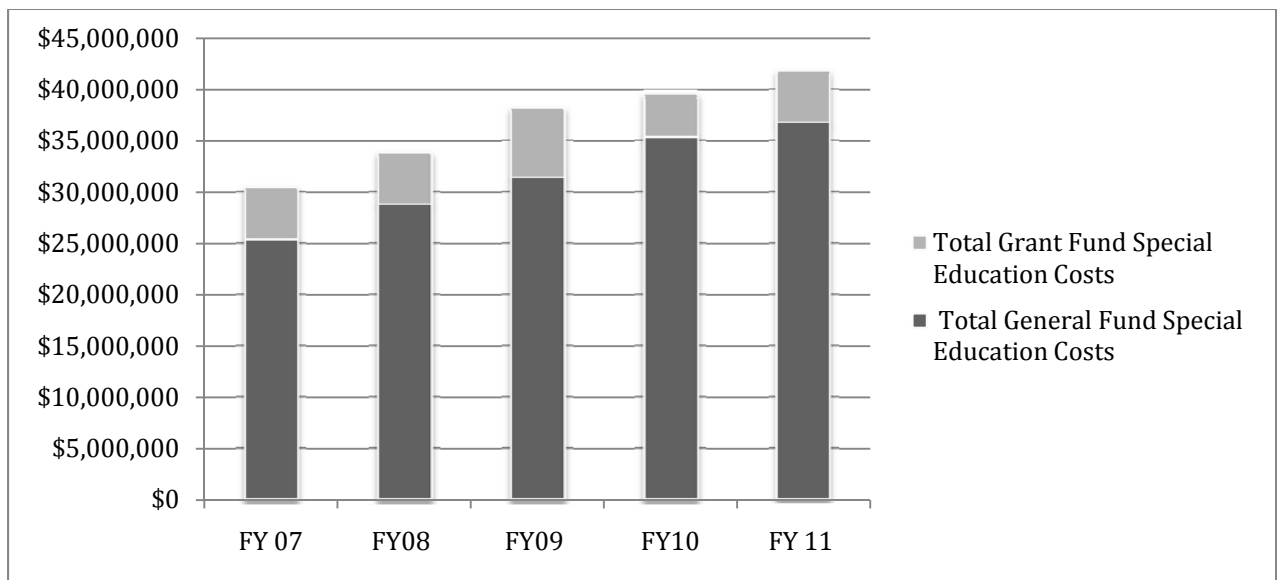
	FY 2011 Adopted Budget
<b>Salaries and Benefits</b>	\$25,852,336
<b>Tuition</b>	\$12,411,546
<b>Materials, Supplies, Contracted Services</b>	\$530,701
<b>Transportation (1)</b>	\$2,842,057
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$41,636,640</b>

Table 18 shows that the General Fund supports 88% of the cost of special education in Cambridge while state aid for Circuit Breaker and federal IDEA funds only support 4% and 7% respectively.

Table 19 shows that the 62% of the cost of special education is devoted to staff salaries and benefits, while tuition to out-of-district placements accounts for approximately 30%.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of total special education costs paid from General Funds dollars compared to state and federal special education grant funds for fiscal years 2007-11.

**Figure 1 Special Education Revenue — Grant Funds vs. General Fund FY 07–11**



**Special Education Initiatives:** Proposed program initiatives for special education in the fiscal year 2011 budget included: an Integrated Kindergarten classroom and two additional professional staff: a new full-time Teacher in Charge for the Autism Spectrum Disorder Program and a Teacher in Charge for the Special Education Behavior Program/Structured Academics Program (total cost of new initiatives: \$271,328).

The district also proposed a number of other new initiatives intended to address the achievement gap and improve outcomes for all students. These included differentiated instruction training for middle grades teachers, a long-range plan to implement Response to Intervention (RTI), strengthening the Instructional Coaching Model in literacy and math, support for English Language Learners, and a merger of the Transition Program with the High School Extension Program (the Alternative Program).

**Circuit Breaker:** MADESE data for Circuit Breaker claims (state reimbursement for extraordinarily high cost students) for fiscal year 2010 show that Cambridge claimed 174 students for a total amount of \$10.2 million. (See Table 20.) Cambridge has 3% of overall enrollment in Circuit Breaker claims. Compared to similar districts, Cambridge has a relatively high percentage of students whose individual total costs exceed the Circuit Breaker threshold. Only Marlborough equaled Cambridge in the percent of overall enrollment eligible for Circuit Breaker. According to financial information provided by the district, the cost of day and residential out-of-district placements in Cambridge of \$12.4 million for fiscal year 2011 is about 30% of the total special education budget of \$41.6 million. According to data from MADESE, out-of-district tuition includes placement in Massachusetts public schools and collaboratives (20%) and placement in Massachusetts private and out-of-state schools (80%) in fiscal year 2009.

**Table 20 Cambridge Expenditures Per Pupil and Circuit Breaker Claims Compared to Similar Districts**

District	Grade Structure	Circuit Breaker Claims	Total FTE Pupils 2011	% of Enrollment in Circuit Breaker	Expenditures Per Pupil 2008-2009
Cambridge	K-12	174	6,019	3%	\$26,337
Fitchburg	K-12	101	4,881	2%	\$12,573
Framingham	K-12	189	8,182	2%	\$15,373
Haverhill	K-12	49	6,804	>1%	\$11,302
Marlborough	K-12	145	4,573	3%	\$13,877
New Bedford	K-12	138	12,538	1%	\$13,220
Pittsfield	K-12	48	5,978	>1%	\$12,200
Salem	K-12	79	4,565	2%	\$14,746
Somerville	K-12	71	4,855	1%	\$16,219
Waltham	K-12	86	4,796	2%	\$18,911
West Springfield	K-12	35	3,932	>1%	\$11,755
State	K-12	--	985,165		\$13,006

Note: These comparisons show similar districts on the basis of district structure, wealth, and enrollment. Other measures may be equally valid and yield different results. Source: [http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/ppx09\\_comp.aspx?ID=049](http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/ppx09_comp.aspx?ID=049). This data is from the

MADESE DART site and may not conform exactly to updated district enrollment data. Also note that the MADESE Web site data is for 2008-09.

**Per Pupil Spending:** The Cambridge expenditure per pupil is \$26,337 for fiscal year 2009 (MADESE, FY 09), exceeded only by two other districts statewide: Minuteman and South Middlesex, both regional vocational technical school districts. A comparison to similar districts shows that Cambridge exceeds all other districts in its K–12 category.

Table 21 shows CPS per pupil spending for 2009–10 in comparison to similar districts in terms of demographics and enrollment as determined by MADESE.<sup>16</sup> When compared to similar districts, per pupil spending at CPS appears high: over 100% higher than state average per pupil spending.

**Table 21 Cambridge Per Pupil Expenditures 2008-2009 Compared to Similar Districts**

<b>Educational Entity</b>	<b>Per-pupil Spending 2008-2009</b>	<b>Percentage Above/Below State</b>
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>\$26,337</b>	<b>102%</b>
Fitchburg	\$12,573	-3%
Framingham	\$15,373	18%
Haverhill	\$11,302	-13%
Marlborough	\$13,877	7%
New Bedford	\$13,220	2%
Pittsfield	\$12,200	-6%
Salem	\$14,746	13%
Somerville	\$16,219	25%
Waltham	\$18,911	45%
West Springfield	\$11,755	-10%
State	\$13,006	0%

Source: [http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/ppx09\\_comp.aspx?ID=049](http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/ppx09_comp.aspx?ID=049)

<sup>16</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, “District Analysis and Review Tool (DART),” retrieved on December 21, 2010, from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/>.

Of the 10 districts comparable to CPS, there are 6 with higher spending than the state average. Of these, the highest per pupil spending district below CPS is Waltham, 45% higher than the state per pupil spending. The next highest is Somerville, 25% higher than the state average, with the remaining four districts less than 20% higher than the state average. The comparable district with the lowest per pupil spending is Haverhill, 13% below the state average.

Table 22 shows the same information compared to districts that neighbor Cambridge geographically. Again, Cambridge is spending significantly above neighboring communities.

**Table 22 Cambridge Per Pupil Expenditures 2008-2009 Compared to Neighboring Districts**

<b>Educational Entity</b>	<b>Per-pupil Spending 2008-2009</b>	<b>Percentage Above/Below State</b>
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>\$26,337</b>	<b>102%</b>
Boston	\$17,900	38%
Brookline	\$16,847	30%
Newton	\$16,243	25%
Somerville	\$16,219	25%
State	\$13,006	0%

### **Summary of Results of the Data Analysis for the District**

Based on the above data analysis, CPS strengths and challenges are presented below, highlighting key findings of the data analysis.

#### **Strengths**

1. **Outcomes for Students with Disabilities:** When taken within the context of comparable districts and state averages, CPS performs well in terms of outcomes for students with disabilities:
  - CPS English Language Arts and Math assessment results — at 27% and 20%, respectively — on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) for students with IEPs in grades 3–8 and 10 are nearly on par with the state



proficiency rates of 28 and 21%, respectively. These proficiency rates put CPS second from the top in terms of comparable districts for ELA performance and third from the top in Math performance.

- The current CPS cohort graduation rate of 72% for students receiving IEP services compares very favorably to a state average of 65% and is the highest of any comparable district.
  - The current CPS dropout rate for special education students of 0.4% is much lower than the state dropout rate of 5.0% for special education students and is the lowest of any comparable district.
2. **IDEA Compliance:** CPS performs very well in terms of meeting the compliance requirements of IDEA as reported annually to the U.S. Department of Education by MADESE. CPS was reported as being 100% in compliance on the following three indicators during 2008–09 (the most recent year this information is available):
- All children transitioning from the IDEA Part C Birth to 3 program to the IDEA Part B age 3–21 program were reported to have an IEP in place by their third birthday.
  - All children eligible for an initial IEP evaluation had their evaluation completed within state timelines.
  - All children who were required to have an appropriate post-secondary transition plan on their IEP were reported as having such a plan included in their IEP.
3. **Least Restrictive Environment:** CPS is substantially above the state percentage of children placed in inclusive environments (70.2% versus 56.8%) and has the highest percentage in inclusive environments of any comparable district.

## Challenges

1. The data suggest a lack of a full continuum of services for students whose needs require additional time outside of the regular classroom environment but for whom an out-of-district placement may not be required:
  - CPS places nearly twice as many students in out-of-district placements (residential or day programs), on a percentage of population basis, than the state (13% versus 7%). CPS also has the highest percentage of students in these restrictive environments of any comparable district. This is not a new trend: Since the 2004–05

school year, statewide out-of-district placements have hovered under 7%, while CPS' out-of-district placements have consistently been near 13%.

- CPS, at 5.5%, has the second lowest percentage of students in partially inclusive environments (outside the general education classroom between 21% and 60% of the day) of any comparable district and is well below the state average of 21%.
2. Per pupil spending (inclusive of all students) at CPS is high compared to similar districts, neighboring districts, and the state average:
    - Per pupil spending at CPS is over 100% higher than the state average per pupil spending: \$26,337 at CPS versus the state average of \$13,006, as of 2009–10. CPS has the third highest per pupil spending in the Commonwealth, only exceeded by Minuteman (\$28,727) and South Middlesex (\$27,859).
    - Of the 10 districts comparable to CPS, none has per pupil spending near that of CPS. The highest per pupil spending district below CPS is Waltham (\$18,911), 45% higher than the state per pupil spending. The next highest is Somerville (\$16,219), 25% higher than the state average, with the remaining four districts less than 20% higher than the state average. The comparable district with the lowest per pupil spending is Haverhill (\$11,302), 13% below the state average.
    - Of the four districts that neighbor Cambridge geographically, all are considerably below Cambridge in spending per pupil.
  3. Overall Cost of Special Education: Special education as a percentage of overall expenditures is at approximately 30%. Of the total special education budget of \$41.6 M, approximately, 30% is devoted to tuition for out-of-district placements.
  4. Achievement gaps persist in ELA and Math for students with disabilities compared to non-disabled peers. Most schools did not make AYP for the students with disabilities subgroup.
  5. Child Count: CPS child count of special education students exceeds the state average and shows an escalating trend, rising from 20% in 2005–06 to 22% in 2010-11. See Tables 8 and 9.
  6. There is evidence of disproportionate representation of students from minority groups in special education in two of the district's schools.
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## Results of Interviews and Staff Focus Groups Spring 2010

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Notes from all interviews and focus groups were read/reviewed by all team members. Themes were identified by individual researchers and then discussed and collapsed/reorganized into nine focus areas: (1) Equity Issues; (2) Communication; (3) Parent and Community Involvement; (4) Professional Development; (5) General Education Capacity to Support All Students; (6) Staff Roles and Responsibilities; (7) Achievement Gap; (8) Continuum of Services; and (9) Space and Facilities. Within each focus area, themes were presented in terms of affirmative statements summarizing the main idea or point for each theme. Consensus across interview and focus group respondents should not be inferred. However, consensus across WestEd evaluators regarding the accuracy of each theme statement was obtained. If there was disagreement between evaluators regarding the interpretation or main idea of a theme, additional review of interview or focus group data and additional discussion across team members was conducted until full agreement was reached across evaluators in terms of the categories and themes that emerged from the data. The theme statements are not “conclusions” or “findings.” Rather the theme statements are preliminary statements of what the WestEd evaluators gleaned from the perceptual data offered by respondents in both interviews and focus groups. These initial impressions were validated through other data collection activities conducted in the Fall 2010. Table 23 shows the preliminary themes that emerged from the Spring 2010 focus groups and interviews for each focus area. A detailed explanation of main themes and key concepts that emerged from the Spring 2010 interviews and focus groups is included in Appendix E.

### Perceived Strengths of the Special Education Programs

The Spring 2010 staff interviews and focus groups also asked respondents to comment on the strengths of the CPS Special Education programs and services. Many respondents noted areas that they considered to be strengths and/or assets. These are summarized, below. A listing of strengths that were offered by staff is included in Appendix E.

- Strong staff competency/capacity/expertise/knowledge and skills
- Special education programs and the continuum of services available
- Autonomy versus consistency — a strength and a weakness
- Investment of resources in special education programs and services
- Leadership at the central office and building level
- Teamwork and collaboration within schools
- Values and beliefs — commitment to the children

**Table 23 Preliminary Themes — Interviews and Focus Groups Spring 2010**

<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Equity Issues	Variability, inconsistency, differential treatment
Communication	Mistrust, inconsistency, mixed messages, time constraints
Parent & Community Involvement	Differential treatment/response, more information, more communication, more outreach to diverse groups
Professional Development	Alignment, compensation, opportunity, general education/special education joint professional development
General Ed Capacity to Support all Students	Capacity development in general education, shared responsibility for all students
Staff Roles & Responsibilities	Consistency
Achievement Gap	Access and opportunity, consistency, expectations, early intervention
Continuum of Services	Differential treatment and response, inconsistency, full continuum with some gaps
Space & Facilities	Inequity, poor conditions

Note: See Appendix E for a more detailed explanation of themes.

## Results of Online Educator Survey

The online survey was sent via email to all education/teaching staff within CPS for an approximate 833 total potential respondents. There were 312 responses to the survey for a response rate of 37%. Respondents represented all schools, including the High School Extension Program (HSEP). Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) represented 21.4% of total responses. General education teachers represented 29.2% of total responses, while special education staff represented 16% of responses. Note that 125 respondents checked the category “Other” for instructional staff,

totaling 40% of respondents. Table 24 includes a complete breakdown of responses by category of self-reported job assignment.

**Table 24 Breakdown of Educator Survey Responses by School and Job Assignment**

		Number	Percent
School/Grade Level	PK–8	245	78.5%
	9–12	67	21.4%
Job Assignment	General Education Teacher	91	29.2%
	Special Education Teacher	51	16%
	Principal or Other Administrator	10	3.2%
	Paraeducator	16	5.0%
	Related Services Provider (OT/PT/SLP)	19	6.1%
	Other Instructional or Direct Service Staff	125	40%
Total		312	99.5%

The educator survey was designed to address the following seven areas:

1. Special education procedures and practices related to access to the general education curriculum, staff expectations, accommodations, and IEP services
2. Continuum of services in the district
3. General education capacity to support all students
4. Staff roles and responsibilities
5. Communication and collaboration
6. Professional development
7. Parent and community involvement

### **Special Education Procedures and Practices**

Respondents reported that staff hold high expectations for all students and that, for the most part, programs provide access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities and students receive the services they need to meet IEP goals. This section of the survey received the

highest ratings overall compared to the other six areas. The item receiving the lowest rating in this section related to the consistent implementation of curriculum and instruction across schools.

**Table 25 Special Education Procedures and Practices Related to Access to the General Education Curriculum, Staff Expectations, Accommodations, and IEP Services**

<b>SCHOOL PRACTICE</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>Not At All - Seldom/Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat/Sometimes - To a Great Extent</b>
High expectations for IEP students	3.64	1.5%	98.5%
SpEd delivery provides access for disabled students	3.51	2.7%	97.3%
IEP goals aligned with GenEd curriculum	3.53	4.5%	95.5%
Student receives services to meet IEP goals	3.54	5.1%	94.9%
Accommodations implemented across all subjects	3.22	10.2%	89.8%
Consistent curriculum and instructional methods	2.69	32.9%	67.1%

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Not At All, 2=Seldom/Rarely, 3=Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4=To a Great Extent

### **Continuum of Services**

Respondents rated these items relatively low on the continuum of implementation. While most staff indicated that there was a full continuum of placement options available within the district, they noted unclear criteria for entry and exit along the continuum. The lowest rated item in this section related to the equitable distribution of special education resources within schools across the district.

**Table 26 Continuum of Services in the District**

<b>SCHOOL PRACTICE</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>Not At All - Seldom/Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat/Sometimes - To a Great Extent</b>
Continuum of placement options in district	3.21	11.5%	88.5%
Placement decisions based on student's needs	3.31	13.0%	87.0%
Clear criteria for placement entrance	2.94	25.5%	74.5%
Clear criteria for placement exit	2.90	26.6%	73.4%
SpEd resources equitable across district	2.63	41.9%	58.1%

**General Education Capacity to Support All Students**

Respondents indicated that building-based Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) are operating somewhat effectively, that for the most part teachers know how to refer to the TAT, and that they receive TAT support. Lower ratings were received for respondents' estimation of the schools' capacity to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

**Table 27 General Education Capacity to Support All Students**

<b>SCHOOL PRACTICE</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>Not At All - Seldom/Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat/Sometimes - To a Great Extent</b>
Know how to refer student to TAT	3.59	9.1%	90.9%
Receive TAT help when asked	3.35	11.6%	88.4%
GenEd teachers differentiate instruction	3.14	13.5%	86.5%
TAT operating effectively	3.24	14.9%	85.1%
Teachers provided necessary resources	3.17	15.7%	84.3%
Capacity to implement RTI	3.16	19.5%	80.5%
Capacity to implement PBIS	3.04	25.9%	74.1%

## Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Respondents indicated that while, for the most part, special education teachers have a common understanding of roles and responsibilities, these may not be performed consistently across schools. The lowest rating in this area and third from the bottom in terms of the survey as a whole related to the equitable distribution of the workload across special education staff in the district. It is important to note, however, that 39% of respondents offered a “Don’t Know” response to this question. (See also the General Education/Special Education comparison, in Table 33, below.)

**Table 28 Staff Roles and Responsibilities**

SCHOOL PRACTICE	MEAN	Not At All - Seldom/Rarely	Somewhat/Sometimes - To a Great Extent
SpEd common understanding of roles and resp	3.43	10.5%	89.5%
SpEd staff perform consistently	3.11	21.5%	78.5%
Equitable workload across SpEd staff	2.52	42.2%	57.8%

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Not At All, 2=Seldom/Rarely, 3=Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4=To a Great Extent

## Communication and Collaboration

Respondents indicated relatively low implementation ratings for the delivery of consistent messages across schools and from the Central Office, support from the Central Office to schools, and consistent interpretation of policies and procedures across schools. The lowest ratings in this area and the survey as a whole were with regard to the opportunity for special education staff to share expertise with each other and for common planning time for general and special education teachers to collaboratively plan instruction.



**Table 29      Communication and Collaboration**

<b>SCHOOL PRACTICE</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>Not At All - Seldom/Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat/Sometimes - To a Great Extent</b>
School Admins deliver consistent messages	3.16	18.8%	81.2%
OSE Admins deliver consistent messages	3.10	23.7%	76.3%
OSE Admins support SpEd implementation	3.04	26.0%	74.0%
Consistent interpretation of SpEd policy and procedures	2.80	34.2%	65.8%
Common instruction planning time	2.51	49.4%	50.6%
Opportunities to SpEd staff to share expertise	2.45	56.3%	43.8%

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Not At All, 2=Seldom/Rarely, 3=Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4=To a Great Extent

### **Professional Development**

While the inclusion of special education staff in general education professional development opportunities received a relatively high implementation rating, lower ratings were reported for the degree to which paraeducators have professional development opportunities, the degree to which staff evaluations are used to identify professional development needs, and the degree to which there are opportunities for general education teachers to learn about the instructional needs of students with disabilities and for special education teachers to learn about the general education curriculum. Respondents were also asked to prioritize their needs for professional development given a number of topics. Although staff ratings for schools' capacity to implement RTI and PBIS were relatively high (see Table 27) the top three priorities across all respondents for professional development were: (1) PBIS; (2) RTI; and (3) differentiated instruction.

**Table 30 Professional Development**

<b>SCHOOL PRACTICE</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>Not At All - Seldom/Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat/Sometimes - To a Great Extent</b>
ProfDev aligned with student achievement	3.30	9.1%	90.9%
SpEd staff included in GenEd ProfDev opportunities	3.46	10.7%	89.3%
SpEd can learn GenEd curriculum and programs	3.01	24.2%	75.8%
Paraprofessionals can attend ProfDev	3.06	25.3%	74.7%
Admins use evaluations to ID ProfDev needs	3.06	27.8%	72.2%
GenEd can learn special instruction for GenEd room	2.70	38.7%	61.3%

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Not At All, 2=Seldom/Rarely, 3=Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4=To a Great Extent

### **Parent and Community Involvement**

Respondents gave relatively high implementation ratings for practices including helping parents to understand the special education evaluation and eligibility determination process, considering parents as equal partners with school personnel, and giving equitable consideration to parent requests. Respondents perceived that, for the most part, parents know and exercise their rights.

**Table 31 Parent and Community Involvement**

<b>SCHOOL PRACTICE</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>Not At All - Seldom/Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat/Sometimes - To a Great Extent</b>
Teachers consider parents equal partners	3.61	5.3%	94.7%
Teachers help parents with SpEd determinations	3.63	6.3%	93.7%
Parental involvement encouraged by teachers	3.56	7.0%	93.0%
Parents know their rights	3.38	8.3%	91.7%
Parents exercise their rights	3.32	9.1%	90.9%
All parent requests are considered equitably	3.46	11.0%	89.0%

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Not At All, 2=Seldom/Rarely, 3=Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4=To a Great Extent

Table 32 shows the survey results for all survey items, including percentages of the extent to which a practice was rated as implemented as well as the mean score for each item. Note that the rating scale was on a four-point continuum showing the extent to which a particular practice was perceived to be implemented. Rating choices were as follows: 1= Not at all, 2 = Seldom/Rarely, 3 = Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4 = To a great extent. There was also a “Don’t Know” category of responses. “Don’t Know” responses were removed prior to calculation of results so that the means and percentages reflect the percent of respondents who rated the item on the four-point scale. Items are listed in descending order beginning with the items showing the highest degree of perceived implementation of the practice. While means are not an exact measure of central tendency of ordinal data, means may be useful as a general comparison across survey items.

**Table 32 Educator Survey Results: Means and Percentages — Degree of Implementation of School Practices**

<b>School Practice</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>Not At All - Seldom/Rarely</b>	<b>Somewhat/Sometimes - To a Great Extent</b>
High expectations for IEP Students	3.64	1.5%	98.5%
SpEd delivery provides access for disabled students	3.51	2.7%	97.3%
IEP goals aligned with GenEd curriculum	3.53	4.5%	95.5%
Student receives services to meet IEP goals	3.54	5.1%	94.9%
Teachers consider parents equal partners	3.61	5.3%	94.7%
Teachers help parents with SpEd determinations	3.63	6.3%	93.7%
Parental involvement encouraged by teachers	3.56	7.0%	93.0%
Parents know their rights	3.38	8.3%	91.7%
Know how to refer student to TAT	3.59	9.1%	90.9%
Prof Dev aligned with student achievement	3.30	9.1%	90.9%
Parents exercise their rights	3.32	9.1%	90.9%
Accommodations implemented across all subjects	3.22	10.2%	89.8%
SpEd common understanding of roles and responsibilities	3.43	10.5%	89.5%
SpEd staff included in GenEd Prof Dev opportunities	3.46	10.7%	89.3%
All parent requests are considered equitably	3.46	11.0%	89.0%
Continuum of placement options in district	3.21	11.5%	88.5%
Receive TAT help when asked	3.35	11.6%	88.4%
Placement decisions based on student's needs	3.31	13.0%	87.0%
GenEd teachers differentiate instruction	3.14	13.5%	86.5%
TAT operating effectively	3.24	14.9%	85.1%
Teachers provided necessary resources	3.17	15.7%	84.3%
School Admins deliver consistent messages	3.16	18.8%	81.2%
Capacity to implement RTI	3.16	19.5%	80.5%
SpEd staff perform consistently	3.11	21.5%	78.5%
OSE Admins deliver consistent messages	3.10	23.7%	76.3%
SpEd can learn GenEd curriculum and programs	3.01	24.2%	75.8%
Paraprofessionals can attend Prof Dev	3.06	25.3%	74.7%
Clear criteria for placement entrance	2.94	25.5%	74.5%
Capacity to implement PBIS	3.04	25.9%	74.1%
OSE Admins support SpEd implementation	3.04	26.0%	74.0%
Clear criteria for placement exit	2.90	26.6%	73.4%
Admins use evaluations to ID Prof Dev needs	3.06	27.8%	72.2%
Consistent curriculum and instructional methods	2.69	32.9%	67.1%
Consistent interpretation of SpEd policy and procedures	2.80	34.2%	65.8%
GenEd can learn special instruction for GenEd room	2.70	38.7%	61.3%
SpEd resources equitable across district	2.63	41.9%	58.1%
Equitable workload across SpEd staff	2.52	42.2%	57.8%
Common instruction planning time	2.51	49.4%	50.6%
Opportunities to SpEd staff to share expertise	2.45	56.3%	43.8%

## Open-ended Questions

In addition to demographic information and the Likert-scaled items, the survey also contained four open-ended questions: (1) What do you think is most needed to close the achievement gap for students with disabilities? (2) Are there any gaps in the continuum of services within the Cambridge Public Schools? And, if yes, what are they? (3) What in your experience has been the biggest barrier to involving parents in their children's education? (4) What is the most successful strategy you have used to engage and involve parents?

**Closing the Gap:** The vast majority of respondents completed this open-ended item, some with lengthy explanations and suggestions. The initial screen sorted responses into two categories: (1) strategies over which the school district has control and (2) factors outside of school over which the school district has no direct control or influence. The majority of respondents noted a variety of strategies that the school district could implement to help address the "achievement gap." A minority mentioned factors outside school control, such as elimination of poverty, better parenting, housing, health care, more community supports for families, etc. Within the broad category of factors over which the school district has control or at least opportunity to influence, the following categories or themes emerged: (1) professional development; (2) planning time; (3) collaboration between general and special education; (3) consistency and alignment of curriculum across schools; and (4) more services, staff, programs, materials, instructional time, and money. Respondents, as a whole, clearly see that there are many strategies that could be implemented to address the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. There was tremendous variability, however, across respondents in terms of the strategies suggested.

**Gaps in the Continuum:** Only 44% of respondents answered this open-ended question. The other 56% of respondents indicated that they did not know. Of those who did respond, 91% indicated that there were "gaps" in the continuum of service delivery and placement options offered through the Cambridge Public Schools. Gaps in the continuum that were noted by multiple respondents included: (1) services for emotionally disturbed and/or behavior disordered students; (2) integrated Kindergarten classes; (3) more opportunities for co-teaching across schools; (4) opportunities for "partial inclusion;" and (5) a resource room/learning center option at the high school level. Other comments related to gaps in programming for students learning English as a second language who also have a disability, and to the issue of transition, particularly from middle school to high school, as well as from one school to another for categorical sub-separate classrooms.

**Barriers to Parent Involvement:** Sixty-six percent of respondents answered this question. Responses were first categorized by whether the barrier to parent involvement rested with the parent or with the school/district. The vast majority of responses placed the barrier with the

parent(s), and the largest categories of responses related to the following issues: (1) work schedules; (2) languages other than English; and (3) cultural or attitudinal issues regarding acceptance of disability and the perceived stigma attached to being in special education.

**Successful Strategies for Parent Engagement:** Sixty-five percent of respondents answered this question. The largest category of strategies that respondents reported had been successful in engaging parents was frequent, positive, respectful, personal contact with parents by email, phone, written, or face-to-face. Respondents reported that building a positive relationship takes time and effort and a variety of approaches. Some strategies included sending daily or weekly communication “logs” or notebooks back and forth between home and school so that parents would be informed about their child’s progress on an ongoing basis. Several respondents recommended inviting parents to observe their class or therapy session in school. Others recommended home visits, providing refreshments at school meetings, providing translators or interpreters, visibility in the community, flexibility in scheduling meeting times, arranging carpools, and overall open, consistent, and persistent efforts to involve and communicate with parents.

**General Education/Special Education Comparison:** The two largest groups of respondents for the Educator Survey were (1) general education teachers (29%) and (2) special educators (16%).<sup>17</sup> Responses for these two categories of personnel were compared. Table 33 shows items on the survey where there was a 20 percentage point difference or more between general and special education teacher responses. General and special education teacher ratings of five survey items showed a discrepancy of 20 percentage points or greater, indicating a difference in perception between the two groups of teachers with regard to these items: (1) the degree to which placement decisions are made based on the needs of the individual student; (2) the degree to which special education resources are equitable across schools in the district; (3) the degree to which general education teachers know how to differentiate instruction to address the diverse needs of students; (4) the degree to which there is consistency across schools in the implementation of special education policies and procedures; and (5) the degree to which there are opportunities for special education teachers to share expertise and collaborate with each other.

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<sup>17</sup> Note the special educator category includes respondents who checked any of the following five job assignments: Teacher in Charge, PK Special Education, Itinerant Special Education Teacher, Inclusion Specialist, and Sub-Separate Class.

**Table 33 Comparison of General and Special Education Teacher Responses to Selected Survey Items Rated Somewhat/Sometimes and To a Great Extent**

Survey Item	GenEd %	SpEd %	Discrepancy
Placement decisions based on individual student's educational needs	72.5%	95.0%	22.5 points
SpEd resources equitable in schools across district	44.0%	75.0%	31.0 points
GenEd teachers know how to differentiate instruction	93.8%	70.7%	23.1 points
Workload equitably distributed across SpEd staff	37.2%	63.6%	26.4 points
Consistency across schools regarding interpretation of SpEd policies and procedures	50.0%	70.6%	20.6 points
Opportunities for SpEd staff to share expertise	55.6%	31.6%	24.0 points

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Not At All, 2=Seldom/Rarely, 3=Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4=To a Great Extent

**Paraeducators:** Paraeducators employed in Cambridge Public Schools were included in the survey. Sixteen responses from paraeducators were received, representing seven schools and approximately 15% of the 107 paraeducators employed in the district. (See Table 4.) The educational level of responding paraeducators was high. Eighty-one percent of responding paraeducators indicated that they had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Responses of paraeducators to the survey's Likert-scaled items were, for the most part, in line with those of the total respondent pool, with some exceptions. It is important to note that paraeducator respondents frequently checked the "Don't Know" option. Therefore, "Don't Know" responses were removed from the calculation of percentage of agreement with each item.

The items on the survey that paraeducators rated the lowest in terms of the degree to which the practice was occurring were (1) there are ongoing opportunities for paraeducators to attend district-wide professional development (54.5% agreement); (2) the workload is equitably distributed across special education staff across the district (50.0% agreement); and (3) there are opportunities for special education staff to share expertise with each other across the district (28.6% agreement).

Table 34 shows items on the survey where there was a 20 percentage point difference or more between paraeducators and the responses of the total respondent pool. Three survey items showed a discrepancy of 20 percentage points or greater, indicating a difference in perception between the

paraeducators and the total respondents with regard to these items. It is important to note that of the 16 responding paraeducators, only 13 answered the Likert-scaled items. In addition, more than 30% of respondents checked the “Don’t Know” response option for 24 out of the 39 Likert-scaled items (62%). Paraeducators indicated that their top three priorities for professional development were: (1) PBIS; (2) differentiated instruction; and (3) literacy.

**Table 34 Comparison of Paraeducator Responses to Selected Survey Items Rated Somewhat/Sometimes and To a Great Extent Compared to Overall Responses**

Survey Item	Overall %	Para %	Discrepancy
Consistency across schools regarding interpretation of SpEd policies and procedures	65.8%	100%	34.2 points
Administrators use staff evaluations to identify professional development needs	72.2%	100%	27.8 points
Opportunities for paraeducators to attend district-wide professional development	74.7%	54.5%	20.2 points

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Not At All, 2=Seldom/Rarely, 3=Somewhat/Sometimes, and 4=To a Great Extent

## Results of Parent Focus Groups

The following is a summary of the feedback given during the five parent/guardian focus groups. A complete Parent Focus Group Report is attached as Appendix J. A total of 24 parents (or guardians) participated in the focus groups. Two were males, the rest females, representing children of most grades, a range of disabilities, in-district and out-of-district placements, and members of the Cambridge Parent Advisory Council on Special Education (C-PAC). Since very nearly all focus group parents/guardians were White, the focus group participants are not representative of the population of parents in Cambridge as a whole.

### Successes

In every focus group, parents were first asked to share the successes they or their children had experienced through Cambridge special education programs and services.



**School/Teacher/Principal Approach:** Several parents mentioned their child had experienced success because of the particular school approach to special education, or because a teacher, service provider, instructional aide, or guidance counselor had shown knowledge and understanding about the child’s disability and had gone the extra mile to ensure the child received the needed assistance. Comments were also made about effective leadership and support from some principals, and Special Start was noted as a very positive and successful model for early childhood special education. For example:

- *“My success is about the Special Start program. That was really good for our [child] who has a language based learning disability. We were extremely frustrated that they don’t continue an appropriate program like that at least into Kindergarten and through the primary grades.”*
- *“The successes my child had at Haggerty were due to teachers who stood on their heads to make [my child] feel accepted ... and a principal who modeled inclusion ... an exceptional principal.”*
- *“An exceptional Kindergarten teacher who could meet the needs of students, especially those with behavioral issues.”*
- *“Physics class ... my [child] was challenged there; felt respected; assignments were perfectly laid out so it worked...”*
- *“[The] principal was big on inclusion and modeled it. His motto was: ‘Everyone is different, but everyone belongs.’”*
- *“The Principal at King Open was great. At certain points he instructed the [IEP] team to listen to us. He said, ‘Listen to the parents.’ That’s huge.”*

**Out-of-District Placement:** Another success most often mentioned by focus group parents was a sense of relief parents felt when their child was moved to out-of-district status and placed in a school outside of Cambridge. Parents related that students who were placed out-of-district were experiencing more success, being treated well, and were happier. One parent gained a clearer understanding of the IEP process when exposed to it out-of-district; and another wondered aloud why Cambridge has not implemented certain programs that work well in other places. For example:

- *“As a parent, the greatest success was when I got a good educational consultant and lawyer who knows every player in the field, and we, with great difficulty, won an out-placement.”*
- *“[My child] moved to out-of-district placement. For the first time, has friends in the classroom; was much more able to cope; and is proficient in all areas of the MCAS.”*
- *“When we hear about successful programs like at ‘Carroll,’ we wonder ‘Why don’t we use those and make system-wide changes [in Cambridge]?’”*

**Parental Persistence:** Parents also shared successes that had been achieved, as they put it, “through a lot of hard work and struggle on the part of the parent,” and emphasized that these successes could not be credited to the Cambridge Public Schools or to the Office of Special Education. These parents pointed out some of the efforts they expended to succeed in getting their children the services they needed. For example:

- *“My child succeeded with a great deal of work on our part as parents. Nothing about the school system. My [child] was immediately flagged for a [visible disability] ... got services for that. Things went well until the OG provider got ill and didn’t show up. No one told us [parents].”*
- *“When [our] child was first diagnosed, we asked for OG or a Wilson certified instructor. We were told there was no such person in the district. After mediation, [the district] got someone who was Wilson certified. Eventually, the special educator went out and got certified in Wilson and bought in wholeheartedly.*
- *“We had to fight to get an in-class aide. Any progress our [child] has made over the last two years has been a result of this aide. This constant aide has been a huge gift. Based on the marvelous qualities of this individual ... not anything systemic or replicable ... [it’s] so subtle and intuitive.”*

## Challenges

These focus group parents/guardians described a wide range of frustrations with many components of the system, including: inconsistency of services; poor communication; inaccessible and unresponsive staff, specialists, and OSE personnel; inadequately trained staff; rude and disrespectful treatment; a fearful and dishonest climate; and insufficient support for teachers. Parents claimed they spend a lot of time educating themselves so they can educate the teachers and OSE about their children’s disabilities. Focus group parents were under the impression that the Cambridge staff lack an appropriate understanding of the laws governing special education, and vary tremendously in expertise, approach, acceptance, and attitude toward special education students.

- *“The differences between kids with disabilities are so subtle sometimes ... not always visible ... no two kids are exactly the same.”*
- *“There’s no one to help you through this as a parent — you’re in denial at first. [I] had to read a dozen books and become an expert on Asperger’s Syndrome. Every kid is completely different.”*
- *“There seems to be a gap in understanding what’s legal or illegal by just about everyone. That’s why parents have had to hire lawyers and advocates and educate themselves.”*

- *“The schools are too ready to expel, suspend kids.”*
- *“Controlled choice, controlled chaos ... if this school doesn’t work, go someplace else. But there’s the importance of being in a community and staying with your peers.”*

**Equity:** Focus group parents shared concerns about inequities in services and also in the way they believe parents are treated. They stated that under-represented populations in Cambridge were likely not able to advocate for their children in the same ways as other populations. Most agreed with statements like *“There is no equity in the provision of special education services,”* from their own personal observations. A few shared that they had “heard” about inequities, e.g., *“Well, for me ... I’m not really in a position to know, but I [know someone] who works in the district who says, ‘It’s the parents who have the confidence and the money to push for a result that get it.’”* Other equity issues discussed included the imbalance of parent volunteerism at different schools, the unfair expectations of some teachers/staff, and the high proportion of non-white students in substantially separate classrooms. For example:

- *“... White, highly educated parents that can afford legal counsel are the ones that can successfully advocate for their children.”*
- *“I am concerned about equity. If I am having these problems — understanding the special education process and getting the services that my [child] is entitled to — I can’t imagine what happens to parents that do not speak English, or come from other cultures, or parents that are poor.”*
- *I think the school system is doing the bare minimum of engaging parents and showing them they are important. I’ve heard too many times ‘...but parents don’t come.’ Why? Fix that! It’s a systemic problem! Even in this room, there’s a lack of diversity ... here we are ... predominantly white.”*
- *“It’s hearsay, I haven’t spent that much time in other schools, but I’m not sure the SPED PAC has had this kind of conversation. It’s acknowledged, but my concern is about parent volunteerism ... there is a huge discrepancy school to school.”*
- *“One thing that the special ed staff and general ed staff almost always get wrong is that LD students must, first and foremost, advocate for themselves. Many of these kids cannot do so and are left to fend for themselves because they have broken this cardinal rule. I think that the teachers must take responsibility for reaching out to these kids. The kids should not be made to reach out to the teachers first.”*

**Inconsistency of Services:** Sometimes parents noted their child had experienced a good start in either a particular school or with a particular intervention or strategy, and as the child moved up in grade level, those services tended to deteriorate. Others shared that a particular strategy or

curriculum or intervention had been working well for their child, and then suddenly it changed or ceased, sometimes without notice or explanation to the parent. Still others had to move their child to a different school in order to get needs met. For example:

- “ ... at one point when [my child] had a truly great year with a great teacher, they took all the supports away. The next year went disastrously.”
- “Every year it’s a new battle — one year, a good general education teacher and a good special education teacher might be there, and things go well. The next year, back to ground zero, starting all over again. No consistency across the district or across grades of the level of quality of services, instruction, professionalism, understanding, etc.”
- “My [child] started at [one] school where the principal just didn’t ‘get’ special education at all and that filtered down to the staff. Moved [the child] to [another school] ... did much better; child feels accepted. Teachers go out of their way to maximize strengths.”

Another inconsistency of services reported by parents had to do with students being forced to change schools throughout the elementary years due to the set-up for substantially separate classrooms. This concern was raised often, and one parent explained it this way:

- “Children in substantially separate classrooms for behavioral disabilities or autism spectrum disorders must change schools three times during their educational careers. The Superintendent tried to push for this to change, because that kind of disruption is bad for these most vulnerable special education students. It also raises a question of whether kids in substantially separate classrooms are truly included in their school community ... if they and their parents have to get to know new schools every few years, how does that affect the parents’ ability to advocate for their child? How does that affect the children’s sense of belonging to a school community? This is truly unjust, and I don’t think the PAC has spoken out against it. The school committee failed to implement the Superintendent’s recommendations.”

Other concerns parents raised with regard to inconsistency of services included children missing important class time due to pull-outs; a slow start-up of services as the new year begins, and fewer supports being provided near the end of the school year; lack of summer programs; important information about a child getting lost or never being passed on to the next teacher; and students not getting [the service] that is written in their plan, i.e., “[S/He’s] supposed to get one-on-one; but the aide had half the class.” Parents also noted transitions were not well planned and that once a child reached high school, there was a strong push to “get them off IEPs and onto 504s.”

**Communication:** Parents described issues with communication ranging from not receiving the basic notices that they believe should be sent home, such as when a teacher or aide is out sick, to

not being informed about the C-PAC, to not hearing about important issues in a timely or accurate manner, to an overall sense of miscommunication or lack of honest communication. For example:

- *“Teachers are under extreme constraints not to say anything — no one said what [my child] needed was out-of-district placement. Not until after we finally got it did the teachers say, ‘Oh, that’s good, that’s what s/he needed.’ There’s a huge atmosphere of mistrust and people not being able to tell the truth.”*
- *“Parents don’t get informed when their kids’ teacher or service provider goes on leave, or is sick, or just doesn’t show up. Basic communication lacks.”*
- *“Communication is contradictory — I hear from a teacher that [my child’s] doing great, just great; then I hear three weeks later, ‘Oh, this week was much better than the last three ... Huh? I never heard about [that] ... just that [my child] was doing great. So, it’s hard to trust it.”*
- *“At school, some of the most successful interactions I’ve had have been informal — like when the special educator walks by and I’m in the library ... serendipitously. And that’s not good enough. I have tried so many times to put communication in the IEP; but meetings don’t get set up unless I insist.”*

**Individual Education Plans (IEPs):** Parents noted that often they did not feel acknowledged or heard during IEP meetings; and they find it necessary to bring in advocates, doctors, or legal representatives. Parents stated that sometimes OSE staff were not present at the IEP meetings or when they were, they were seen as blockers and gate keepers to save resources, not to engage or express interest in the welfare of children. Parents also mentioned that the IEPs are “cookie cutter” or “boiler plate” documents that don’t allow for individualization, consist of many pages and are not easy to understand, often don’t contain what the parent expected, and often have language that is too vague and doesn’t ensure the child will receive the appropriate or promised intervention/accommodation. One noted that the *“onus is on the child to fit whatever model or teaching appropriation or intervention”* the OSE decides to put in place. For example:

- *“The formation of the IEP is a frustrating process. Even with assistance and insistence on language that includes clear and measurable goals, I feel we still have this progress report run around where [goals] are not clearly measured. Or accurately reported is maybe more the issue. The document itself is enormous ... 16 or 18 pages with progress reports. And they only work with the service delivery grid — that seems to be the only part they look at. Not the vision statement or the description of your child’s disability. My child needed accommodations [that were] clearly written and weren’t delivered.”*
- *“The document and process has to be fluid, flexible; parents need to be real partners, be respected and recognized by the IEP team.”*

- *“I have seen the district write things in the IEP and then not do it.”*
- *“Sometimes the OSE staff is intimidating and not helpful at IEP meetings.”*
- *“At some IEP meetings, there is no decision maker; thus nothing gets done, even though that means they’re out of compliance. Certain decisions cannot be made unless the head of OSE is present, i.e., out-of-district placement.”*
- *“The [external consultant] I paid to come said it was the worse meeting they’d ever been in — very unprofessional — teacher was arrogant — I’m crying — there was one special educator ...”*
- *“Why can some parents get specific things written into the IEP, and others cannot? For example, ‘multi-sensory’ ... not Wilson. Another’s says ‘a consultant certified in floor time’ ... elsewhere in the IEP it’ll say ‘play-based’ ... this way they can do whatever they want.”*
- *“Teachers do no learning on the job — no collecting of data — no thinking about what’s working or what isn’t — both special education and general education — there’s no questioning by the teachers — the onus is put on the child — he’s not responding to this approach or this therapy — there’s something wrong with the kid. It’s backward — onus on the child to fit whatever model or teaching approach or intervention ...”*

**School Climate/Staff Expertise and Accessibility:** Parents described variations they find in the atmosphere in schools, the attitude of teachers, staff and administrators, and the approach being taken toward special education students across the 13 schools in Cambridge. Several comments were made about climate in schools, a lack of welcoming environment for working class, culturally, racially, linguistically diverse parents. One noted *“The climate is dependent on the individual classroom teacher.”* Parents stated they believe teachers are unable to speak the truth, and won’t write up “strategies” that work from fear of getting in trouble. It was also heard that teacher/parent relationships can start off collegial, but when parents ask for more services or begin saying what they think their child needs, i.e., an out-of-district placement, the collegiality dissolves. Focus group parents also reported they believe staff expertise and qualifications for teaching special education students vary greatly across the district. They also noted that general education teachers lack training in inclusion and how to teach with special education students in their classrooms.

- *“Accommodations that teachers do that work are not written in IEPs and are hidden from OSE staff ... or they risk ‘being in trouble.’”*
- *“I think well of the teachers and the principal, but it was not so collegial when we started saying we think this child needs an out-placement.”*
- *“It becomes a mindset clash — teachers who don’t get it or refuse to get it — and mistreat kids with language that is inappropriate.”*

- *“General educators and special educators need to be certified in Orton Gillingham, a program that’s proven to work well for dyslexia; Cambridge keeps using Reading Recovery which doesn’t work for these kids. A simple solution is to go to OG, but [Cambridge] wastes energy on things that don’t work.”*
- *“Specialists who know nothing about your child’s disability are treating them.”*

**District/OSE Climate:** Focus group parents strongly suggested a need for a change in the “climate” in the Office of Special Education. They noted that upon entering, no one personally welcomes or greets visitors who have to wait to be asked if they can be helped, and the physical building also needs repairs. In addition, parents mentioned a reluctance on the part of staff to deliver some services due to an “old school [way of] thinking” that was hampering progress.

- *“Old school thinking on the part of administration and some teachers; not comfortable doing the accommodations ... even when it’s written that the child needs something, i.e., being in a different room for a test. Teacher said, ‘Oh I didn’t want to make [the child] feel different.’”*
- *“The general climate ... contrary to what’s in the Strategic Plan ... the district operates in a scarcity model. That resources are limited, if we give to you, can’t give to someone else ... then the guilt plays in. Then there’s competition. Then [they] sit back and have this gate keeping role that doesn’t feel like it’s serving your kid. [They’re] protecting the whole pie without meeting the needs as fully as they could.”*
- *“Change the energy ... [OSE staff] spend a lot of energy resisting ... energy that could be spent getting our kids better ... I have no doubt they could improve the lives of our kids, but they spend their energy resisting ... our kids get worse, and the clock is ticking.”*

Focus group parents offered many suggestions for improving the special education programs and services in Cambridge. These are included in the full focus group report attached as Appendix J.

## Results of the Parent Survey

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Of an estimated 1,200 potential respondents PK–12, 233 surveys were returned, yielding a 19% response rate. Slightly under half of responding parents were White (48.9%) with the remaining parents self-reporting race in one of three other categories: African American, Hispanic, or Asian. The largest category of disability represented was specific learning disabilities (32.4%). Sixty percent of student placements were in the regular classroom. Table 35 shows the demographic breakdown of responses.

**Table 35 Breakdown of Parent Survey Responses by Grade Level, Disability, Placement, and Race/Ethnicity**

		Number	Percent
<b>Grade Level</b>	Pre-Kindergarten	12	5.3%
	K–8	148	65.85%
	9–12	61	27.1%
	Other	4	1.8%
<b>Disability</b>	Specific Learning	71	32.4%
	Emotional	12	5.5%
	Autism	17	7.8%
	Sensory Impairment	4	1.8%
	Health Impairment	1	0.5%
	Communication	11	5.0%
	Developmental Delay	14	6.4%
	Other Categories	89	40.6%
<b>Placement</b>	Regular Classroom	137	60.1%
	Pull-Out/Push-In	31	13.6%
	Sub-Separate/Special Class	18	7.9%
	Out-of-District Placement	21	9.2%
	Other	21	9.2%
<b>Race</b>	White/Caucasian	111	48.9%
	African American	43	18.9%
	Hispanic	20	8.8%
	Asian	14	6.2%
	Other	39	17.2%

Note: “No responses” were removed from the calculation.



**Response to Likert-Scaled Items:** Parent survey responses to the Likert-scaled items are reported in Table 36. The survey was intended to solicit information on parent experiences with regard to special education through the Cambridge Public Schools. Responses reflect parent perceptions of the services their children have received and the quality of their interaction with the school district. Rating choices were as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree. Agree and Strongly Agree responses were combined for an overall agreement rating for each item. Similarly, Disagree and Strongly Disagree responses were combined for an overall disagreement rating. Items are listed in descending order beginning with the items showing the highest percent overall agreement. “Don’t Know” responses were removed from the calculation. Means for each item are also included. While means are not an exact measure of central tendency of ordinal data, means may be useful as a general comparison across survey items. A sample survey is included in Appendix F.

The items with which parents expressed the greatest degree of agreement related to acceptance and a feeling of being welcomed in the school community for both themselves and their child. A majority of parents also agreed that they understand parent rights in special education and that their child’s teachers understand and celebrate their child’s strengths. The majority reported that they know whom to contact if there is a problem or concern and that they are treated with respect by school personnel. Parents reported slightly higher agreement that they communicated regularly with their child’s regular classroom teacher than with the special education teacher. The majority of parents reported that their child has access to the general education curriculum, that their child’s IEP is appropriate and designed to report progress, that their child is making progress on IEP goals and objectives, and that their child’s placement is in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The majority of responding parents also indicated that the C-PAC is effective in supporting parents.

The survey items with the lowest percentages of overall agreement related to (1) accessibility of Central Office administrators (73.6%); (2) receipt of regular updates on child’s progress (73.5%); and (3) the provision of all of the accommodations on child’s IEP (68.6%).

**Table 36 Cambridge Special Education Parent Survey — Means and Percentage of Items Rated Disagree/Strongly Disagree and Agree/Strongly Agree**

Survey Statement	MEAN	% DISAGREE (Disagree to Strongly Disagree)	% AGREE (Agree to Strongly Agree)
I Feel Welcomed in Child’s School	3.36	8.8%	91.2%
Child Feels Welcomed and Accepted	3.32	9.3%	90.7%
Appropriate Placement (LRE)	3.17	11.1%	88.9%
Understand IEP rights	3.22	11.8%	88.2%
Teachers Understand Child’s Strengths	3.25	14.7%	85.3%
Treated With Respect	3.22	15.4%	84.6%
Know Whom to Call with Questions	3.21	15.6%	84.4%
Special Ed Teacher Knowledgeable	3.20	16.6%	83.4%
Access to General Education	3.10	16.7%	83.3%
Communicate with Classroom Teacher	3.24	16.9%	83.1%
PAC Effective in Supporting Parents	3.15	17.1%	82.9%
Child Receives FAPE	3.12	17.6%	82.4%
Teachers have High Expectations	3.16	18.1%	81.9%
IEP Measures Progress	3.09	18.2%	81.8%
Special Ed Provides Accommodations	3.12	19.6%	80.4%
Receives All Services on IEP	3.09	19.7%	80.3%
Communicate with Special Ed Teacher	3.13	20.7%	79.3%
Child Making IEP Progress	3.04	21.5%	78.5%
Equal Partner in Decisions	3.07	22.2%	77.8%
General Education Teacher Knowledgeable	2.96	26.3%	73.7%
Accessible Administrators — CPS/OSE	2.92	26.4%	73.6%
Receive Regular Updates	2.96	26.5%	73.5%
General Ed Provides Accommodations	2.91	31.4%	68.6%

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree

“Don’t Know” responses were removed from the calculation.

**Survey Responses Disaggregated by Race:** When parent responses are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, a somewhat different picture emerges. Table 37 shows items on the survey where there was a 10 percentage point difference or more between White parents and parents of all other races. White and Non-White categories on six survey items showed a discrepancy of 10 percentage points or greater, indicating a difference in perception between the two groups of parents with regard to these items: (1) Accessible Administrators — CPS/OSE; (2) PAC Effective in Supporting Parents; (3) Treated with Respect; (4) Child Making IEP Progress; (5) Equal Partner in Decisions; and (6) Child Feels Welcomed. In all cases, White parents rated the item lower than Non-White parents in terms of their degree of agreement.

**Table 37 Comparison of White and Parents of All other Races — Responses to Selected Survey Items Rated Agree and Strongly Agree**

Survey Item	White % Agree	Non-White % Agree	Discrepancy
Accessible Administrators — CPS/OSE	52.9%	67.0%	14.1 points
PAC Effective in Supporting Parents	46.7%	60.2%	13.5 points
Treated with Respect	77.3%	90.5%	13.2 points
Child Making IEP Progress	67.6%	79.6%	12.0 points
Equal Partner in Decisions	71.9%	83.3%	11.4 points
Child Feels Welcomed	85.0%	95.3%	10.3 points

Note: Rating choices were as follows:

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree

Agree and Strongly Agree categories were combined for an overall rating of agreement.

**Open-ended Responses:** Parents were also provided with the opportunity to comment in response to the question: “What suggestions do you have for strengthening/improving special education programs and services in Cambridge Public Schools?” Several themes emerged from parent comments in the following categories: (1) communication; (2) continuum of services; (3) transitions; (4) professional development; and (5) equity in treatment.

**Communication:** A theme in the open-ended responses was that parents would like more frequent communication and progress updates, a more timely and proactive approach on the part of

the district and school personnel, a less adversarial relationship with the CPS Central Office/OSE, and the development of a consistent “culture of responsiveness” throughout the district to parent questions, concerns, and input. Several parents mentioned the need for interpreters and translation to facilitate communication with parents.

- *“More regular communication — at this point the only communication is from therapists and the service provider. I didn’t know when my child’s services started. I found out incidentally from his classroom teacher.”*
- *“Better communication with parents, more often, more specific about how to help children complete homework and study, especially for ‘specials.’”*
- *“I know that, technically, the team chair is meant to be the point person, but I have found that having someone to communicate with on a more consistent basis than just quarterly, has really smoothed away a lot of potential problems.”*
- *“I believe that as long as the line is kept open for communication, everything will work out.”*

**Continuum of Services:** A number of parents commented on what they considered to be a “gap” in the continuum of services and placement options available in the district, particularly for children with what were referred to as “language-based learning disabilities.” Specifically, responding parents would like to see programs including Lindamood Bell, Orton-Gillingham, and the Wilson Reading System used more extensively or consistently with more one-to-one tutoring outside the regular classroom. They implied that out-of-district placements for some students might be avoided if these options were more widely available locally. A few other parents suggested expanding after-school support for students so that they would not need to be pulled out of class during the school day. A number of parents mentioned the co-teaching models that are available at the high school and at the Haggerty School as options that were working well and should be more widely available. The integrated classrooms for preschool children through Special Start were also mentioned as an exemplary placement option, and a number of responding parents would like to see this option extended into Kindergarten and elementary school. Some parents noted that the concept of “inclusion” extends beyond the classroom and needs to be addressed across environments including lunch, hallways, after-school programs, etc.

- *“There is ‘full inclusion’ and ‘substantially separate’ but no in between; rarely do individual schools have the resources to provide ‘partial inclusion.’”*

**Transitions:** A number of parents commented on the difficulty that children have with transitions, from one grade to the next, from school to school, from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle, and especially from middle to high school. “Transition planning” for exiting

or graduating high school students was also mentioned as a critical area and one that needs improvement. One parent specifically mentioned that substantially separate classrooms for a particular category of disability (e.g., autism) should be in one school so that transitions for those children are minimized.

- *“Need more help with the transition from Special Start to public. Earlier transition updates before new school year and for at least 2 months into it.”*
- *“The services offered to my son upon his transition to CPS from early intervention were wholly and absolutely inappropriate...We lost valuable time which could have been spent helping my son at the most critical age, the so-called ‘age of intervention.’”*
- *“Extra info would help re: the transition from pre-k to k. Maybe pair parents with volunteer parents who have made that transition.”*
- *“Transition age services and programs for students aged 16–22 are very poor. Academic opportunities to develop basic reading and math skills are not adequate.”*

**Professional Development:** Many parents commented on the need for more professional development for general education teaching staff in a number of areas including learning and behavioral differences, accommodations, differentiated instruction, training on the characteristics and needs related to specific disabilities, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), etc.

- *“When a child is placed in general education classes, the general education teachers need to be made aware that this child needs special accommodations or the child will not be able to succeed.”*
- *“[I experienced] inappropriate and uneducated behavior by general education teachers who did not understand the nature of LD issues and did not support needed services. One teacher said she didn’t ‘believe in’ learning disabilities.”*
- *“Professional Development for CPS Learning Specialists — anyone whose job it is to write/approve IEPs, send CPSD Spec Ed personnel to a Wrights Training so they learn how to write SMART IEP’s (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, Time-Based).”*
- *“ABA and floor time courses for ALL teachers and assistants involved with children in Autism class.”*

**Equity in Treatment:** Several parents commented on what might be termed differential or inequitable treatment, indicating that parents who are knowledgeable about their rights and have access to legal representation have an advantage over parents who do not in terms of being successful in negotiations with the district in obtaining requested services or placements for their student.

- *“Overall, I find the system (CPS) responsive to needs as long as parents persist to advocate, tirelessly, for their child.”*
- *“Why if families can afford a good lawyer can their kids be sent to the Carroll School? Learning Prep? Landmark and not mine? We paid for 3 years at the Carroll School while other parents hired a lawyer and the school district paid. It’s not fair!”*
- *“It seems that a number of parents have an adversarial relationship with OSE. I always thought we both want what is best for children. That does not mean that the parents or the professionals are always right or will always agree, but they have to work together.”*
- *“Many parents in Cambridge do not have the education, the money, or the ability to fight that battle.”*

### **Specific Parent Suggestions for Improvement:**

- Assign a “liaison-to-parent” on the IEP Team for ongoing, frequent communication.
- Provide an orientation to families of children on IEPs to help them “navigate the system.”
- Develop an “outreach” plan to educate parents about their rights and the resources available.
- Disseminate information about C-PAC, what it is and what it does.
- Provide training for teachers in student diversity and specific disabilities.
- Provide a “language-based classroom” to address specific language and communication disorders.
- Increase uniformity of services throughout the district.

## **Results of the Classroom Observations**

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Fifty-six separate classroom observations were conducted by a four-person WestEd evaluation team. All schools, including the High School Extension Program, were visited by one or more team members. However, only one team member conducted each observation. Thirty percent of the observations were in the regular classroom and another 30% in sub-separate or special classes only for students on IEPs. Ten examples of “co-teaching” were observed at the elementary and high school levels. Table 38 shows the breakdown of observation settings.

**Table 38 Observations by Type of Setting**

Setting	Number of Settings	Percent of Settings
Regular Classroom incl. Co-Teaching	17	30%
Sub-Separate/Special Class	17	30%
Resources Room	9	16%
Pull-out, 1:1 OT/PT/SLP	7	13%
Integrated PK	6	11%
Total	56	100%

The observation protocol was organized into two main categories related to classroom practices: Direct Instruction (11 items) and Overall Classroom Climate and Support (15 items). Items were rated using a four-point scale according to the following continuum of the extent to which a particular practice was observed: 0 = No Evidence, 1 = Little Evidence, 2 = Moderate Evidence, and 3 = Extensive Evidence. In addition, there was a “Not Applicable” response option. (See Appendix G). Each observation was between 30–45 minutes in length. Table 39 shows the percentage of practices rated as demonstrating moderate to extensive evidence of the particular practice, the percentage of practices rated as demonstrating little to no evidence of the practice, and the mean rating for each item. Practices are presented in descending order, with the items with the greatest degree of evidence observed reported first. “Not applicable” and blank responses were removed from the calculations. While means are not an exact measure of central tendency of ordinal data, means may be useful as a general comparison across survey items.

Observational ratings of evidence of classroom practices in the areas both of Direct Instruction and of Overall Classroom Climate and Support were generally positive, showing moderate to extensive use of the practice(s). Particularly strong ratings were shown for Direct Instruction items including “instruction geared appropriately to the students’ instructional level(s),” “checks for understanding,” and “high levels of teacher-student interaction.” The lowest ratings in the Direct Instruction category were related to whether the instruction for students on IEPs was aligned with the general education curriculum and whether students had the opportunity to work individually, in small groups, and or the whole class.

**Table 39 Classroom Observation Data — Degree to Which Particular Practices Were Observed**

<b>Classroom Practice</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>No Evidence/Little Evidence</b>	<b>Moderate Evidence/Extensive Evidence</b>
Instruction is appropriate to instructional level	2.54	1.9%	98.1%
Frequent positive teacher feedback	2.76	5.5%	94.5%
Adequate space for instruction	2.55	5.6%	94.4%
Teacher checks for understanding	2.53	5.7%	94.3%
Classroom organization	2.41	5.7%	94.3%
High level student-teacher interaction	2.65	7.3%	92.7%
Students on IEPs receive accommodations	2.44	8.8%	91.2%
Students actively engaged	2.53	9.1%	90.9%
Varied pace of instruction	2.41	9.3%	90.7%
Instructional time not interrupted	2.56	9.6%	90.4%
Structured routines	2.42	10.2%	89.8%
Adequate materials and technology	2.27	10.4%	89.6%
Physical environment conducive to learning	2.36	10.9%	89.1%
Students on IEPs included with non-disabled students	2.59	11.1%	88.9%
Instructional adjustment based on checks	2.37	11.5%	88.5%
Teachers give clear feedback for behavior	2.42	11.5%	88.5%
Teacher communicates high expectations	2.38	11.8%	88.2%
Differentiated instruction	2.43	12.2%	87.8%
Opportunities to practice skills	2.36	13.2%	86.8%
Effective classroom transition practices	2.13	15.4%	84.6%
Classroom management is effective	2.21	16.7%	83.3%
Agenda of daily lessons	2.32	17.4%	82.6%
Behavioral expectations are clear	2.16	18.4%	81.6%
Instruction aligned with GenEd curriculum	2.20	22.7%	77.3%
Support staff interact with all students	2.00	33.3%	66.7%
Students work individually, in small groups, and whole class	1.53	40.0%	60.0%

Note: Means are based on a four-point scale where  
0 = No Evidence, 1 = Little Evidence, 2 = Moderate Evidence, and 3 = Extensive Evidence.



In the category of Overall Classroom Climate and Support, particularly strong ratings were shown for “frequent positive teacher feedback,” “classroom organization,” “students being actively engaged,” and “uninterrupted instructional time.” The lowest rating was shown for the degree to which support staff (e.g., paraeducators or special education teachers) had the opportunity to interact with all students in the class, rather than being isolated and working only with children on IEPs, a practice which tends to stigmatize special education students. However, ratings for this item would naturally be lower if the observation was in a sub-separate classroom/special class.

### **General Comments Regarding Classroom Observations**

- Observations indicated that both general and special education staff are generally providing effective instruction for students with disabilities in inclusive and co-teaching settings as well as in sub-separate classrooms and/or pull-out sessions.
- Co-teaching teams appear to be working well together and are enthusiastic about the co-teaching model.
- In general, class sizes are low with ample staffing and low adult to student ratios. Across the regular classrooms observed, class sizes ranged from a low of 10 to a high of 18 students, with numbers of staff (teachers and paraeducators) ranging from 2–4 per classroom.
- Staffing varied across classrooms depending on the needs of students, however, in some cases, the level of staffing seemed excessive or inefficient. For example, one sub-separate class had two teachers, two paraeducators, and a student volunteer in a class of seven students. In spite of the level of adult support available, the approach to the class was whole-class instruction where most of the adults were observing while one teacher presented the lesson and led the discussion.
- In a few examples, paraeducators or other support staff took a passive role and appeared to be observing, not interacting with students during lessons, making it difficult to determine why they were there or what their roles were.
- Use of technology and other devices as instructional tools or accommodations was fairly limited. However, in some settings a number of assistive technology devices and other accommodations were in evidence, e.g., Alpha Smart word processors used by individual students, study carrels, signing, tennis balls on chair legs for noise reduction, therapeutic cushions on chairs, etc.
- Classroom observations revealed that in 14 out of 17 sub-separate classrooms (82%) across schools, the majority of students were from minority groups.

### Examples of Observer Comments in Two Exceptional Settings

- *“If I did not know the name of the special education teacher prior to the observation, it would have been difficult to know which teacher was the special education teacher and which was the regular education teacher. It was a very good example of co-teaching.”*
- *“This was by far the best organized, differentiated, adaptive and accommodating class that I have been in in this district. Though it is still October, these very young children have learned routines and ways that the classroom runs, as well as how to interact kindly with one another. It seemed that every interaction between the teacher and one or more children was a ‘teaching moment.’ This was inclusion at its best.”*

### Results of Individual Student Records

A total of 79 individual student records for which parents provided consent were reviewed. Based on the information provided in the student’s record, including the most recent evaluation information and current IEP, WestEd evaluators rated each record on the following: (1) whether the eligibility decision was justified/adequately substantiated and documented; (2) whether given the student’s disability and description of needs for special education, the IEP as written was appropriate; and (3) whether, given the student’s disability and needs for services as described in the record, the student’s placement was appropriate. Note, as stated above, this was not a compliance review. WestEd evaluators were basing their review on what was provided as evidence in the record rather than direct knowledge of the child him or herself. WestEd is not saying, for example, that an eligibility or placement decision was “right” or “wrong,” only that given the information provided, the reviewers had questions or needed more information about eligibility, IEP services and/or placement decisions.

**Table 40 Student Record Review — Number and Percent of Records**

	Number of Records	Percent of Records
IEP Current	65	82%
Eligibility Substantiated/Justified	51	65%
IEP Appropriate	63	80%
Placement Appropriate	69	87%

Note: A total of 79 records for which parents provided written consent were reviewed.

## Reviewer Comments and Observations

The following are general comments on the status of the totality of records reviewed.

- Records were consistently written and complete using standardized forms across the district.
- Files were in good order and, in most cases, all necessary components were found in files.
- Adequate justification of the eligibility decision was lacking in approximately one third of records reviewed. For students eligible as Specific Learning Disabled (SLD), there was weak documentation of either a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement and/or lack of response to instruction.
- It is important to distinguish between a student who is learning English as a second language and a child with a language-based learning disability and to document/justify this distinction in the determination of eligibility and in the IEP.
- Test and classroom accommodations listed in IEPs were frequently the same/identical for many students. It is important to consider each student's needs for accommodations individually.
- There was inconsistency in "level of need" ratings in some records between what was documented on the "service grid" and the overall rating of level of need.
- A general weakness in IEPs reviewed was in the description of how the student's disability affects progress in the general education curriculum which was often stated in general terms that described the disability itself rather than the impact of the disability on access. For example, "The student's disabilities affect progress as follows: weakness in visual processing and phonetic awareness affect ability to access the general education curriculum and progress in English/Language Arts."
- Many students, particularly at the upper elementary and high school level receive "academic strategies" support outside the general education environment. Consideration should be given as to whether these services might be offered within the context of the regular classroom and, if so, are they really "specialized instruction" consistent with the need for special education?
- Inclusion Specialist services were not specifically included on the "service grid."
- In a few files, reviewers questioned whether a 504 Accommodation Plan would be a more appropriate way to support a student who has a disability but does not need special education/specialized instruction.
- Justifications and rationales for placements, in general, were descriptive of the type of placement (e.g., substantially separate or full inclusion), justifying the placement based on the student's eligibility category (e.g., SLD) versus a justification for the placement based on the student's documented needs. For example, "Due to SLD, the student requires academic strategies outside the classroom."

- For many files, present levels of educational performance were general comments rather than specific levels of performance (e.g., test scores) or descriptive statements of skills.
- Reviewers often observed less than the required timely notice to parents for the IEP meeting. However, parents for the most part attended the meeting and signed off on the IEP.

## Summary of Results

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The preceding section has presented the results of the various components of the Cambridge Special Education Program Review. It has included a profile of the district's programs and services, a report on the results of the data analysis and document reviews, a summary of what was learned through interviews, focus groups, and parent and educator surveys about the perceptions of key stakeholder groups, and reports on district-wide classroom observations and individual student record reviews. The following section will draw from all of these sources of data to arrive at a series of conclusions made on the part of the WestEd evaluation team.

# Conclusions

This section is organized by the seven system components which were addressed in the review:

- Child Find and Special Education Identification
- Continuum of Services
- Communication with and Perceptions of Stakeholders
- Compliance
- Accountability and Student Outcomes
- Leadership, Staffing, and Management
- Finance, Budget, and Cost Effectiveness

## **Child Find and Special Education Identification**

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### **Over-Identification**

Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) is identifying a high percentage of students as eligible for special education services. This is a trend that has persisted for many years. The analysis of child count data from the MADESE Web site shows that 22% of CPS students are on IEPs, exceeding the state average (17%) by nearly 30%. Updated data from the district shows a child count rate of 21% for

2010-11. Schools across the district vary in the percentage of students being identified, ranging from a low of 12.1% in Cambridgeport to a high of 23.3% in Fletcher Maynard (not including students in sub-separate classes). (See Table 5.) Within specific disability categories as a percentage of the total population of students with disabilities, Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) stands out as higher than the state average by 11 percentage points (46% vs. 35% state average). At Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS), the high school, 63% of students on IEPs are reported eligible in the SLD category of disability. (See Table 11.) Based on a review of eligibility data and decisions as presented in student records, CPS may be over-identifying students as eligible for special education, particularly in the SLD category. Adequate justification of eligibility based on either a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement and/or lack of response to instruction was lacking in approximately one-third of records reviewed.

### **Disproportionality**

The analysis of child count information showed that overall CPS does not appear to demonstrate disproportionate representation of minorities in special education, compared to state averages. However, individual schools — Amigos and King Open — show some evidence of over-representation of Hispanic (Amigos) and Black (King Open) students in special education, when compared to the proportions in the general population. In addition, classroom observations revealed that in 14 out of 17 sub-separate classrooms (82%), across several schools, the majority of students were from minority groups. (See the “Disproportionality” analysis in the “Results” section, p.35.)

## **Continuum of Services**

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### **LRE**

Data from MADESE indicate that CPS is placing a high percentage of students in “full inclusion” settings (i.e., 80% or more time in the regular classroom), showing an overall inclusion rate at 70%, higher than both the state average and a selection of comparable districts. (See Table 12.) Record reviews also confirmed “full inclusion” as placement in a majority of cases. However, comments from some parents and staff indicate that what “inclusion” means in Cambridge varies depending on the school and staff interpretations of the term. There is some concern that simply placing a child in the regular classroom does not in and of itself ensure access to the general education curriculum or an appropriate instructional program. As one administrator put it, *“Inclusion is quality services in the least restrictive setting...It’s including kids in the overall social and academic aspects of the school.”* The district employs “Inclusion Specialists” who are available to support the successful integration of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Some schools in

Cambridge, most notably Haggerty, have a reputation of being an “inclusive school.” Co-teaching classrooms, particularly at Haggerty and CRLS, appear to be helping to facilitate greater success for students in the regular classroom.

### **Out-of-District Placements**

Cambridge is placing a relatively high percentage of students in out-of-district placements — 177 as of August 2010, an increase of 20% since 2007–08, when there were 147 out-of-district placements, according to data provided by the district. (Updated data as of September 2011 show a decrease to 167 students, Table 6.) CPS places nearly twice as many of its students in out-of-district placements than does the state, on average, and also has the highest percentage in these more restrictive settings of any comparable district. (See Table 12.) Since the 2004–05 school year, statewide out-of-district placements have hovered under 7%, while CPS’ out-of-district placements have consistently been near 13%. Sixty percent of out-of-district placements are at the high school level. Students with Emotional Disabilities comprise the largest category of out-placed students, followed by students with Specific Learning Disabilities and children with Autism. Day Programs (147) represented 91% of all out-of-district placements 2009–10, compared to residential programs (14) at 9%.

According to interviews and focus groups with administrators and staff, the district has been working to develop its capacity to serve more students within the district and/or to return students who are out-placed to local programs. For example, the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Program has grown in recent years and appears to be helping reduce out-placements for this group of students, at least in the lower grades.

Parent focus groups and comments from the parent survey indicate that parents whose children are placed outside the district see this as a benefit and that their biggest “success” in terms of special education in Cambridge was obtaining an out-of-district, private placement. There is a perception on the part of some parents that parents who are knowledgeable about their rights and have access to legal representation have an advantage over parents who do not in terms of being successful in securing an out-of-district placement for their child. This concern was also raised by CPS staff and administrators.

### **Gaps in the Continuum**

Cambridge offers a variety of services and placement options throughout the district, ranging from least to most restrictive. Data analysis indicates that while CPS places high percentages of students in the regular classroom for a large percentage of the time, the district shows low percentages in the “partial inclusion” category. (See Table 12.) Placement, interview and focus group data, as well as

the educator and parent surveys show that potential “gaps” in the continuum of service options in Cambridge include: lack of a “therapeutic” setting for students with severe emotional disturbance, lack of a “language-based” classroom option for students with learning disabilities, and absence of a learning center or resource room option at the high school level. On the Educator Survey, 89% of CPS staff agreed that there was a full continuum in the district. However, in the open-ended comments, staff noted potential “gaps,” including: (1) services for emotionally disturbed and/or behavior disordered students; (2) integrated Kindergarten classes; (3) more opportunities for co-teaching across schools; (4) opportunities for “partial inclusion;” and (5) a resource room/learning center option at the high school level. Other comments related to gaps in programming for students learning English as a second language who also have a disability and the issue of transition, particularly from middle school to high school, as well as from one school to another for categorical sub-separate classrooms. Parent focus groups and surveys also indicated that some parents think that a gap exists for students with “language-based learning disabilities.” Specifically, responding parents would like to see structured phonics-based programs such as Lindamood Bell, Orton-Gillingham, and the Wilson Reading System used more extensively or consistently with more one-to-one tutoring outside the regular classroom. They implied that out-of-district placements for some students might be avoided if these options were more available locally.

## **Communication with and Perceptions of Stakeholders**

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### **Parent Perceptions**

The parent “voice” in this review was obtained from two primary activities: the parent focus groups and the parent survey. Parent responses to the survey showed that in many cases, parents are satisfied with the services their children are receiving, that they know and are able to exercise their rights in special education, and that they are treated with respect and considered an equal partner with school personnel in decision-making about their child. (See Table 36.)

There is a difference in perception on the part of White and Non-White parents. Non-White parents feel more positively than White parents with regard to accessibility and responsiveness of CPS/OSE administrators, whether the C-PAC is effective in supporting parents, the degree to which they are treated with respect and involved in decision-making, and the degree to which their child feels welcomed in the school and is making progress on IEP objectives. (See Table 37.) The difference in perception shown in the scaled survey responses stands in contrast to the concerns raised by many parents in the focus groups and in open-ended comments on the survey regarding equity in treatment for parents from diverse backgrounds or minority groups. Focus group participants and



survey comments indicated a perception of a failure to include, engage with, or reach out to parents from diverse populations and from low-income groups. Several parents commented on what might be termed differential or inequitable treatment, indicating that parents who are knowledgeable about their rights and have access to legal representation have an advantage over parents who do not in terms of being successful in negotiations with the district in obtaining requested services or placements for their student(s). Based upon these two sources of parent input data, perceptions regarding the degree to which parents are treated equitably are mixed, and hypotheses on the part of some parents were not confirmed in the parent survey scaled items.

## **C-PAC**

There was one item on the parent survey specifically targeted to gauge parent perceptions of the effectiveness of the Cambridge Parent Advisory Council on Special Education (C-PAC) in supporting parents. While 82.9% of responding parents agreed or agreed strongly that C-PAC is effective in supporting parents, 36% of respondents, indicated that they did not know. This may be evidence that many parents are not aware of or have not accessed C-PAC's services.

## **Staff Perceptions about How to Engage Parents and Barriers to that Engagement**

The Educator Survey shows that CPS staff value and encourage active parent involvement in the schools and that parent requests are equitably considered. Staff reported that there are a number of barriers to increased parent involvement, including parent work schedules, languages other than English, cultural or attitudinal issues regarding acceptance of disability, and the perceived stigma attached to being in special education. Staff expressed a number of ideas or strategies that they have found to be successful in engaging parents, showing an understanding and concern for the challenges faced by many families and the need to reach out to parents in multiple ways to increase and improve communication (p.62).

## **Summary of Parent Comments**

Comments from the parent focus groups and the open-ended survey question indicate that CPS has a parent communication problem, particularly with a highly dissatisfied and vocal minority. The perception on the part of many responding parents, as shown in the focus group and survey comments, is that Cambridge is not responsive to parent concerns. A wide range of frustrations with many components of the system was described in the focus groups and in the open-ended survey responses, such as inconsistency of services; poor communication; inaccessible and unresponsive staff, specialists and OSE personnel; inadequately trained staff; rude and disrespectful treatment; a fearful and dishonest climate; and insufficient support for teachers. The good intentions of many

CPS administrators and staff are either not being communicated well or are not effective with some groups of parents of children receiving special education services.

## **Compliance**

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While this evaluation was not a compliance review, the current compliance status of Cambridge Public Schools was reviewed to inform the evaluators' overall impressions of the district. According to MADESE, Cambridge is, on the whole, meeting the requirements of state and federal regulations with regard to the education of students with disabilities. This finding is based on the 2009 Coordinated Program Review (CPR) conducted by MADESE as well as by MADESE data on specific compliance indicators, including timely initial evaluations, timely early childhood transition, and secondary level transition planning. CPS showed a 100% compliance rating for these three indicators. (See Table 17.)

Record reviews conducted by the WestEd evaluation team showed that student records were well organized and complete. There were questions on the part of the evaluators with regard to eligibility and placement decisions in a number of individual cases; however, these were not findings regarding statutory or regulatory compliance. While procedural compliance in special education is critical to the delivery of services, compliance with the letter of the law is only the most basic foundation of quality programs and services for students with disabilities.

## **Accountability and Student Outcomes**

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### **Achievement Gap**

Like many districts in Massachusetts and across the U.S., Cambridge achievement results show a substantial gap in the achievement of students with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, as measured by the MCAS.

### **Adequate Yearly Progress**

Since 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and its regulations have required districts and schools to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA and Math for all students and for subgroups of students, including students with disabilities. For 2010, Cambridge is not meeting AYP targets for the district for the students with disabilities subgroup in both ELA and Math. The following individual schools did not make AYP for the students with disabilities subgroup in ELA,

Math, or both: Baldwin, Graham and Parks, Haggerty, Kennedy/Longfellow, King Open, Martin Luther King, Morse, Peabody, and Tobin. Amigos, Cambridgeport, Fletcher Maynard and CRLS made AYP for the students with disabilities subgroup in both ELA and Math (*MCAS and Adequate Yearly Progress Report*, 2010). However, proficiency rates in ELA and Math for the subgroup of students with disabilities in Cambridge compare favorably to both the statewide proficiency rates and selected similar districts. So, while there continues to be a substantial gap in achievement, Cambridge is doing as well as the state as a whole and many comparable districts. (See Table 15.)

### **Graduation and Dropout Rates**

On two additional indicators of student outcomes, Cambridge compares well to both the state as a whole and to selected similar districts. Reports for CPS by MADESE show a students with disabilities graduation rate of 72% (state average = 64.9%) and a dropout rate of 0.4%, well below the state average of 5.0%. (See Table 16.)

### **Perceptions about Factors Contributing to the Gap**

Staff and administrator interviews, as well as focus groups and the online Educator Survey surfaced perceptions about factors contributing to the achievement gap and strategies for reducing it for students with disabilities. There were differences between what staff offered during focus groups and interviews as compared to what they reported in the online Educator Survey. Contributing factors that were offered through the Spring 2010 focus groups and interviews included the use of pull-out models for service delivery, particularly in the upper grades, which may be preventing full access to the general education curriculum content. They also noted inconsistency and/or lack of coherence in curriculum and instructional methods across schools, lack of capacity on the part of general education to address the needs of struggling students prior to referral for special education, and the lack of differentiated instruction in the regular classroom. There is also a perception that the achievement gap starts well before children enter school, due to factors outside of the schools' control, which continues and widens as children move up the grades. High mobility/transience in the Cambridge population is also perceived to contribute to the achievement gap. Finally, low expectations for students with disabilities were perceived to be a barrier to improved achievement by some respondents.

The online Educator Survey, however, showed that 98.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that staff *at their school* hold high expectations for students on IEPs. In fact, this was the highest rated item on the Educator Survey. Ninety-seven percent of respondents agreed that special education programs and services provide access to the general education curriculum, and 96% agreed that IEPs are aligned with the general education curriculum. (See Table 32.)

Record reviews showed that, for the most part, IEPs appeared to be aligned with the general education curriculum. However, reviewers did not compare individual student IEP goals and objectives with the actual curriculum used in Cambridge or to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. A general weakness in IEPs reviewed was in the description of *how* the student's disability affects progress in the general education curriculum, which was often stated in general terms that described the disability itself rather than the impact of the disability on access.

### **Perceptions about How to Close the Gap**

The Educator Survey included an open-ended question about strategies to address the achievement gap. While staff perceive that to a large degree the achievement gap is due to factors outside school, within the broad category of factors over which the school district has control or at least opportunity for influence, the following categories or themes emerged: (1) professional development; (2) common planning time; (3) increased collaboration between general and special education; (3) consistency and alignment of curriculum across schools; and (4) more services, staff, programs, materials, instructional time, and money. Staff seem to perceive that adding additional services and personnel will help to narrow the gap between students with disabilities and their peers.

The Cambridge MCAS and AYP reports indicate that the district has initiated a number of new initiatives intended to address the achievement gap and improve outcomes for *all* students. These include differentiated instruction training for middle grades teachers, a long-range plan to implement a Response to Intervention (RTI) framework, strengthening the Instructional Coaching Model in literacy and math, providing content training to special education teachers by the Math Department, increased support for English Language Learners, and a merger of the Transition Program with the High School Extension Program (the Alternative Program). As one administrator put it, “[We need to focus] on our sphere of influence...the only thing we really can do is [look] at what is our own practice in the classroom...high expectations, differentiated instruction...we should not try the ‘one size fits all’ approach.”

## **Leadership, Staffing, and Management**

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### **District Leadership**

The district has set ambitious goals for student achievement and program improvement indicating a commitment to improved results for all students, including children with disabilities. It is clear from interviews and focus groups with administrators, including the Superintendent's cabinet, that this goal is shared across general and special education leaders in the district. All are concerned about

and committed to the pursuit of excellence and equity for all students across the district's programs and services. Leaders also express strong commitment to parent involvement and to making sure that all parents have an equal voice. As one administrator expressed it: *"Communication out to the community...we can't communicate enough. We need to be better at how we explain what the special education program is."*

District leaders as a group see the need for greater collaboration between general and special education at all levels and the importance of increasing the capacity of the overall general education system to support the diverse needs of all students. This is perceived as both a "top down" and "bottom up" cultural or paradigm shift that moves from categorical "silo" thinking to a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for all students.

Strategies that CPS leaders support include implementation of Response to Intervention and the use of schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. The overall message from district leadership is that CPS needs to move from "past practice" to "best practice" with regard to the delivery of special education services.

### **Organizational Structure**

Special education in Cambridge takes a categorical, programmatic, and centralized approach. While each school building has its own character, identity, and "brand," and each uses site-based decision-making and provides a good deal of diversity across schools, the Office of Special Education (OSE) in the CPS Central Office has overall authority and responsibility for the management and delivery of special education services. The Executive Director, Assistant Director, and Program Manager are the top managers for OSE. They, in turn, work through a team of Teachers in Charge who are organized categorically to coordinate/supervise the categorical sub-separate programs, supervise related services personnel, and coordinate out-of-district placements. The top three administrators divide responsibilities in categorical terms as well, with the Assistant Director responsible for the supervision of school-based psychologists and school adjustment counselors. Teachers in Charge are not "building based" and travel from school to school, based on the location of the programs they supervise. Responsibility for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which provides access and accommodations for students with disabilities who are not on IEPs, is completely separate from OSE and managed through the Affirmative Action Office. Title I has its own Central Office director who oversees Title I services in all of the district's schools, also operating separately from OSE.

This categorical approach to program-specific, specialized services may be contributing to a fragmentation of service delivery and what interviewees and focus group respondents noted as an inconsistency of interpretation of policies and procedures, perceived inequities in service delivery, and reported "mixed messages" from the Central Office to the schools. The organizational structure

focused on *type* of programs (e.g., ASD, Behavior, Functional Academics, etc.) may be inadvertently exacerbating the differences and gaps between general and special education. It also undermines the goal of a unified system of education that will result in improved results for all students. The location of sub-separate categorical programs in particular schools limits the choice options for some students and creates the need for frequent and potentially disruptive transitions from school to school.

## **Staffing**

Cambridge Public Schools employs an experienced and well-qualified staff of professional educators. For special education staff, most have been employed for 10 years or more in the district and have at least a Master's degree. In the Spring 2010 focus groups with special education staff, teachers described themselves as “top-notch special educators” who perceive themselves as a strength of the system — committed, competent, with high levels of knowledge and skill.

Parent comments during the focus groups indicated that their satisfaction with the services their children received depended to a great extent on the particular staff with whom they were working. Several parents mentioned their child had experienced success because of the particular school's approach to special education or because a teacher, service provider, instructional aide/paraeducator, or guidance counselor had shown knowledge and understanding about their child's disability and had gone the “extra mile” to ensure the child received the needed assistance. As one parent commented: *“The successes my child had... were due to teachers who stood on their heads to make [my child] feel accepted ... and a principal who modeled inclusion...”*

As noted above, Cambridge employs large numbers of special education staff. This is true in general education as well, where student-to-adult ratios and class sizes are relatively low across the board. Cambridge student-teacher ratios overall (10.5 to 1 in 2009–10) are lower than the state average of 13.7 to 1. There are currently a total of six Teachers in Charge and one Out-of-District Coordinator. Two new positions were added in 2010–11. There is variability across schools with regard to numbers of staff and how they are used. The Central Office controls decisions about staffing levels. Staff are organized categorically, including Behavior Specialists, LD specialists, Inclusion Specialists, etc. While this categorical organization may provide specialized support and expert service to students in particular categorical programs, it may also contribute to staff perceptions of isolation and fragmentation. The three lowest-rated items in terms of agreement on the Educator Survey addressed the inequitable workload distribution across staff, the lack of common planning time between general and special educators, and few opportunities for special education staff to share expertise. Classroom observations indicated that while teachers are working well together in many instances, particularly with regard to co-teaching, there were questions raised

about the most effective use of special education personnel (teachers and paraeducators) in some settings.

## **Finance, Budget, and Cost Effectiveness**

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### **Overall Expenditures**

By any number of measures, Cambridge Public Schools is a high spending district both in general education overall and in special education. The per pupil cost overall is \$26,337, the highest of any K–12 district in the state and more than double the statewide average per pupil cost of \$13,017 for fiscal year 2010. The primary source of funding for special education is local dollars from the General Fund, supplemented by federal and state resources (e.g., through federal IDEA-B funds and the Circuit Breaker Program of reimbursement for individual high cost students). A significant portion of the CPS special education budget — \$12 million or approximately 35% — is spent on out-of-district placements, which have shown a steady upward trend. The special education budget represents about 25% of overall General Fund expenditures, not including transportation costs. Special education expenditures have been increasing over recent years at a rate greater than the General Fund non-special education expenditures, showing a 45% increase from fiscal year 2007–11 compared to an overall General Fund for non-special education increase of only 10%.

### **Budget Process**

The budget process and allocation of resources across schools shows a different approach for general as compared to special education. Because so much of the budget is based on staff salaries and benefits, allocation of resources is largely dependent on how staff are distributed. In general education, each school is provided with a floor level of staffing according to an established staffing formula, including a full-time building principal, assistant principal, school clerk/administrative assistant and parent liaison, and a number of general education classroom teachers based on overall enrollment (e.g., a teacher for every homeroom). Every Kindergarten classroom has a teacher and paraeducator, each school has a math coach and ELA coach, and a Reading Recovery Teacher. For the middle school level, there is a minimum of four core teachers for the four core subjects, regardless of enrollment numbers. In addition, each school receives an appropriation from the School Improvement Fund based on the size of the school and the population of children served.

For special education, students are not assigned to buildings based on their special education status, with the exception of children in sub-separate classrooms. However, the controlled choice system in Cambridge, based on socioeconomic status, can sometimes result in an inequitable distribution of

students on IEPs across schools. Each school has a school psychologist and a school adjustment counselor. However, other staff are not assigned based on a formula or minimal level of staffing per school. Staffing is determined by the Office of Special Education based on the documented needs of students' IEPs. This is described as a "top down" process from OSE to the building level. However, Central Office administrators perceive that staffing levels in individual schools are based on idiosyncratic building-based decision-making that creates variability across schools. Table 4 indicates that the range in numbers of full-time equivalent special education staff (teachers, aides, and related services personnel) across elementary schools is 10.33 FTE at Amigos to 33.97 FTE at Fletcher Maynard Academy. This degree of variation is explained in part by the location of sub-separate classrooms. However, when sub-separate students and staffing are removed, there continues to be wide variation which is not explained by the numbers of special education students, ranging from a low of 8.14 FTE staff at King with 31 special education students to a high of 25.80 FTE at Haggerty with 51 special education students. (See Table 5.) Special education teacher to special education student ratios range from a ratio of 1 teacher for every 7 students at Kennedy/Longfellow and Haggerty to a ratio of 1 teacher for every 13 special education students at Baldwin. The way that special education staffing decisions are made and staff allocated across schools may be contributing to inequity and inefficiency.

### **Sources of Support for Struggling Students through General Education**

When considering the high cost of special education and the high numbers of children being identified in Cambridge, it is instructive to look at what other resources are allocated in the schools to provide support to students who may have difficulty academically or behaviorally but who may not have a disability and need special education. These types of early intervention supports can be a way of reducing special education referrals and identification rates, since absent these effective early interventions, children often end up being identified as needing special education services even if they are not disabled and do not require specialized instruction.

In Cambridge, schools have a range of support for students who are having difficulties in school in addition to special education support for children on IEPs. Title I is offered in 7 out of 12 elementary schools. All implement schoolwide Title I projects which give maximum flexibility in terms of which students are served and how. Most schools implement Title I supplemental reading and math support programs. Title I also provides outreach to Title I parents and a minimum of 1.0% of Title I resources are devoted to family involvement activities. Schools also have ELA and math coaches, Reading Recovery Teachers, and parent liaisons. For fiscal year 2011, there are 13.97 full-time equivalent Title I teachers in the elementary school budget, 12.33 Reading Recovery Teachers, and 24.0 full-time equivalent Reading/Math Coaches. The School Improvement Fund, mentioned



above, represents additional resources that schools use to address building-specific priorities based on the needs of their students.

The capacity for schools to use these other-than-special education resources in a coordinated way to support students and families is hard to determine. Interview respondents indicated that Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) operate differently/inconsistently across buildings. There is a perception that TATs are not successful at addressing strategies for struggling students prior to referral for a special education evaluation. However, respondents to the online Educator Survey indicated that building-based TATs are operating somewhat effectively, that for the most part teachers know how to refer to the TAT, and that they receive TAT support.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is being considered as a framework for school improvement and support to all students. However, schools are in the very early stages of developing awareness level understanding of RTI and what will be needed for its implementation across the district. On the online Educator Survey, lower ratings were received for respondents' estimation of the schools' capacity to implement RTI and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and the degree to which teachers implement differentiated instruction. These were also the top three areas of need for professional development identified by survey respondents. Interviewees and survey respondents indicated that there is a need to develop specific interventions for both academics and behavior. PBIS is not well developed across schools, and there appears to be the perception that the concept of shared responsibility across general and special education for the success of all students is weak. Special education, according to interviewees, is seen as a separate system from general education, a perception that may be reinforced by the way that special education is organized and delivered across the district.

### **Cost Effectiveness**

Using the special education system as *the* way to provide support to students who are having difficulty in school is perhaps the most costly way to address student learning and behavioral issues. Prevention and early intervention efforts may help to reduce special education referrals, identification rates, and resultant costs. Cambridge identifies a high percentage of students overall as eligible for special education. There is some evidence that while supports other than special education are available in the schools (e.g., Title I, Reading Recovery, etc.), the degree to which these services are used in a systematic and coordinated manner is questionable. CPS also serves a high percentage of students in very costly out-of-district placements.

Staff positions, particularly the Teachers in Charge, are organized in a categorical manner that results in teachers traveling from school to school across the district, which may contribute to additional costs in time and travel that could be utilized elsewhere. There may be some duplication

of effort between Inclusion Specialists and other special education teachers within each building. Interviews and focus group results indicate that there is considerable difference of opinion across schools regarding the role of the Inclusion Specialists who interpret and perform their jobs differently across schools.

Classroom observations showed that staff-to-student ratios are low and that there are often 3–4 adults present in the classroom, including paraeducators. While staffing levels varied based on the needs of students, in some observation settings the level of staffing seemed excessive or inefficient. In a few examples, paraeducators or other support staff took a passive role and appeared to be observing, not interacting with students during lessons, making it difficult to determine why they were there or what their roles were. These are areas where staffing patterns may be contributing to inefficiencies in service delivery and cost.

## Summary of Conclusions

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- The quality, level of experience, and commitment of teaching staff across the district is a definite strength.
- Classroom observations confirmed that inclusive practices and high-quality instruction are being provided in many classrooms and most schools throughout the district. Two examples of where effective inclusive practices seem to be working well are co-teaching at CRLS and at the Haggerty School and the Special Start Integrated Pre-school classrooms.
- District leadership is committed to high expectations and improved results for all students.
- Child count, cost per pupil, and utilization of out-of-district placements in Cambridge are high by comparison to state averages and to similar and neighboring districts.
- The overall cost of special education as a percentage of total expenditures is high (approximately 30% for FY). Growth in special education expenditures is dramatically exceeding the growth in general education.
- There is evidence of disproportionate representation of students from minority groups in special education in two of the district's schools. However, the district's overall numbers do not show disproportionality based on the state's definition.
- There is a comprehensive continuum of services and placement options for students with disabilities in Cambridge, but some gaps exist, particularly for students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities and students with "language-based learning disabilities."
- Cambridge demonstrates high rates of "full inclusion" of students with disabilities in the regular classroom for the majority of the school day. However, there is little flexibility for "partial inclusion" options for students who may need that type of setting or approach.

- There is a good deal of variability in staffing across schools that is not explained by either enrollment or the location of sub-separate classrooms.
- There continues to be an achievement gap between students with disabilities and nondisabled peers, and the district is not meeting AYP targets for the students with disabilities subgroup. However, proficiency rates for students with disabilities in Cambridge are comparable to state averages.
- Other outcomes for students with disabilities (e.g., graduation and dropout rates) are above average for the state and similar districts.
- Communication between the schools, the Central Office/OSE administration, and parents needs direct attention. The negativity expressed by some parents regarding their treatment and interaction with school personnel is a concern that needs to be a priority focus for improvement. There is a discrepancy between White and non-White parents, as shown in the parent survey.
- Cambridge is in compliance with state and federal special education requirements, according to MADESE's Coordinated Program Review (CPR) report.
- The district uses a categorical, centralized organizational structure for special education that may be contributing to fragmentation and inefficiency with regard to utilization of resources.
- Special education services are primarily arranged by classroom or program type and disability category (e.g., sub-separate classes for particular types of students). Location of strands of sub-separate classrooms in different schools creates unnecessary transitions for some students with particular disabilities.
- A number of resources are available through general education to support struggling students prior to a referral to special education. However, these resources are not systematically coordinated into a schoolwide system of instructional and behavioral supports. Special education functions as a separate system from general education.

# Recommendations

This final section of the evaluation report is organized by the five purposes of the review as articulated by the district. The purpose of the Special Education Program Review was to provide:

- Recommendations for strengthening CPS special education programs (substantially separate and inclusion)
- Recommendations for improving communication with the public in order to build confidence in CPS programming, staffing, and organization around special education
- Recommendations for cost containment measures that do not compromise the quality of services provided
- Recommendations for the development of additional programs to serve students who currently receive services outside of the district
- Clear definitions of educational terminology

## **Recommendations for Strengthening CPS Special Education Programs (Substantially Separate and Inclusion)**

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Given the findings from the review that show that special education in Cambridge is approached as a system separate from general education, the overall recommendation from the WestEd evaluation

team is to set a goal of moving to one unified system of education that will result in improved results for all students. This goal is consistent with the district's mission to develop "a diverse urban school system that works with families and the community to successfully educate all of its students at high levels." This will require a change in the way all staff and administrators "think" about general education, special education and education overall, moving from a categorical system based on program types and disability categories to one where special education is fully integrated into the overall educational system in Cambridge. The following are recommendations for a place to begin this "cultural" shift, building on the strong direction already set by district leadership.

1. Firmly establish that responsibility for all students is shared across general and special education, that the responsible "unit" is each individual school, and that building principals are responsible for all of the children in their schools, including those receiving special education services (Sailor & Roger, 2005; Sailor & Roger, in press).
2. Work toward increasing the capacity of each school to address the diverse educational needs of all its students using an integrated, coordinated model of service delivery that emphasizes early intervention and support to students prior to referral to special education. This type of schoolwide approach to early intervention and support might coordinate resources from a variety of source including special education, Title I, Reading Recovery, or other building-based support services. The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework that the district is considering is a good example of this type of coordinated, early intervention approach that will benefit all students. This approach may also help to reduce referral and special education identification rates and may impact the need for both sub-separate classrooms and out-of-district placements.
3. Reorganize/restructure the Office of Special Education (OSE) into a service unit designed to support schools rather than serve students (Honig et al., 2010). For example, the Teachers in Charge positions might be restructured to establish a building-based student support services position for each school. Other current positions, such as school psychologists, also might be reconfigured for this purpose. These building-based positions could be responsible for the coordination of all student support services within the building, including Title I, Reading Recovery, Teacher Assistance Teams, 504 and special education (Ferguson, Kozleski, & Smith, 2001). Ideally, these positions would be based full time in a single building. This would provide a single point of contact for both teachers and parents regarding all support services, including but not limited to special education.
4. To create more coordination and consistency in OSE interaction with and across schools, use the Teacher in Charge positions to oversee special education in the schools and to supervise staff in assigned schools. Support to schools should be done in a holistic manner, not categorical as currently organized. Supervision of Teachers in Charge could be divided

- between the Executive and Assistant Directors; however, both should meet regularly with all Teachers in Charge to ensure consistency in communication.
5. Regular meetings with building principals should also include school psychologists, again to ensure consistent direction and communication.
  6. Assign a minimum level of special education staffing to each school building using an allocation “formula” that is based on overall enrollment rather than special education child count (removing any incentive to over-identify students in order to justify more resources). For example, assign 1.0 or 2.0 full-time equivalent special educators and 2.0 paraeducators for every 100 enrolled students. These staff would support students with a *range of disabilities* in that building. Add additional staff and related service providers based on an *analysis of student needs* for students placed *in that building*. Expert consultation from district-wide specialists (e.g., Behavior Specialists or ASD Specialists) could be brought in based on the needs of individual students. Decisions about additional resources would be made by OSE in collaboration with building principals based on the needs of students in that building.
  7. Rethink and repurpose the role of Inclusion Specialist. Instead of the Inclusion Specialist position, create building-based instructional support positions where the individual could provide consultation to classroom teachers, direct services to students in or out of the regular classroom, and supervision to paraeducators at their assigned grade levels, serving students on a cross-categorical basis with a range of disabilities.
  8. Strengthen, support, and provide professional development to the Teacher Assistance Teams in each school building and ensure that they are operating effectively as building-based problem-solving teams that support general education teachers and develop interventions for struggling students prior to referral for special education.
  9. Develop a coordinated system of tiered interventions and supports in each school that draws from resources other than special education to form a flexible, integrated, and well coordinated system of services and supports to which any/all students might have access.
  10. Provide job-embedded professional development and expert consultation and coaching to schools as they begin to implement an RTI framework.
  11. Continue to maintain the option of sub-separate classrooms for children who demonstrate the need for that type of highly structured placement. However, locate program strands (e.g., ASD classrooms) in one school building to minimize the transitions the individual children need to make as they move up through the grades.
  12. Carefully monitor the placement decisions for children in sub-separate classrooms to ensure that decisions are free from cultural bias and have no differential impact on children from minority groups.

13. Establish and disseminate clear transition procedures for children who are moving from school to school, from PK into Kindergarten, from the middle grades into the high school, and from high school into post-school environments, including higher education and employment.
14. Throughout any restructuring of special education services and programming, it will be important to continue strong collaborative partnerships between OSE and building principals and to provide supervision, oversight, consultation, and support to staff in assigned buildings. This structure may result in a stronger partnership between OSE and individual schools and bring OSE administrators “closer” to the building level. This revised structure would necessitate close communication between the OSE administrative team to ensure that OSE policies and procedures are being consistently communicated and carried out across schools. There should continue to be one overall Executive Director for the Office of Special Education.

*“Focusing on the classroom and the support to the teacher in that classroom...regardless of where the support comes from...to get them what they need. If we aren’t making sure that the supports are given and that there is implementation, fidelity, and accountability...then I don’t know if we can expect outcomes to improve.” (Administrator)*

## **Recommendations for Improving Communication with the Public in Order to Build Confidence in CPS Programming, Staffing, and Organization Around Special Education**

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1. OSE should establish a partnership with C-PAC leadership, collaboratively developing plans to improve outreach and support to parents of children with disabilities in Cambridge, with particular emphasis on reaching out to under-represented parent groups. The position of C-PAC Coordinator, which has already been established, is an excellent beginning to a strengthened collaborative relationship.
2. Work with the C-PAC to develop parent information materials that are user-friendly and disseminated widely through multiple channels, including the C-PAC and CPS Web sites.
3. Ensure that all relevant information is available on the district’s Web site for special education, that the site is accessible and user-friendly, and that information is available in other languages when necessary.
4. Coordinate parent activities with the outreach and support already provided to parents through Title I parent liaisons and the district’s Family Resource Center. Join building-

based or district-wide parent events, open-houses, and breakfasts so that a unified approach of a general education/special education partnership is modeled for parents from the beginning of their contact with the schools.

5. Track and publicize outcome data on students with disabilities to show progress over time in achievement, graduation and dropout rates, and other student outcome measures.
6. Through close and supportive relationships with building-based staff and principals, develop an “early warning system” for potential disagreements or conflicts between parents and schools so that issues are addressed and resolved in a respectful and timely manner. Encourage staff to bring issues of concern or potential conflict to the attention of administrators (principals and OSE) early. Parents and schools may not always agree, but the process for dealing with differences of opinion needs to be timely, respectful, transparent, and equitable. The MADESE has established an IEP Meeting Facilitation process whereby a school district may request a neutral third party to facilitate a potentially contentious or complex IEP Meeting. For more information see the MADESE Web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/bsea/fiep.html>. Another helpful resource on parent/school communication is the National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) at <http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/>.

*“Being a parent [myself], I know that the quickest way to a parent’s heart is to show kindness...To be respectful of them and assume their best intentions. To honor their child and the child’s needs, especially if it’s a very difficult situation. To be polite and patient when they are angry or frustrated...To meet/talk with them whenever humanly possible. To use humor. To remember to always say something positive before the conversation ends. To remember that parents are ‘growing up’ too (in their responsibilities as parents) and life is tough.” (Teacher)*

## **Recommendations for Cost Containment Measures That Do Not Compromise the Quality of Services Provided**

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Special education cost drivers in Cambridge appear to be numbers of students identified, the intensive needs of some individual students, and the increasing number of costly out-of-district placements. Cost containment while maintaining a full continuum and high-quality services is a responsible goal for the district and one for which the community should hold the administration accountable. Cost containment in special education is most likely related to capacity in general education. In other words, to the degree that the general education system in Cambridge has the capacity to address the diverse instructional and behavioral needs of all/each/every student, the need



for special education may be reduced. Early intervention is the most effective way to prevent the need for special education and/or to reduce the need for more costly and intensive services.

1. Evaluate current and newly implemented instructional approaches and programs to assess their effectiveness and impact on student outcomes. Expand successful approaches based on data-based decision making and eliminate others where minimal results are demonstrated. For example, co-teaching is being implemented in several schools and feedback from teachers, staff, and some parents has been positive. However, implementing co-teaching with two full-time teachers per classroom on a large scale may be cost prohibitive. Evaluate the co-teaching model that is currently being used to ensure that it is resulting in improved student outcomes before moving to implement the approach on a broader scale.
2. Begin the budget process at the building level, based on an agreed-upon minimal level of staffing per school. Then build “bottom up” from there, adding staff based on the needs of students placed in that building and establishing sub-separate classrooms or programs only when student needs within their buildings cannot be met satisfactorily.
3. The OSE administrative team should continue to collaborate with building principals in budget development for each school. This collaboration is important in order to establish building-based responsibility and accountability for special education students at the building level. However, it will be important for OSE to retain the flexibility to move staff between schools if needed to adjust to changing needs or enrollment patterns.
4. To increase consistency and equity across schools, develop criteria or guidelines for decision-making about level of services and placement decisions. Further, to address perceived idiosyncratic and variable decision-making across schools with regard to the nature and extent of IEP services and staffing, provide district-wide training to IEP Team Chairpersons with regard to IEP services decision-making. The document, *Guidelines for Making Decisions about IEP Services* (Giangreco, 2001) may be a useful resource. (See Appendix L.)
5. Create protocols to clearly establish when and how services and supports should be recommended. For example, create a protocol to establish when a student may be in need of a 1:1 paraprofessional so this determination is consistent across all schools in the district.
6. Regarding paraeducators assigned to individual students, develop an individualized plan to gradually phase out paraeducator support as the student demonstrates greater independence.
7. Continue to develop in-district capacity to serve students who are currently served in out-of-district settings, particularly for secondary level students with Emotional or Specific Learning Disabilities.

*“The money is there; we’re not trying to cut special ed because of lack of money. It’s really about best practices and not overspending so there is money for other programs. CPS does have the resources to provide for these kids ... and the will ... but it needs to be more systematic.”*  
(Administrator)

## **Recommendations for the Development of Additional Programs to Serve Students Who Currently Receive Services Outside of the District**

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The results of this special education program review have indicated that there are gaps in the continuum of services in Cambridge that are likely contributing to the need or demand for specialized private placements outside the district. Data analysis has shown that most out-placed students are at the high school level and that students with Emotional Disabilities represent the largest disability category, followed by Specific Learning Disabilities and Autism. An overall strategy for reducing the need for out-of-district placements should be to further develop capacity within the district to serve students with these exceptional and intensive needs. Reduction in out-of-district placements will require both a system-wide and individual student approach. It is also important to acknowledge that while reduction in out-of-district placements is a long-range goal, some students may continue to require an out-of-district placement due to their unique needs and the nature of their disability.

1. Utilize the Teacher in Charge position for coordination of out-of-district placements to conduct an analysis of the needs and current status of students currently out-placed and to develop plans for transitioning individual students back to the district, based on individual student needs.
2. Review all students currently placed out-of-district and develop a three-year plan to reduce the number to a level consistent with averages of the state and similar communities.
3. Analyze all out-of-district placements by disability, placement, grade level, school, etc., to pinpoint areas where numbers of out-placements are occurring with the most frequency.
4. Establish entry and exit criteria for individual students as placement decisions are made and incorporate into each student’s IEP criteria for determining when return to a less restrictive environment is indicated. Placing a student in a highly restrictive day or residential placement should not necessarily mean that the student will remain in that setting indefinitely.
5. Work with the out-of-district school, the receiving CPS school, other service providers (e.g., mental health professionals), and parents to develop effective transition plans prior to

returning a student to the CPS community. Ensure that necessary community services and supports outside school are in place.

6. Consider establishing an in-district therapeutic day school option for students who have demonstrated the need for a more structured/protected environment. Collaborate with mental health professionals in the community to explore and develop this program option. Visit other school districts that have established similar programs to inform what CPS eventually decides to do. Carefully weigh the benefits and risks related to establishing this type of option within the district.
7. Develop capacity at the elementary, middle, and high school levels to address the instructional and behavioral needs of students with Specific Learning Disabilities. If appropriate and intensive services are available early and throughout the grades, the need for out-of-district placements for this population of students may be reduced.
8. Continue to develop capacity to serve students on the Autism Spectrum within the district at the building level and through sub-separate classrooms, if warranted, and ensure continuation of support as students move through the grades.
9. Continue to make placement decisions for individual students based on the individual student's need for support, aligned with the least restrictive environment provisions of the IDEA.
10. Develop building-based capacity to utilize PBIS to support the behavioral needs of a range of students and to prevent the need for more restrictive placements.

*“[We] send a lot of kids out....What does that say about us as being ‘inclusive’....” (Administrator)*

## Clear Definitions of Educational Terminology

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WestEd evaluators are interpreting this request for recommendations in terms of the development of a “common language” across the district for thinking and talking about special education within an integrated, cross-categorical model of service delivery. One of the key questions asked of many participants in the interviews and focus groups with staff and administrators was, “What is your interpretation of ‘inclusion’ in Cambridge?” The evaluation process revealed that there are differences of opinion and interpretation of what is meant by terms such as “inclusion” and “Inclusion Specialist.” Recommendations that should lead to a common language and understanding of educational terminology include:

1. Initiate a long-range planning process for special education services in Cambridge, coordinated with the district's overall goals and improvement initiatives — one that

involves multiple stakeholders, including community and parent representatives, and begins with a discussion of what “inclusion” means within the context of a unified educational system that is designed and structured to “successfully educate all of its students at high levels” (CPS District Goals 2010–12). This process will help to build a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for all students.

2. Provide integrated professional development opportunities where general and special education and other specialized staff are learning together about academic content and the general education curriculum as well as differentiated instruction, RTI, and PBIS.
3. Provide opportunities for special education staff across the district to come together to share expertise and for joint problem-solving with the OSE administrative team.
4. Provide collaborative planning time within buildings for general and special education staff and other support personnel to meet to review student work and progress and to plan or modify instruction.
5. Include all members of the OSE administrative team in the Superintendent’s Cabinet and/or other meetings of district leaders so that they are aware of and can participate in discussions regarding school improvement initiatives in the district, including curriculum development and professional development for general and special education teachers.
6. Develop clear job descriptions for all special education staff positions in line with a reorganized, integrated system of service delivery across the schools.

*“Think about a broader concept of ‘inclusion’....as an overarching goal for the district...it goes beyond kids getting services in the classroom. It’s including kids in the overall social and academic aspects of the school.” (Administrator)*

## Concluding Reflections

The Cambridge Public School District is a diverse, multi-faceted, complex community. This external review of Cambridge special education programs and services was undertaken with the intent of improving programs and supports for students with disabilities. The district demonstrates many strengths, including a well-qualified and dedicated staff, strong and committed district and building leadership, a range of high-quality programs, adequate resources, and a diverse and involved community of parents. Challenges to the district demonstrated in this review include high numbers of children in special education, high costs overall, and high numbers of out-of-district placements that strain the overall budget for special education and detract from resources that might be spent more effectively within the district. Additional challenges relate to consistency and equity across schools in how resources and staff are distributed, and relationships with the parent community.

This external review has used a mixed methods design intended to capture a variety of perspectives using multiple sources of data and to solicit the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, from administrators to staff to parents. The recommendations of the WestEd evaluation team are offered with the acknowledgement that the people most closely involved and responsible for management of the Cambridge Public Schools and those most directly impacted by services provided by the

school system are in the best position to judge the system's effectiveness and to plan future priorities and directions. Nevertheless, recommendations for improvement have been offered based upon the understanding that the WestEd team has developed about the district. This report will perhaps provide the impetus for a new beginning in thinking about the delivery of special education services in Cambridge within the context of an overall education system that is focused on improving results for all students.

## Limitations

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The findings and recommendations of this external review should be considered in light of the following limitations:

1. While the request for consent to review individual student records was made of all parents of students with disabilities, the record review was limited to only a selection of records from those parents who provided consent, so the review represents less than 10% of students currently on IEPs. As such, the sample was not fully representative of the total population of students with disabilities served in the district.
2. Judgments about the eligibility determinations or placement decisions for individual students were based only on the information available in the record, rather than any direct knowledge of the individual students themselves.
3. Though the high number of students placed out-of-district is cited as an area of concern, the WestEd evaluation team was not able to visit or observe any individual students in out-of-district placements and therefore is not able to comment on the appropriateness of individual student placements in those settings.
4. Parent focus group participants represented a small number of parents across the district as a whole. Therefore, representation of the opinions of all or a majority of parents throughout the district should not be inferred. Nevertheless, the opinions of those who participated should be fully considered.

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# Appendix A

## WestEd Evaluation Team Biographies

**Kristin Reedy, Ed.D.** was the WestEd Project Director for the Cambridge Special Education Review. Kristin is the director of Learning Innovations' federally funded Northeast Regional Resource Center (NERRC) and has extensive experience in state and local special education policy and program implementation. Other areas of expertise and interest include special education reform, special education policy, program evaluation, finance, regular education reform, and early childhood special education. Kristin has over 30 years of experience in special education as a classroom teacher, consultant, and administrator. Prior to joining WestEd, she served as a consultant and manager at the Vermont Department of Education where she was interim Chief of the Special Education Unit, coordinator for 619 Preschool Special Education and established the foundation for the Vermont's Early Intervention/Birth to Three Program (then Part H). She has also served at the local level as the Director of Special Services for two Vermont school districts which included responsibility for special education, Section 504, ELL and Title I. Kristin has led special education program evaluation projects in selected school districts across the region. She has also been the co-director for the annual MA Special Education Leadership Academy 2004-2010, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE). Kristin holds a doctorate in educational leadership and policy studies from the University of Vermont.

**Debra Benitez, Ph.D.** is a Project Director in WestEd's Center for Prevention and Early Intervention and is responsible for training, technical assistance, and conducting research and evaluation projects for children and youth with disabilities, ages birth to 22 years of age. Prior to joining WestEd, Debra worked with children, youth, and adults with disabilities. She has provided instruction in K-12 public and non-public classrooms for students with high incidence disabilities, developed curricula, and provided support and training to teachers of students with special needs. Debra has also worked with school districts, community-based organizations, and state agencies on developing, maintaining, and evaluating transition programs for youth with disabilities, as well as supporting community agencies in developing inclusive practices for children and youth with disabilities. She was appointed to the Mayor's Transitional Youth Task Force in San Francisco, providing expertise on and representing the interests of students with disabilities transitioning into adulthood. Debra received an MA in special education, with a focus on learning disabilities, from San Francisco State University and a PhD in special education, with a focus on transition policy and education reform, from the University of Kansas. Debra participated in the on-site visit in Cambridge and conducted observations in schools throughout the district. She also led the design of the Educator Survey instrument.

**George Dowaliby, M.S.**, joined Learning Innovations at WestEd in August 2010. Most recently, he has been employed by the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), a regional education service center in CT. He has served as the Division Director for Student Services, managing and providing leadership for services and programs for students with disabilities from birth to age 21. Prior to this assignment, George was the Director of Technical Assistance and Brokering Services for CREC, a division that provides comprehensive training and technical assistance service with over 600

education, clinical, technical, legal, human resource, health, organizational, and management consultants. Before joining CREC in 2007, Mr. Dowaliby spent nine years at the CT State Department of Education, eight as the Chief of the Bureau of Special Education and one as the Interim Associate Commissioner for the Division of Teaching and Learning Programs and Services. Starting his career as a school psychologist, he has 35 years of experience, primarily in special education, in public education in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts, including 30 years as an administrator at the local, regional and state levels. George assisted with the student record review portion of the evaluation.

**Vicki Hornus, M.S./CAS** is a Senior Program Associate with the Northeast Regional Resource Center and Learning Innovations at WestEd, Vicki is a career special educator with particular expertise in the area of Focused Monitoring. Vicki has led NERRC's State-to-Local Monitoring Work Group for Parts B and C and, in collaboration with the National Center on Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM), has consulted with the majority of states in the northeast region in establishing their focused monitoring systems. Vicki brings experience from an extensive career in special education as a local-level administrator (Springfield and Burlington, VT), an elementary school counselor and has worked at the national, regional, state, and local levels as state agency staff and as a local special education director, teacher, and consultant. She served at the Vermont Department of Education as the Special Projects Coordinator for the State's special education reform initiative. She has experience in higher education, teaching Educational Psychology and Child Development at Miami University and Hudson Valley Community College. For the past six years, she has co-directed the annual MA Special Education Leadership Academy 2004-2010, funded by MADESE. She has also co-directed special education program evaluations in sites across the region. Vicki's educational background includes a B.A. in Elementary and Special Education from Purdue University, an M.S. in School Psychology from Miami University, and numerous courses in administration from the University of Vermont. Vicki participated in on-site observations, interviews and focus groups, and record reviews.

**Nancy Hurley, B.A.**, Senior Research and Evaluation Associate and member of Learning Innovations (LI) at WestEd since 1998, has designed and conducted extensive site studies and program evaluations in various topic areas, including teacher professional development, induction, retention, and mentoring of new teachers, science education, collaborative learning communities, leadership development, smaller learning communities, special education, use of technology in the classroom, mathematics and social studies curricula and school and district-wide change initiatives. Currently, Hurley directs the evaluation of the Nashua NH Smaller Learning Community Grant, contributes to the evaluation of the Quebec Community Learning Centres, and is the primary evaluator for WestEd's NSF-funded Teacher Professional Continuum Grant *Building Systems for Quality Teaching and Learning in Science*. Recently, Hurley directed the evaluations of the Lowell, MA Teacher Academy and the UNH IOD *Beyond Access for Assessment Accommodations Project*, and contributed to in-depth school site visits in Prince George's County, MD, in an evaluation of three district-wide programs: the Faculty Support Team Mentoring Model, the Special Education Program, and the Talented and Gifted Program. Other work includes the evaluation of the New Bedford, MA Smaller Learning Community Grant and the evaluation of Rhode Island's Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements Program. Hurley served on WestEd's monitoring team for the Institute of Education Sciences-funded Mathematica Study on *the Impact of Mentoring on Teacher Induction and Retention*. As a team member, she conducted site visits in Illinois, New Jersey, and Florida to gather data about the consistency and fidelity of the study implementation. As coauthor of *Collaborative Evaluation Led by Local Educators: A Practical, Print- and Web-Based*

*Guide* (<http://www.neirtec.org/evaluation/>), Hurley has facilitated collaborative evaluation institutes in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, and Puerto Rico. For the past five years, directors of special education programs from over 100 Massachusetts school districts have attended summer institutes on collaborative evaluation provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. They have returned to their districts with an evaluation plan in hand, equipped with skills to gain buy-in from stakeholders, conduct data gathering, and analyze and report findings. A member of the American Evaluation Association, Hurley received a BA in management from Lesley University. Nancy facilitated parent and staff focus groups and did the analysis of the parent focus group results.

**Lucy Ely Pagán, M.A.**, is a Learning Innovations Program Associate, with particular expertise in disproportionate representation of students with disabilities in special education, working with parent organizations, and issues related to the identification of ELL students. Prior experiences include work as a rehabilitation counselor and coordinator of training and placement services. Lucy's work at Learning Innovations focuses on secondary transition, disproportionality, cultural and linguistic diversity, and family/school collaboration. She contributes to Learning Innovations' partnership with the Region II EAC, working on disproportionality and equity issues at the state and local level in NY, NJ, PR and VI. Lucy is bilingual (Spanish and English) and bicultural. Her commitment to families and people with disabilities is demonstrated in her volunteer activities throughout her life. She is an expert in facilitation of systems change at both national and regional levels. Lucy has a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Puerto Rico (1976). Lucy co-facilitated the parent focus groups with Nancy Hurley.

**David Phillips, M.P.A.**, Senior Program Associate, is a new member of the Learning Innovations team, joining Learning Innovations at WestEd in June of 2010 and provides IDEA implementation support to states in the Northeast Region. Dave comes most recently from the Vermont Department of Education where he spent four and one-half years in a key leadership role implementing IDEA as the State's Part B Data Manager. Primary responsibilities included developing and implementing the data collection systems required to report state-wide and local Annual Performance Report results and to support the local determinations process. Other responsibilities with the Vermont DOE included leading an internal team of six staff in the development, implementation and analysis of an "as-is" organizational assessment protocol. He also recently served as a data system evaluator for the Westat Data Expert contracted to consult with the Milwaukee Public Schools system as part of the "Jamie S. Settlement Agreement." Prior to entering public service, Dave focused his Master of Public Administration work at George Mason University on program evaluation. His education data management and reporting career has been further supported by seven years of account management, business development and project implementation work in the financial services, information technology and executive education services areas. Dave coordinated the data analysis for the evaluation.

**Stephen J. Ruffini, Ph.D.**, is a Senior Research Associate for WestEd's Evaluation Research Program. Dr. Ruffini will be involved in all aspects of the evaluation and participate in project activities that include developing the final evaluation plan, conducting interviews with district leaders and staff, conducting document and data analysis, contributing to report development, participating in the onsite visit, onsite report presentation and all meetings, and leading all briefings. Dr. Ruffini has managed, conducted, and led research and evaluation efforts in a variety of education organizations, including an urban school district where he evaluated the nature and impact of special education services provision. He also has experience providing evaluation

assistance to Title I staff. His experience and skills include: conducting regression and cluster analyses, and analyses of covariance; developing, reviewing, and validating surveys; conducting or managing large-scale and small-scale survey projects; developing efficient data analysis programs; managing several large student demographics and assessments databases with up to 750,000 plus records each; creating single-year and longitudinal data sets for internal and external research and evaluation projects; and supervising staff to ensure data integrity and report accuracy. As former Director of the GED Testing Service, Research, and Program Evaluation Unit at the American Council on Education, Dr. Ruffini established a research and program evaluation unit to improve the value of the GED tests primarily through collaborations with jurisdictional test administrators. This work led to improvement of the data collection process, development of new data access mechanisms, and improvement of data verification processes. While serving as Director of the Office of Consent Decree Evaluation and Data Management for the Baltimore City Public School System, Dr. Ruffini used existing quantitative data and conducted surveys to provide a comprehensive descriptive account of different special education inclusion services models; consulted with school principals to develop standards-based evaluation guidelines; designed qualitative studies for improving decision-making and ensuring compliance; conducted training sessions; and prepared summary reports. Dr. Ruffini holds a Ph.D. in Educational Administration that he earned from the Pennsylvania State University. Steve participated in the on-site visit, conducted classroom observations across schools and consulted with the team on data analysis and sampling procedures.

# Appendix B

## Interviews and Focus Group Schedules

May 24, 25, 26, 27 2010

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Special Ed. Administrative Interviews		Kristin	Kristin Reedy	
Focus Group with Assistant Principals	Nancy Hurley			
Focus Group with Superintendent's Cabinet	Nancy Hurley			
Focus Group Gen. Ed. Teachers CRLS High School	Nancy Hurley			
Focus Group Special Ed. CRLS High School			Vicki Hornus	
Focus Group with SLPs	S.Guckenburg			
Focus Group with School Psychologists	Sarah Guckenburg			
Focus Group with Gen Ed. Teachers K-8	Candice Bocala	Nancy Hurley		
Focus Group with Special Educators K-8		Kristin Reedy	Kristin Reedy	
Focus Group with Principals		Nancy Hurley	Nancy Hurley	
Focus Group with OT/PT		Vicki Hornus		
Focus Group with Inclusion Specialists		Vicki Hornus		
Focus Group with Sub. Separate Teachers		Vicki Hornus		
Focus Group with Counselors & SW		Sarah Guckenburg		
Focus Group with Special Start PK		Candice Bocala		
Focus Group Paras				Nancy Hurley
Focus Group Coaches		Nancy Hurley		
Focus Group Beh. Spec			Kristin Reedy	
	6 Groups	9 Groups	4 Groups	1 Group

TEAM: Kristin Reedy, Nancy Hurley, Vicki Hornus, Sarah Guckenburg (Total 20 Groups)

# Appendix C

## List of Documents Reviewed

Cambridge Public Schools Coordinated Program Review (CPR) Report of Findings (2009)  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2009/0049.pdf>

CRLS School Handbook 2010-11

[http://www.cpsd.us/CRLS/publications/CRLS\\_HANDBOOK\\_2010-11.pdf](http://www.cpsd.us/CRLS/publications/CRLS_HANDBOOK_2010-11.pdf)

Cambridge Public Schools Administrative Directory, September 29, 2010

Cambridge Application for IDEA-B Funds FY 11.

Cambridge Public Schools Guide to Policies for Students and Parents (August 2009)

Cambridge Public School Guide to Policies-Staff Edition (June 2010)

Cambridge Public Schools Employee Handbook

Cambridge Public Schools Special Education Information and Statistics, September 2007

Cambridge Public Schools Non-Discrimination Policy and Prohibition Against Sexual Harassment

Cambridge Public Schools Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Disability (June, 2009)

Cambridge Public Schools Administrative Support Reorganization Plan Executive Summary

Cambridge Public Schools Special Education Executive Summary, September 2009

Cambridge Parent Advisory Council on Special Education Brochure 2010-11

Cambridge Public Schools Adopted Budget FY2011

Cambridge Public Schools Goals for 2010-11

Cambridge Public Schools Budget Presentation FFY' 11, March 2, 2010

Cambridge Public Schools Schools at a Glance 2009-10

Cambridge Public Schools Controlled Choice Plan, December 18, 2001

Annual Review of Controlled Choice Plan, November 2006

District Referral Comparison by Grade, 2007-08- 2009-10

District-wide OSE Staffing 09-10

FY 2011 Initiative

MCAS and Adequate Yearly Progress Report 2010

Massachusetts School and District Profiles, 2009-2010 NCLB Report Cards – Cambridge—All Schools

Massachusetts School and District Profiles—Cambridge

Massachusetts School and District Profiles—Cambridge Enrollment Data 2009-10

Massachusetts School and District Profiles—Cambridge Teacher Data 2009-10

Massachusetts School and District Profiles 2008-09 Per Pupil Expenditures Report

Total Expenditures Function

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Total School District Expenditures, All Funds, By Function, FY07 to FY09  
[http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/function\\_3yr\\_09sum.aspx?ID=049#](http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/function_3yr_09sum.aspx?ID=049#)

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education FY09 Expenditures Per Pupil, District Comparisons Based Upon Grade Structure, District Wealth, and Enrollment

[http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/ppx09\\_comp.aspx?ID=049#](http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/schfin/statistics/ppx09_comp.aspx?ID=049#)

MCAS Tests of Spring 2009 Percent of Students at Each Performance Level

Massachusetts School and District Profiles—Cambridge 2009 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Data

Massachusetts School and District Profiles Cambridge - Special Education Data 2008-09

MCAS and Adequate Yearly Progress Report 2010-Cambridge Public Schools

Office of Special Education Administrative and Supervisory Structure 2010-11

Office of Special Education Description of Services

Out-of-District Placement Comparison Data 2007-08 – 2010-11

School Committee Presentation, Special Education Information and Statistics, September 2009

School Referrals Comparison Chart, 2006-07 – 2008-09

Special Education Programs and Locations

Special Education Child Count Data by school, level of need, gender, race, grade and disability 9-10-2009

Special Education Parent Welcome Letter 9-1-2010

# Appendix D

## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### SUPERINTENDENT'S CABINET

Please introduce yourself, tell us your position, and a little bit about your role, i.e. what you do.

1. As you know, MCAS results for CPS show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other students.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap? Why does it persist?
  - b. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers?
2. What are the biggest issues that are currently facing the District in terms of special education?
3. What about the numbers of students being identified in CPS for special education services? Are too many students being identified? In particular categories of disability? Or do you feel some children are under identified?
4. In your opinion, based on your experience and observations in the Cambridge Public Schools, to what degree do you believe that students with disabilities have equal/equitable access to the general education curriculum?
5. In your opinion, based on your experience and observations in the CPS, to what degree do you believe that students with disabilities have equal/equitable access to special education services? Why?
6. To what degree and in what ways are teachers working together in collaborative ways to jointly address the instructional and behavioral needs of students? How could collaboration be improved?
7. Building Capacity/Bridging the Gap: How are special educators being supported to improve their expertise in the content (i.e., mathematics)? How do general education teachers (i.e., mathematics) learn to better differentiate their instruction for special education students?
  - a. Teaming?
  - b. What suggestions do you have for building capacity on both sides? .
8. How are needs for professional development (both general and special ed.) identified and addressed? What are the current PD priorities for the district?
9. To what degree do the schools in Cambridge have other support services (e.g. RTI, early intervention, Title I, etc.) to support students who are having difficulty academically or behaviorally?
10. How would you characterize CPS communication with the public?
  - a. What recommendations do you have for improving communication with the public?
11. What policies or practices need to change at the district level to better serve students with disabilities? (Staffing? Resources? Identification? Communication with the public?)
12. What is the nature of parent and community involvement in special education programs? In CPS in general? How might parent or community involvement be improved?



13. What about the cost of special education in CPS?
  - a. About what percentage of the total budget is devoted to special education?
  - b. Do you feel that resources are being used effectively/efficiently?
  - c. If not, what might be a better use of resources?
  - d. Do you have recommendations for cost containment?
14. Please share what you see as the greatest strengths of the special education programs in Cambridge?
15. In your view, what is one thing that could improve the delivery of special education in Cambridge?
16. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### PRINCIPALS & ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

Ask for introductions, school name, and how long they've been principal or assistant principal.

1. As you know, MCAS results for CPS show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other students.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap?
  - b. Why does it persist?
  - c. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers?
2. To what extent do you believe services for special education students are equitable across all schools in the district?
3. What policies or practices need to change at the district level to better serve students with disabilities? (Staffing? Resources? Identification?)
4. As a principal, how are you involved with/how do you interact with the Office of Special Education? (Meetings? Memos? Updates?)
5. How would you characterize internal communication at your school or within the district?
6. What are the structures in your school for teacher-to-teacher collaboration (general and special education)? How would you describe the climate/culture of the teaching staff? (Open? Collegial? Isolated)
7. What services and supports are available through general education for struggling students at your school prior to outside special education?
8. Describe what happens at your school when it is time for a student with disabilities to transition to a new school or grade level?
9. What happens when a student transitions from an out of district placement or a substantially separate placement to a less supportive placement?
10. What is your understanding of RTI? In an RTI framework, what might your role be?
11. Please share what you see as the greatest strengths of the special education programs in the Cambridge Public Schools?
12. What challenges remain?
13. What suggestions do you have for improving services for students with disabilities in Cambridge?
14. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### CENTRAL OFFICE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

1. Tell me a little bit about your role as Special Education Director for CPS/Teacher in Charge.
2. What are the biggest issues and challenges that you are currently facing in your current role?
3. What type of professional development/support/coaching/supervision do you receive?
4. As you know, MCAS results for CPS show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other subgroups.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap? Why does it persist?
  - b. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers?
5. What is your interpretation of “inclusion”? What does “inclusion” mean to you? How would you explain/describe it?
  - a. To what extent do you think the inclusion process in Cambridge “works”?
  - b. How can we improve it?
  - c. What are barriers to increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular classroom? In the district?
6. How do you see the role of the special educators and Inclusion Specialists?
7. To what extent do you believe services for special education students are equitable across all schools in the district? Why?
8. Cambridge has a wide range of programs and personnel working in special education. Do you think the district is making the best use of CPS resources? Using personnel in the most efficient and coordinated fashion? How can we maximize the resources that we have?
9. Do you see gaps in the continuum of services for students with disabilities across the district?
10. To what degree do you believe that students with disabilities have equal/equitable access to the general education curriculum?
11. What policies or practices need to change at the district level to better serve students with disabilities? (Staffing? Resources? Identification?)
12. Transitions: In your view, how are transitions for students with disabilities planned and managed?
13. How are needs for professional development identified and addressed?
14. To what degree does special education staff participate in professional development offered to general education staff?
15. What are the district’s current PD priorities?
16. To what degree and in what ways are teachers working together in collaborative ways to jointly address the instructional and behavioral needs of students? How could collaboration be improved?
17. To what degree do the schools in Cambridge have other support services (e.g. RTI, early intervention, Title I, etc.) to support students who are having difficulty academically or behaviorally?
18. Communication Internal and External
  - a. What are the main communication structures within the district?
  - b. Are there areas where communication breaks down?
  - c. How could it be improved?

- d. How is information about the district currently provided to the public and to the community?
  - e. In what ways do you think information sharing could be improved?
19. Parent/Community Involvement/Engagement
- a. What is the nature of parent and community involvement in special education programs?  
In CPS in general?
  - b. How might parent or community involvement be improved?
20. Supervision and Coordination of Special Education and other Student Support Services between the Central Office and individual schools.
- a. What are the current and proposed job functions and responsibility of OSE staff?
  - b. What is the nature of the OSE's relationship to individual schools?
21. To what degree is supervision and evaluation of special education and/or student support staff shared or coordinated between the OSE and CPS?
22. What, if any, are your recommendations for increasing coordination and alignment between services and supports for students and staff at CPS with the overall direction in which the district is moving in terms of district-wide improvement planning and implementation?
23. In your view, what one change would improve the outcomes for SWD in the Cambridge Public Schools?

## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### **SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS / OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS / PHYSICAL THERAPISTS**

Please introduce yourself.

1. Please explain your role and responsibilities with regard to students with disabilities.
2. As you know, MCAS results for CPS show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other students.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap?
  - b. Why does it persist?
  - c. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers?
3. How are IEPs developed?
4. How does your school communicate with parents about their children with disabilities? How would you describe parental involvement at your school?
5. What kind of professional development have you attended that related to working with students with disabilities? What types of opportunities would you like to be offered in the future in this area?
6. To what extent do teachers in your school collaborate? Gen Ed with SPED? How would you describe the climate/culture of the teaching staff? (Open? Collegial? Isolated?)
7. What do you see as the greatest challenges you face in your role as a \_\_\_\_\_?
8. What do you need to make your job easier/more efficient?
9. To what extent do you believe services for special education students are equitable across all schools in the district? Why?
10. What suggestions do you have for improving services for students with disabilities in Cambridge?
11. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### CAMBRIDGE PARENTS

Main themes to address: Communication; identification; IEP process; transitions; equity; challenges; strengths; climate

*Inform the parents that the purpose of the focus group is to provide an opportunity for the parents to share their experiences with special education in relationship their own children. They could also be asked to think broader than their own experiences and ask them to think of what insight they have received from other parents who may not be able to participate in the focus group.*

1. As you know, MCAS results for Cambridge Public School show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other students.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap?
  - b. Why does it persist?
  - c. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and non-disabled peers?
2. What has been the process or strategy for assisting struggling students prior to referral for special education?
3. Tell us about the IEP process for your child ... Do you have a role? Who attends the meetings? Do you have an opportunity to be heard? Do you understand what and why decisions are made? How do you know if your child is making progress on his/her IEP goals?
4. Does your child's IEP say anything about how your child will participate in general ed curriculum? Have accommodations? Modifications? Be included or pulled out?
5. What do you know about your child's teachers – Have they been adequately trained to teach children with special needs? What supports do they have? Paras? Do they have enough support?
6. To what extent do you believe services for special education students are equitable across all schools in the district? Why?
7. What have been the greatest successes for your child? To what do you attribute these successes?
8. What have been the greatest challenges for your child in the Cambridge Public School? How have those been resolved?
9. Tell us about communication ... from the district ... from teachers ... from special educators ... specialists? How does it work? Is it working? What else is needed?
  - Expectations of your child?
  - Expectations of you as a parent?
  - How do you learn what your child's teacher expects?
10. What happens during transitions (Elementary to Middle School to High School)? Has your child transitioned to out of district services? Or to a substantially separate classroom? Come back in? How has it gone? Challenges? Successes?
11. Who determines which school your child attends? Do you decide as a parent? What do you take into consideration? Does your child typically get to go to the school of your choice?
12. Tell us about the After School Program ... what do you know? Does your child attend? Challenges? Successes? Special Start?
13. Ask about the C-PAC?

14. How would you describe the general climate between the district/schools and parents/families of students with disabilities? Examples?
15. What suggestions would you offer for improvement of services for children with special needs and their families?
16. Greatest strengths and challenges of the overall Special Education?

## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Please introduce yourself, name, school, grades served, etc.

1. Please explain your role and responsibilities with regard to students with disabilities in your school.
2. As you know, MCAS results for CPS show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other students.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap? Why does it persist?
  - b. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers?
3. Please describe the referral process/special education identification process at your school? What works well? What are the challenges? How would you improve the process if you could?
4. Describe what happens at your school when it is time for a student with disabilities to transition to a new school or grade level? (PROBE for supports, transitions plans, parental involvement, OTHER?)
5. What happens when a student transitions from an out of district placement or a substantially separate placement to a less supportive placement? What works well to help these transitions? What are the challenges?
6. What services and supports are available through general education for struggling students at your school(s) prior to outside special education?
7. How does your school communicate with parents about their children with disabilities? How would you describe parental involvement at your school?
8. To what extent do teachers in your school collaborate? Gen Ed with Special Ed.? How would you describe the climate/culture of the teaching staff? (Open? Collegial? Isolated?)
9. Cambridge has a high number of students placed out of district. What could the district do to keep more students in district for special education services?
10. Please share what you see as the greatest strengths in special education in Cambridge in terms of meeting the needs of students in your school?
11. What challenges remain?
12. What suggestions do you have for improving services for students with disabilities in Cambridge?
13. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?



## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS / SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS / SPECIAL START TEACHERS / COACHES

#### Introductions

1. Please explain your role and responsibilities with regard to students with disabilities.
2. As you know, MCAS results for CPS show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other students.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap?
  - b. Why does it persist?
  - c. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers?
3. How do you communicate with [special ed/general ed teachers] or other specialists (SLP, OT, PT) about the strengths, needs and progress of the students in your class who have an IEP? To what extent do teachers in your school collaborate? (Gen. Ed. with Special Ed.?) How would you describe the climate/culture of the teaching staff? (Open? Collegial? Isolated?)
4. How do you provide instructional accommodations for students with disabilities or special needs? And assessment accommodations?
5. If you have a paraeducator assigned to your class, how do you communicate with him/her and the [special/general] education teacher about the expectations for the para in supporting students with special needs?
6. Cambridge serves many students with special needs in substantially separate or out of district placements. What do you think would be needed so that more students with disabilities could be in the regular classroom for a greater amount of time?
7. What services/supports are available through general education for struggling students at your school prior to or outside of special education?
8. Please describe the process or strategy for assisting struggling students prior to or instead of a referral to special ed.?
9. What is your understanding of RTI? How do you see your role in an RTI model?
10. What professional development and support do you receive about the disabilities of the students with whom you work or are in your class(es)?
11. Please share what you see as the greatest strengths in special education in Cambridge in terms of meeting the needs of students in your school?
12. Please share the greatest challenges/barriers/weaknesses.
13. What suggestions do you have for improving services for students with disabilities in Cambridge?
14. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### SUBSTANTIALLY SEPARATE TEACHERS ASD / BEHAVIOR / LD / DD

Please introduce yourself, name, school, grades served, etc.

1. Please explain your role and responsibilities with regard to students with disabilities.
2. As you know, MCAS results for CPS show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other students.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap? Why does it persist?
  - b. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers?
3. Describe the referral process/special education identification process at your school. What works well? What are the challenges? How would you improve the process if you could?
4. How are IEPs developed? What is your role in that process? (PROBE for IEP goals regarding transition to less segregated environments.)
5. To what extent do you believe services for special education students are equitable across all schools in the district? Why?
6. Is there a protocol used to determine if a child is ready to be mainstreamed/more fully included in the regular classroom? How do you make those decisions? (Exit strategy?)
7. What are the benefits of being a building-based program? Is there adequate support?
8. Cambridge sends a large number of students to out-of-district placements. What strategies would you recommend to enable CPS to educate more students within the district?
9. Please share what you see as the greatest strengths in special education in Cambridge in terms of meeting the needs of students in your school?
10. What challenges remain?
11. What suggestions do you have for improving services for students with disabilities in Cambridge?
12. What services and supports are available through general education for struggling students at your school prior to or outside of special education?
13. To what extent do teachers in your school collaborate? Gen Ed with SPED? How would you describe the climate/culture of the teaching staff? (Open? Collegial? Isolated?)
14. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

## Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### INCLUSION SPECIALISTS

#### Introductions

1. Please describe your role and responsibilities as an Inclusion Specialist working with students with disabilities?
2. What is inclusion? How would you explain/describe it?
  - a. To what extent do you think the inclusion process in Cambridge works?
  - b. How can we improve it?
3. As you know, MCAS results for CPS show that there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and all other students.
  - a. Why do you think there is an achievement gap?
  - b. Why does it persist?
  - c. What is one strategy that you think could help to narrow the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers?
4. What professional development and support do you receive concerning the disabilities of the students with whom you work and concerning your role as an Inclusion Specialist?
5. What services/supports are available through general education for struggling students at your school prior to or outside special education?
6. What has been the process or strategy for assisting struggling students prior to referral for special ed.?
7. To what extent do you believe services for special education students are equitable across all schools in the district? Why?
8. What is your understanding of RTI? How do you see your role in an RTI model?
9. To what extent do teachers in your school collaborate? Gen Ed with SPED? How would you describe the climate/culture of the teaching staff? (Open? Collegial? Isolated?)
10. Please share what you see as the greatest successes in special education in Cambridge in terms of meeting the needs of students in your school?
11. What challenges remain? What suggestions do you have for improving services for students with disabilities in Cambridge?
12. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you?

# Appendix E

## Preliminary Themes Spring 2010

Focus Area Category	Themes
<p><b>Equity Issues</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is inconsistency across schools with regard to interpretation of policies, carrying out procedures, curriculum and instructional methods, IEP development, expectations/standards for achievement, etc.</li> <li>2. A minority of parents, who have both the financial resources and knowledge about the special education process, challenge the district with regard to programming and placement of their children, while others who are less well-informed or who do not have the resources for legal counsel do not. This distinction seems to break down along income and race/ethnicity lines.</li> <li>3. There is a perception of inequity in terms of job responsibilities and case load distribution between special educators and Inclusion Specialists and across other special education staff groupings.</li> <li>4. Resources for Pre-Kindergarten programs are perceived to be inequitable in comparison to school-age programs.</li> <li>5. Because of the curricular and instructional differences across schools there is a perception that students do not have equitable access to programs and services.</li> <li>6. Concern expressed that ELL students are not provided services or tested in their native language.</li> <li>7. Perception of inequity in funding for classroom supplies, etc., provided for general ed teachers; not for special ed teachers.</li> <li>8. Perception of inequities in teacher evaluations.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Variability, inconsistency, differential treatment</p>
<p><b>Communication</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communication with regard to CPS policies and procedures is inconsistent between Office of Special Education (OSE) administrators to and across schools.</li> <li>2. There is a perception of “mixed messages” coming from OSE to building-based staff and principals.</li> <li>3. There is a perceived disconnect or distance between OSE administrators and building-based staff in terms of what their work involves and the constraints within which they are operating.</li> <li>4. There is an under-current of mistrust across the district, from the OSE to staff within buildings and across/within the OSE administrative team and the overall CPS administration.</li> <li>5. There is a perception that the “culture” of communication is not open or receptive to new ideas; there are fears of retribution or</li> </ol>

Focus Area Category	Themes
	<p>intimidation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Structures for communication between administrators and teachers across general and special education are established but are not always implemented regularly and with consistency. (i.e., Ed plans have consult time built in, but rarely happens.)</li> <li>7. Common planning time is needed for team meeting and collaboration within the school day.</li> <li>8. There is a perception of isolation among different types of staff (jobs-alike groupings) and a need for closer coordination/communication between general and special education across all components of the system.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Mistrust, inconsistency, mixed messages, time constraints</p>
<p><b>Parent and Community Involvement</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a perception that more affluent parents are given preferential treatment particularly with regard to out-of-district placements.</li> <li>2. The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is not functioning as well as it could be and there is a need for more diverse representation of parents and better outreach to the broader constituency group of parents.</li> <li>3. Some parents are resistant to special education evaluations and services in the early grades.</li> <li>4. There are some particular programs that report high levels of parent involvement and engagement, e.g. the ASD program and Special Start.</li> <li>5. While parents have a “controlled choice” option in Cambridge, respondents report that the population of students in individual schools breaks down along socio-economic and racial lines.</li> <li>6. More information distributed/communicated to parents about special education services in CPS might improve communication and help to increase parents’ capacity to make informed choices in schools and in special education programming and placement for their students.</li> <li>7. More education of parents about teacher expectations re: homework, etc. would help.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Differential treatment/response, more information, more communication, more outreach to diverse groups.</p>
<p><b>Professional Development</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a perception that the district lacks a district-wide plan for professional development for all teachers and staff that is aligned with the district’s priorities.</li> <li>2. There is a lack of structured opportunities for professional development and professional exchange of ideas, problems and</li> </ol>

Focus Area Category	Themes
	<p>strategies across particular jobs-alike staff groupings.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Particular topics/areas where respondents see the need for PD across general and special education include: RTI, differentiated instruction, literacy/reading and math interventions, co-teaching, autism awareness, PBIS, crisis management/CPI and opportunities to observe/visit other districts to learn about successful models and approaches; as well as how to work together; special ed teachers need PD in content and general ed teachers need PD in differentiation of instruction.</li> <li>4. There is a perception that participation in district-offered professional development opportunities is not required and this impacts staff participation.</li> <li>5. Paraeducators do not have opportunities for professional development.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Alignment, compensation, opportunity, general ed./special ed. joint PD</p>
<p><b>General Education Capacity to Support All Students</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. CPS has a range of support services available through general education to support struggling students, including Title I, Reading Recovery, and the Lesley Literacy Initiative (LLI).</li> <li>2. Reading Recovery, the Lesley Literacy Initiative (LLI), ECRS??? and other supports for literacy development are not available beyond grade 3.</li> <li>3. There are few/no early intervention programs in the area of mathematics; however, there are plans for building-based math coaches in 2010-11.</li> <li>4. The Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) operate differently/inconsistently across buildings. There is a perception that TATs are not successful at addressing strategies for struggling students prior to referral for a special education evaluation.</li> <li>5. Response to Intervention (RTI) is being considered as a framework for school improvement and support to all students, however, schools are in the very early stages of developing awareness level understanding of RTI and what will be needed for its implementation across the district.</li> <li>6. There is a need to develop specific interventions at Tier II for both academics and behavior.</li> <li>7. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are not well developed across schools. Some schools are using the Responsive Classroom model.</li> <li>8. There appears to be the perception that shared responsibility across general and special education for the success of all students is lacking/weak. Special education is perceived as a separate</li> </ol>

Focus Area Category	Themes
	<p>system.</p> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Capacity development in general education, shared responsibility for all students</p>
<p><b>Staff Roles and Responsibilities</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. While the CPS has a wide range of staff to address the needs of students with disabilities (SWD), there is the perception that roles and responsibilities are unclear or are inconsistently implemented/performed across schools.</li> <li>2. There is a difference of opinion re: the role of the Inclusion Specialist. Inclusion Specialists interpret and perform their jobs differently across schools; principals sometimes give them tasks to do not related to their role. Role needs to be revisited; has become diluted in recent years.</li> <li>3. “Teachers in Charge” are organized by categories of students rather than by schools and are supervising staff across many different school buildings.</li> <li>4. There are inconsistencies in terms of staff quality, knowledge and expertise.</li> <li>5. Level of staffing is adequate, however, staff use different approaches across schools.</li> <li>6. Level of staffing may be adequate in some places, not in others/for some roles it is not.</li> <li>7. Related services, speech, OT, etc., roles need to be clearly defined. A lot of ‘that’s not my job, you do it.’ Some work well together.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Roles and responsibilities, consistency</p>
<p><b>Achievement Gap</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The use of pull-out models for service delivery, particularly in the upper grades, may be preventing SWD from full access to the content being addressed in the regular classroom.</li> <li>2. Curriculum and instructional methods are inconsistent across schools. There is a perceived lack of vertical and horizontal curricular coherence.</li> <li>3. There is a perception that the “achievement gap” starts well before children enter school due to factors outside of the schools’ control which continues and widens as children move up the grades. High mobility/transience in the Cambridge population contributes to the achievement gap.</li> <li>4. The achievement gap is measured primarily through the use of the MCAS.</li> <li>5. Proficiency on the MCAS may be an unrealistic goal for SWD.</li> <li>6. Instruction in study and test-taking skills could improve test scores.</li> <li>7. More early interventions and supports are needed for struggling</li> </ol>

Focus Area Category	Themes
	<p>students outside/prior to special education.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. General education teachers are weak in their capacity to accommodate individual differences in the regular classroom.</li> <li>9. While IEPs are aligned with the general education curriculum content, the achievement standards are lowered for SWD.</li> <li>10. Instructional approaches in general education are not meeting the needs of some SWD (e.g. whole language vs. structured phonetic approaches).</li> <li>11. The general education curriculum, scope and sequence and pacing may not be appropriate for some SWD.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Access and opportunity, consistency, expectations, early intervention</p>
<p><b>Continuum of Services</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a continuum of services for students with disabilities in CPS, however, there is inconsistency across schools in terms of what aspects of the continuum are available and there is a difference of opinion with regard to types/models of programs.</li> <li>2. The district demonstrates a high, though declining rate of out-of-district placements.</li> <li>3. Programming for ASD students is perceived as high quality and helps to prevent out-placements.</li> <li>4. There is a perception that the district responds differently to parents/advocates who are able to challenge the district re: their child’s educational program and placement.</li> <li>5. Some of the service delivery “models” that are available in CPS include: co-teaching (particularly at CRLS); support for in-class accommodations and differentiated instruction from Inclusion Specialists; pull out programs in reading and math; use of Orton Gillingham and Wilson reading interventions in some schools, self-contained special classes (sub. separate) for students in particular categories of disability (e.g. ED, Autism Spectrum), and out-of-district day or residential placements.</li> <li>6. Perceived “gaps” in the continuum include a therapeutic in-district program for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities, a traditional “resource room” model for SLD students, lack of a special class for SLD students, and lack of a “transition class” for children entering Kindergarten from PK.</li> <li>7. Procedures and criteria for entering or exiting placement options along the continuum are not clear.</li> <li>8. Self-contained classes are reportedly dominated by low income and racial minority students.</li> <li>9. Placement of substantially separate classes by strand in a single building is being considered by CPS; however, there is a good deal of controversy across stakeholders regarding this proposal.</li> </ol>



Focus Area Category	Themes
	<p>10. There is a lack of monitoring special ed. students once they are in the program (for progress and transitioning out.)</p> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Differential treatment and response, inconsistency, full continuum with some gaps</p>
<p><b>Space/Facilities</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conditions in various buildings for OT/PT space are inadequate. Respondents report issues with safety, sanitation, air quality, etc.</li> <li>2. Equipment is not secure during periods when schools are closed.</li> <li>3. Space for OT/PT is inadequate in some schools, particularly the high school.</li> <li>4. PK spaces/classrooms are not necessarily designed for preschoolers.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key Concepts:</b> Inequity, poor conditions</p>

## **Perceived Strengths of Special Education Program**

October 21, 2010

**Dear Cambridge Public Schools Educators and Instructional Staff:**

### **CPS Focus Groups and Interviews May 2010**

**Perceived Strengths of the Special Education Programs taken from interview and focus group notes. This list does not necessarily represent a consensus on the part of respondents.**

#### **Staff Competency/Capacity/Expertise/Knowledge and Skills**

- Staff competency
- Top-notch special educators
- Support from school psychologists
- Teams at the schools and across the district...really phenomenal staff. Well educated, well versed.
- Good school psychologist support. Ours is phenomenal, well educated, can explain to parents, a good team leader.
- Great school psychologist. They know kids from the first grade.
- Going into the classroom, kids look at me as a teacher...they don't know what I do but they want to come with me.
- We have program where our kids are matched with kids from MIT it's a Key Pal Program. One of my kids introduced me, "This is Mrs. M....she's the person who makes my life easier."
- Lots of qualified professionals
- District is blessed with the staff...energy and commitment. Related series providers.
- Experience and quality of teachers I am involved with are really good
- Sped Personnel are extremely dedicated, hard working – toward best interests for our students.
- Sped staff are highly competent and extremely caring about kids.
- Staff working hard, have enough people, they're getting stretched though. Gen ed teachers are getting on board and being supportive. Lots more integration, natural interaction than when the program first started.

#### **Special Education Programs/Continuum**

- It's a great system and special ed. department. Used to teach in another district...huge difference.
- Special Education Program overall. It can work well.
- District's coaching model

- Floor time consultant for ASD program.
- Behavior specialist(s)
- Co-teaching Model and the support we've received ... the fact it's happening it's been positive for me and my students.
- ASD Program: It's sort of specialized ... autism ... teachers are getting trained in how to manage those challenges – paras getting trained; speech person, etc., focus on kids with autism; we're starting to acquire expertise around that ... it's been really helpful .. to me, and also to my other children with other issues ...
- Extended day
- Special Start-Integrated PK Program
- Our evaluations are extremely thorough and ID student's strengths and weaknesses.
- Primary grades, OG trained, common language across schools. I can interpret their IEPs. Consistency across the district. Our IEPs are stellar.
- When you see big progress throughout the year. From a kid who couldn't sit in a chair who is now reading...not on grade level but we are able to make that kind of progress with kids.
- Big changes in kids' attitudes when they can see they have learned.
- ASD program: We got more resources...I feel very supported. Everybody I work with, lots of flexibility and collaboration.
- ASD: I have a big voice, we have a new developing program, I have a voice with my direct supervisor, with OSE, within the building, or administrators are very supportive of us.
- PK excellent classrooms with or without special needs.
- Good IEPs and evaluations. Teams are very thorough.
- Autism program is a strength.
- Concept of AT in CPS is a strength; implementation and support is not in line with concept yet.
- Preschool program, getting in early.
- ABA program has been well supported; staff is supported; there is a cap on numbers.
- Sped at our school are really supportive, many in our school have been excited about our program, especially music, art, gym.
- Co-teaching model that we instituted in grade 8 – second year. We see growth in the kids academically and socially. Paired with our mixed homerooms, advisories, etc., has made a difference for mixing. Co-teaching has taken away a lot of the stigma. In cafeteria, kids are integrated.
- My class is “normalized” now, kids moving in and out now – not just the sped classroom anymore. Kids are included in advisory. “My kids are out in the world.” Nice that they don't have the stigma of being in sped class. We started with specialists. Our old assistant principal did a research group and we did co-teaching pilot.
- Co-teaching and the support received ... positive for me and my students.
- Writing workshop allows for some degree of differentiation; same for guided reading. As opposed to a basal reader.

- “In our school, the one thing we’re doing right is the ASD program ... moving in the right direction.”
- SPED PAC Ombudsman

### **Autonomy vs. Consistency**

- There is respect for autonomy that the teams work differently. It is greatest strength and greatest weakness.
- Variability across schools: A strength and a weakness. Driven by the schools and what people’s preferred approach is.
- Primary grades, OG trained, common language across schools. I can interpret their IEPs. Consistency across the district. Our IEPs are stellar.
- IEPs and reports consistent across the district.
- The flexibility, you make your own schedule but it’s a challenge in the upper grades.
- Flexibility and autonomy in how we do our job.

### **Investment in Resources**

- Investment in resources and lots of staff
- Relatively low case loads (for some staff)
- Have had lots of training in the past.
- Lots of access to resources, lots of supplies.
- Reasonable case loads. Used to be up to 30 kids. Now it’s lower...more special ed. staff. Staff student ratio for special ed. is very low.
- I have what I need to do my job well. Good relationships with classroom teachers... supplies, opportunities. Given the constraints of the school day we're are helping kids who need to be helped. Sometimes I wish we could help kids sooner...but we need to go through that process.
- Budget support a lot of progressive programs.
- Attempt to create the ratio we have and working together.
- SPED teachers included in focus on PD in math; getting MTEL licensed; active engagement in this.
- Autism spectrum; full time consultant hired
- Behavior specialist in the system

### **Leadership**

- The Executive Director: An executive director who really does believe in equity – she doesn’t just say it – she’s getting a lot of push back but she’s hanging in and doing what she believes is right for students despite the craziness that is Cambridge.
- Long term OSE staff with history of experience in the district allowed to stay in the building. “I value when specialists are allowed to stay in the bldg – I learn a lot from them.”
- Grateful for long term OSE staff that has years of experience and are allowed to stay in the bldg because OSE determines where therapists are working every year; no guarantee they will be back.

- New leadership in OSE
- Shift in philosophy from what's best for adults to what's best for kids.
- People who can respond to us....my direct supervisor I can always go to.

### **Teamwork/Collaboration**

- Transition process from middle to high school
- Good communication between teachers
- Close teamwork in the building. Support each other.
- I can call the people at other schools and I get good information.
- Good communication across the schools among special ed. staff.
- We're all in it together and we support each other and work together. We're all in the same boat together.
- Working with a team of professionals.
- In my building, great special ed. team...very collaborative (OT/PT, etc.)
- Sped dept is fantastic – being somewhat new, we have had a lot of support from them – team of people who have the same mentality about the way things should be done. (These were the new ASD sped teachers.)
- Excellent sped team that supports each other. Principal and asst also are very supportive, always there to help. Specialists (art, music, phys ed) do a lot of extra things for kids.

### **Values and Beliefs**

- At CRLS: team development and core belief in the shared responsibility for all students
- Commitment of many of the staff members who have been through many administrators...we keep in mind that we are there for the kids.
- Everybody cares about the kids.
- Encouragement of kids to learn, you are going to learn. Belief that all kids can learn.
- Teachers will do anything to help their children.
- Dedication and commitment of staff is unique; unprecedented compared to other districts.
- Diversity of community.
- School community – tries to include our kids with ASD, developing a community at the schools.
- Everybody's heart really wants to do what is best for kids, nobody is burned out. School psychologist is sped chair in the building – competent, efficient.
- The school is still building and working hard so that students in sub separate class are all included and feel welcome. Everyone's heart is in the right place, heading in the right direction. Motivation for this – things were so bad that kids were going off in ambulances. Think they wanted to start fresh. We have staying power. Principal took leadership in this. Little by little built trust in the sped program. Cooperation from other teachers – things are moving. Related services support. Everyone is chipping in.
- Special ed kids are respected, kids do get services.

# Appendix F

## Educator and Parent Surveys

### EDUCATOR SURVEY

October 21, 2010

#### Dear Cambridge Public Schools Educators and Instructional Staff:

As you may already be aware, last spring the Cambridge Public Schools contracted with WestEd, an independent consulting group, to conduct a **Special Education Program Review**. This review is expected to be completed by December 2010.

The district has asked WestEd to provide recommendations in the following areas:

- *Recommendations for strengthening of CPS special education programs (substantially separate and inclusion).*
- *Recommendations for improving communication with the public in order to build confidence in our programming, staffing, and organization around special education.*
- *Recommendations for cost containment measures which do not compromise the quality of services provided.*
- *Recommendations for the development of additional programs to serve students who currently receive services outside of the district.*
- *Clear definitions of terminology, such as full inclusion.*

As part of the review, WestEd would like to hear from CPS education and instructional staff regarding your perceptions of the special education programs and services in Cambridge and how they are implemented.

**Please complete this short survey by clicking on the link below. It should take you about 15-20 minutes. The survey will “close” on Monday, November 1, 2010.**

**Click on this link:** <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CPSSurvey>

It is important for you to know that your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and confidential. The survey link and results come back to WestEd, not to the district. No individual responses will be shared with the Cambridge Public Schools. Survey responses will be the property of WestEd. Your responses will be summarized with all other responses so we can provide results to the district. No personally identifiable information will be shared with the district. Your responses will remain completely confidential.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact: Kristin Reedy at [kreedy@wested.org](mailto:kreedy@wested.org) or 802-951-8218.

**Thanks very much!**

Cambridge Public Schools –Final Draft

(This survey was entered into Survey Monkey and a link to the survey disseminated to staff via email.)

**Educator Survey**

Demographic Information:

1. At which school(s) is your main teaching/work assignment?\_\_\_\_\_

- |                   |                               |                    |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Amigos            | Baldwin                       | Cambridgeport      |
| Fletcher-Maynard  | Graham & Parks                | Haggerty           |
| Kenney-Longfellow | King Open                     | Martin Luther King |
| Morse             | Peabody                       | Tobin              |
| CRLS              | High School Extension Program |                    |

2. Counting this school year, how many years have you worked in this school or in the district  
WRITE IN YEARS BELOW

1-5    6-10    greater than 10 years

3. Counting this school year, how many years have you been teaching/working in the education field? WRITE IN YEARS BELOW

1-5    6-10    greater than 10 years

4. Counting this school year, how many years have you been working with or on behalf of students receiving special education services?

1-5    6-10    greater than 10 years

5. How do you classify your main assignment at this school? **(Check the box that represents your primary job assignment. Check only one option.)**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| General Ed. Teacher  | Long-term substitute   |
| Special education teacher, substantially separate class  | Related Services Provider (e.g., OT/PT, Speech/Language, etc.) |
| Inclusion Specialist   | Paraprofessional   |
| Preschool General Ed.  | Instructional Coach  |
| Preschool Special Ed.  | Title I Teacher  |
| School Psychologist  | Teacher in Charge  |
| Guidance Counselor   | School Adjustment Counselor                                    |
| Principal or other administrator   | Other (Please specify)   |
| Itinerant special education teacher (your assignment requires you to provide instruction/services at more than one school) |  |

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?  
High school diploma or GED

- Associate’s degree
- Bachelor’s degree
- At least one year of course work beyond a B.A., but not a graduate degree
- Master’s degree
- \_\_\_\_\_ Specialist
- \_\_\_\_\_ Doctorate

**To what degree to the following statements reflect your experience and observations of special education programs and services in the Cambridge Public Schools.**

**To a great extent = 4 Somewhat/Sometimes = 3 Seldom/Rarely = 2 Not at all = 1**

Item	Not at all	Seldom/ Rarely	Somewhat/S ometimes	To a great extent	Don't Know
<b>Achievement Gap</b>					
1. Staff at our school have high expectations for all students, including students on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).	1	2	3	4	
2. Curriculum and instructional methods/implementation are consistent across schools.	1	2	3	4	
3. Special education service delivery models in my school provide access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.	1	2	3	4	
4. Accommodations for students with disabilities are fully implemented across all subject and content classes.	1	2	3	4	
5. Students with disabilities receive the services they need to meet IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	
6. Students’ IEP goals and objectives are aligned with the general education curriculum.	1	2	3	4	
7. [OPEN-ENDED QUESTION] What do you think is most needed to close the achievement gap?	1	2	3	4	
<b>Continuum of Services</b>					
8. Across the district, we have a full continuum of placement options to meet the diverse needs of our students with disabilities.	1	2	3	4	
9. Placement decisions are based on the individual student’s educational needs.	1	2	3	4	
10. Criteria for <b>entering</b> placements along the continuum are clear.	1	2	3	4	
11. Criteria for <b>exiting</b> placements along the continuum are clear.					
12. Special education resources are equitable within schools across the district.					
13. [OPEN-ENDED QUESTION] Are there any gaps in the continuum of services within the	1	2	3	4	



Cambridge Public Schools? ___Yes___No If yes, what are they?					
<b>General Education Capacity to Support all Students</b>					
14. Teachers at our school are provided with the resources they need to develop appropriate instructional programs for students with disabilities.	1	2	3	4	
15. General education teachers know how to differentiate instruction to accommodate diverse learning styles of students in their classrooms.	1	2	3	4	
16. I know when and how to refer a student to a Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT).	1	2	3	4	
17. When I ask for assistance from the TAT, I receive the support I need.	1	2	3	4	
18. The TAT in my school is operating effectively to address the instructional needs of students who are struggling.	1	2	3	4	
19. My school has the capacity to implement Response to Intervention (RTI).	1	2	3	4	
20. My school has the capacity to implement a schoolwide system of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).					
<b>Staff Roles and Responsibilities</b>					
21. Special education staff have a common understanding of their roles and responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	
22. There is consistency among special education staff with how they perform their duties.	1	2	3	4	
23. The workload is equitably distributed across special education staff across the district.	1	2	3	4	
<b>Communication and Collaboration</b>					
24. School administrators at my school deliver consistent messages regarding special education administrative policies and procedures.	1	2	3	4	
25. The Office of Special Education (OSE) administrators deliver consistent messages regarding special education administrative policies and procedures.	1	2	3	4	
26. OSE administrators are available to support schools in the implementation of special education programs and services.	1	2	3	4	
27. There is consistency across schools regarding the interpretation of special education policies and procedures.	1	2	3	4	
28. There are opportunities for special education staff to share expertise with each other across the district.	1	2	3	4	
29. A common planning time for special education and general education is allocated for teachers to collaboratively plan instruction.	1	2	3	4	

<b>Professional Development</b>					
30. Professional development opportunities for all teachers are aligned with district priorities for improving student achievement.	1	2	3	4	
31. Special education staff are included in district-wide professional development opportunities that are offered for general education teachers.	1	2	3	4	
32. There are ongoing opportunities for paraprofessionals to attend district-wide professional development.	1	2	3	4	
33. The school administration uses the staff evaluation process to identify needs for professional development.	1	2	3	4	
34. There are sufficient opportunities for general education teachers to learn about how to address the instructional needs of students with disabilities who are placed in the general education classroom.	1	2	3	4	
35. There are sufficient opportunities for special education teachers to learn about the general education curriculum and general education instructional programs.	1	2	3	4	
36. <b>[OPEN ENDED QUESTION]</b> I would like more professional development in the area of: Differentiated Instruction; Co-teaching; Flexible Grouping; Classroom Management; Response to Intervention; Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports; Cross Communication and collaboration; Data Analysis for Guiding Instruction etc.; Literacy; Mathematics					
<b>Parent and Community Involvement</b>					
37. Teachers at our school encourage parental involvement in determining instructional goals for students with disabilities.	1	2	3	4	
38. Teachers at our school consider parents as equal partners in planning their child's IEP.	1	2	3	4	
39. All parent requests are considered equitably.	1	2	3	4	
40. Our teachers do a good job of helping parents understand the special education evaluation and eligibility determination process.	1	2	3	4	
41. Parents know their rights and are able to exercise them.	1	2	3	4	
42. <b>[OPEN-ENDED QUESTION]</b> What in your experience has been the biggest barrier to involving parents in their child's education?					
43. <b>[OPEN-ENDED QUESTION]</b> What is the most successful strategy you have used to engage and involve parents?					

## PARENT SURVEY COVER LETTER

October 21, 2010

### Dear Parents and Caregivers:

As you may already be aware, last spring the **Cambridge Public Schools** contracted with WestEd, an independent consulting group, to conduct a Special Education Program Review. This review is expected to be completed by December 2010.

As part of the review, WestEd would like to hear from the parents of children who are receiving special education services through the Cambridge Public Schools. We want to learn more about your perceptions of the services that your child has received and about your communication and involvement with the school district in the implementation of your child's educational program. As part of this project, we are conducting this short survey. If you have more than one child receiving services you can base your responses on your overall experience with all of those children.

**Please fill in your responses and, using the self-addressed stamped envelope provided, mail the survey back to our offices in Williston, Vermont by Friday November 5, 2010.**

**It should take you about 10 minutes to complete this survey.**

It is important for you to know that your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may skip any items to which you do not want to respond. Please also note that your privacy is very important to us. No individual responses will be shared with the Cambridge Public Schools. Survey responses will be the property of WestEd. Your responses will be summarized with all other responses so we can provide results to the district. No personally identifiable information will be shared with the district. Your responses will remain completely confidential.

If you need the survey to be translated into another language, please contact me at [Kreedy@wested.org](mailto:Kreedy@wested.org) or 802-951-8218.

**Thanks very much!**

Sincerely,

Kristin Reedy, Ed.D.  
Learning Innovations WestEd

**Dear Parents and Caregivers:**

As you may already be aware, last spring the Cambridge Public Schools contracted with West Ed, an independent consulting group, to conduct a Special Education Program Review. This review is expected to be completed by December 2010.

As part of the review, WestEd would like to hear from the parents of children who are receiving special education services through the Cambridge Public Schools. We want to learn more about your perceptions of the services that your child has received and about your communication and involvement with the school district in the implementation of your child's educational program. As part of this project, we are conducting this short survey. If you have more than one child receiving services you can base your responses on your overall experience with all of those children.

**Please fill in your responses and, using the stamped self-addressed envelope provided, mail the survey back to our offices in Williston, Vermont by Friday November 5, 2010. It should take you about 10 minutes to complete this survey.**

Survey responses will be the property of WestEd. Your responses will be summarized with all other responses so we can provide results to the district. No personally identifiable information will be shared with the district. Your responses will remain completely confidential.

If you need the survey to be translated into another language, please contact Kristin Reedy at [Kreedy@wested.org](mailto:Kreedy@wested.org) or 802-951-8218.

**Thanks very much!**

\*\*\*\*\*

**What schools does your child attend?**

- Amigos       Baldwin       Cambridgeport       Fletcher-Maynard       Graham & Parks
- Haggerty       Kenney-Longfellow       King Open       Martin Luther King       Morse
- Peabody       Tobin       CRLS       High School Extension Program

**Please indicate your child's grade level.**

- Pre-Kindergarten       K-8       9-12

**What is your child's disability?**

- Specific Learning Disability       Sensory Impairment       Emotional Disability       Developmental Disability       Intellectual Disability
- Autism       Health Impairment       Communication       Physical       Multiple Disabilities

Other (please describe):

---

**What is your child's primary placement?**

- Regular Classroom       Pull-out / Pushing In       Sub-Separate Special Class       Out-of-District Placement

Other (please describe):

---

**What is your child's race/ethnicity?**

- White/Caucasian       African American       Hispanic       Asian

Other:

---

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by filling in the circles completely (fill in only one circle for each statement):

**Special Education Progress and Placement**

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Agree	4 - Strongly Agree	0 - Don't Know
My child receives all the services written on my child's IEP.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child's <i>general</i> education teacher provides all of the accommodations and modifications documented on my child's IEP.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child's <i>special</i> education teacher provides all of the accommodations and modifications documented on my child's IEP.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child's IEP tells how progress toward goals will be measured.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child is taught the general education curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate based on my child's needs and goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my child is being educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel my child is being provided with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child's special education teachers and service providers are knowledgeable with regard to my child's disability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The general education teacher (s) is knowledgeable with regard to my child's disability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am included as an equal partner with school personnel in decision-making about my child's program and placement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I receive regular updates, at least 4 times a year, on my child's progress on IEP goals and objectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child is making progress on the goals and objectives on my child's IEP.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by filling in the circles completely (fill in only one circle for each statement):

**Communication with District and School Teachers and Administrators**

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Agree	4 - Strongly Agree	0 - Don't Know
I regularly communicate with my child's special education teacher and/or related services providers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I communicate regularly with my child's classroom teacher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I have questions about my child's program or services, I know who to call.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administrators at the Office of Special Education are accessible to me and responsive to my requests for information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand my rights as a parent of a child on an IEP.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by filling in the circles completely (fill in only one circle for each statement):

**School Community**

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Agree	4 - Strongly Agree	0 - Don't Know
My child feels welcomed and accepted by the school community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel welcome when I visit my child's school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child's teachers understand and celebrate my child's strengths.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child's teachers have high expectations for my child's achievement at school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am treated with respect in my interactions with the Cambridge Public Schools.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Cambridge Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) is effective in supporting parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

“What suggestions do you have for strengthening/improving special education programs and services in Cambridge Public Schools?”

**Please return this survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by November 5, 2010.**

**Kristin Reedy, Ed.D.**  
Learning Innovations at WestEd  
426 Industrial Avenue, Suite 160  
Williston, VT 5495  
Phone: 802-951-8218  
Email: [kreedy@wested.org](mailto:kreedy@wested.org)

**Thank you for your participation!**

**(802) 951-8220**

# Appendix G

## Classroom Observation Protocol

<b>Teacher</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>School</b>		<b>Grade / Level</b>	
<b>Class Period or Time of Class</b>		<b>Duration of Observation</b>	

### Type of Classroom:

- Regular Classroom    
  Special Class only for Students on IEPs    
  Resource Room    
  Title I or Other Small Group Intervention    
  Planning of Behavioral Intervention Room
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### Materials Used (select all that apply):

- Teacher Made    
  Manufactured    
  District or Department Developed

Characterization of Materials:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Student Grouping (Please note if group size changes during class):

- Large Group    
  Small Group    
  1:1

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Composition:

<b># of Students</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b># of Minorities</b>	
	<b>Female</b>		<b># with IEPs</b>	

### Staffing:

What teachers or students support staff are working in the classroom during the observation period?

- Paraprofessional    
  Special Education Teacher    
  Regular Education Teacher    
  Parent Volunteer

Other: \_\_\_\_\_





**Extent of Evidence**

0 – No Evidence / Did Not Occur	This behavior/indicator was not observed during the observation period.
1 - Little Evidence / Occurred – Low Level	This behavior/indicator was observed, but at a low level/frequency or inconsistently.
2 – Moderate Evidence / Occurred Moderate Level	The behavior/indicator was implemented consistently during the observation period.
3 – Extensive Evidence – Occurred High Level	The behavior/indicator was observed frequently and/or with a high level of consistency during the observation period.
X – Not Applicable	The behavior/indicator was not appropriate for the setting being observed.

Please indicate the degree to which you witnessed the following behaviors by filling in the circles completely (fill in only one circle for each statement). For clarity of answer options, see page 3.

**Direct Instruction**

	<i>0 – No</i>	<i>1 - Limited</i>	<i>2 - Moderate</i>	<i>4 - Extensive</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
The instruction is differentiated for the needs of individuals, or small groups of students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher checks frequently for understanding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evidence of instructional adjustment based on checks for understanding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students have the opportunity to work both individually and in small groups in addition to whole class instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students have opportunities to apply or practice skills during the lesson.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pace of instruction is varied and appropriate to the task or lesson.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instruction is appropriate to students' instructional level(s).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instructional approach provides a high level of teacher-student interaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students on IEPs are included in instructional groupings with nondisabled students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students on IEPs receive modifications and accommodations during the observation period.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students on IEPs receive instruction aligned with the general education curriculum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate the degree to which you witnessed the following behaviors by filling in the circles completely (fill in only one circle for each statement). For clarity of answer options, see page 3.

**Overall Classroom Climate and Support**

	0 - No	1 - Limited	2 - Moderate	4 - Extensive	Not Applicable
Teacher communicates high expectations for student achievement/performance and behavior.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classroom organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agenda of daily lesson/activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Structured routines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adequate space for instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adequate materials and technology available for use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective classroom transition practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students are actively engaged/on task throughout the lesson/period.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Behavioral expectations are clear.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classroom management is effective in addressing student behavior.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The teacher(s) give clear, specific corrective feedback for behavior.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher comments/verbal feedback is frequent and generally positive. Negative or critical comments are kept to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical environment is conducive to learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instructional time was not interrupted during the observation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support staff (e.g. special education teacher, paraeducators) interact with all students in the classroom;	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# Appendix H

## Record Review Protocol and Letter to Parents

October 21, 2010

Dear Parents/Families:

It has come to my attention that there are some questions with regard to the Special Education Program review. This is an extremely important project and your involvement and understanding are key to its success, so please allow me to clarify some areas of concern.

As you are aware, last May, WestEd consulting group was contracted to conduct a Special Education Program Review. A Request for Proposals was written and posted in the City of Cambridge website. Bidders submitted their responses and WestEd was determined the most qualified. If you wish to learn more about WestEd, please visit their website at [www.wested.org](http://www.wested.org).

The purpose of this program review is to provide:

- *Recommendations for strengthening our special education programs (substantially separate and inclusion).*
- *Recommendations for improving communication with the public in order to build confidence in our programming, staffing, and organization around special education.*
- *Recommendations for cost containment measures which do not compromise the quality of services provided.*
- *Recommendations for the development of additional programs to serve students who currently receive services outside of the district.*
- *Clear definitions of terminology, such as “full inclusion”.*

Several steps have been taken to meet the deliverables. These are:

- Cambridge Public Schools Staff Focus Groups (completed in May 2010)
- Special Education Parents’ Focus Groups (completed in September 2010)
- Randomly Selected Students’ Records Review (scheduled for October-November 2010)
- Delivery of Services (including classrooms) Observations (scheduled for October-November 2010)
- Cambridge Public Schools Staff Online Survey (scheduled for November 2010)
- Mailing of Parent Survey (scheduled for October-November 2010)

The most significant items that directly involve parents are: Parents’ Focus Groups, Parent Survey and Student Record Reviews.

In September a letter was sent to all parents with students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) inviting them to participate in the **focus groups**. Five parent focus groups were offered the last week of September. Four were in the evening (childcare was provided) and one was scheduled in the morning. A total of 24 parents participated in the focus groups.

**Parent Survey** will be mailed directly from the WestEd offices but they will be enclosed in a Cambridge Public Schools envelope for easy identification. Mailing labels and envelopes were provided to WestEd from our office to facilitate the process. Surveys will be returned directly to the WestEd offices in a self-addressed and stamped envelope included with the survey. The parent survey was developed by WestEd staff based on the feedback provided by the parents during the focus groups.

Lastly, for WestEd to be able to completely meet these goals, their staff will need to review **students' records**. The consulting group had asked us to randomly select about a hundred and ten (110) student records that represent different disabilities, special education programs, delivery of services, schools and grades. About 200 consents were mailed with the expectations that at least 50% will be returned. It has come to my attention that some parents have concerns with regard to the random selection of records. Therefore, we have decided to mail consents to all parents. If you already received and returned your consent, you do not have to send it again. If this is the first time getting the consent and wish to participate, please return the consent to: Judy DeVincent, Special Education Office, 159 Thorndike Street, Cambridge, MA 02141 by no later than November 5<sup>th</sup>. After we have received all the consents, a list of students where we secured agreement from the parents, will be provided to WestEd. Their staff will then randomly select the records. Their selection will be based on student grade, disability and schools. About approximately 10% of the students records receiving special education services through the Cambridge Public Schools will be reviewed.

Please be advised that the purpose for the record reviews is not to determine compliance with the federal and state regulations but rather to determine if eligibility decisions are being made appropriately and to the degree to which IEPs are aligned with the evaluation results and the general education curriculum; as a result, only the last IEP and latest evaluations will be reviewed. A compliance review was completed in 2009 by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. You may review this report at [<http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2009/0049.pdf>]

Records will be reviewed at the Office of Special Education and will not be removed from the secured area. No copies of records will be made. Please be confident that students' name, personal information or any other identifiable information will not be made public at any time during the process of the Special Education Review and/or in the WestEd final report.

I hope this letter clarifies any questions you may have about the ongoing Special Education Program review. We are committed to work with the Cambridge Parent Advisory Council and all Cambridge parents in our ongoing effort to improve special education services for our students.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you.

Aida Ramos, Ed.D.

Executive Director-Office of Special Education

**IF YOU NEED THIS LETTER TO BE TRANSLATED IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE,  
PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AT 617-349-6500.**

**Special Education File Review Form**

**District:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Reviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Review date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name	Grade	Case Manager	School
Gender		Category of Disability	
<b>Section A Documentation of Eligibility</b>		<b>YES=1</b>	<b>NO=0</b>
<b>Date of Evaluation:</b>			<b>Comments</b>
1) Does the student have one or more of categories of disability: Autism/Developmental Delay/Intellectual/Sensory/Neurological/Emotional/Communication/Physical/Specific Learning/Health?			Primary disability:
2) Summary of evaluation results, test scores, etc. from the summary in the student's IEP.			
3) Is there sufficient documentation overall to substantiate determination of eligibility based on the documentation in the IEP summary and other supporting documents? (Note: Information considered includes a.) the IEP summary of test scores, evaluations and other information; b.) a review of most recent evaluation reports; or c.) both.			
<b>Section A Total</b>			

<b>SECTION B Current IEP</b>	<b>YES=1</b>	<b>NO=0</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>IEP date:</b>			
<b>School that developed IEP:</b>			
1. IEP is current.			
2. Parents notified of meeting within required timelines.			
3. Parent or student concerns documented.			
4. Student strengths and key evaluation results summary.			
5. Vision statement for student.			
6. Documentation of present levels of educational performance?			
7. Documentation of general ed. curriculum areas affected by student's disability?			
8. Description of how the student's disability affects progress in general ed. curriculum areas?			
9. Documentation of accommodations			

needed for student to make effective progress?			
10. Types of specially designed instruction including content, methods, and performance criteria?			
11. Documentation of other educational needs, e.g. assistive technology, APE, Language Needs for ESL students, behavior, communication, etc.			
12. Beginning at age 14, transition plan included as part of IEP.			
13. What is the “level of need” for this student?			
14. Special education services appropriate for student needs.			
15. Present performance identifies all needs identified in most recent evaluation			
16. All student need(s) are addressed by appropriate goals and objectives			
17. Annual Goals state current performance levels, measureable annual goals, and benchmarks/objectives?			
18. Evidence that student is making progress toward goals and objectives?			
19. Evidence of progress reports to parents?			
20. Service(s) are consistent with goals and objectives and include consultation services, direct services in the general ed. classroom and/or direct services in other settings.			<p>What services are included on the “grid”?</p> <p>A. Consultation:</p> <p>B. Direct Services in the general ed classroom:</p> <p>C. Direct Services in other settings:</p>
21. Nonparticipation Justification: Justification for removal from the general ed. classroom at any time?			
22. Schedule modification addressed if appropriate?			
23. Transportation services addressed?			
24. Addressed participation in state or district-wide assessments?			
25. Response section: Signed by LEA			

representative?			
26. Response section: IEP Accepted by parent?			
27. If not, did the parent reject all/part of the IEP and/or request a meeting to discuss?			
28. Response section: Parent signature?			
29. IEP is complete			
30. All required members present: parent, reg ed teacher, sp ed teacher/provider, agency representative, individual to interpret evaluation results, student if 14 or older.			
31. Overall alignment between evaluation results, goals, progress, placement, etc.			
32. What is the student's placement?			
33. Parent consent for placement.			
34. Justification/rationale/placement is appropriate.			
<b>SECTION B Total</b>			

**Comments:**

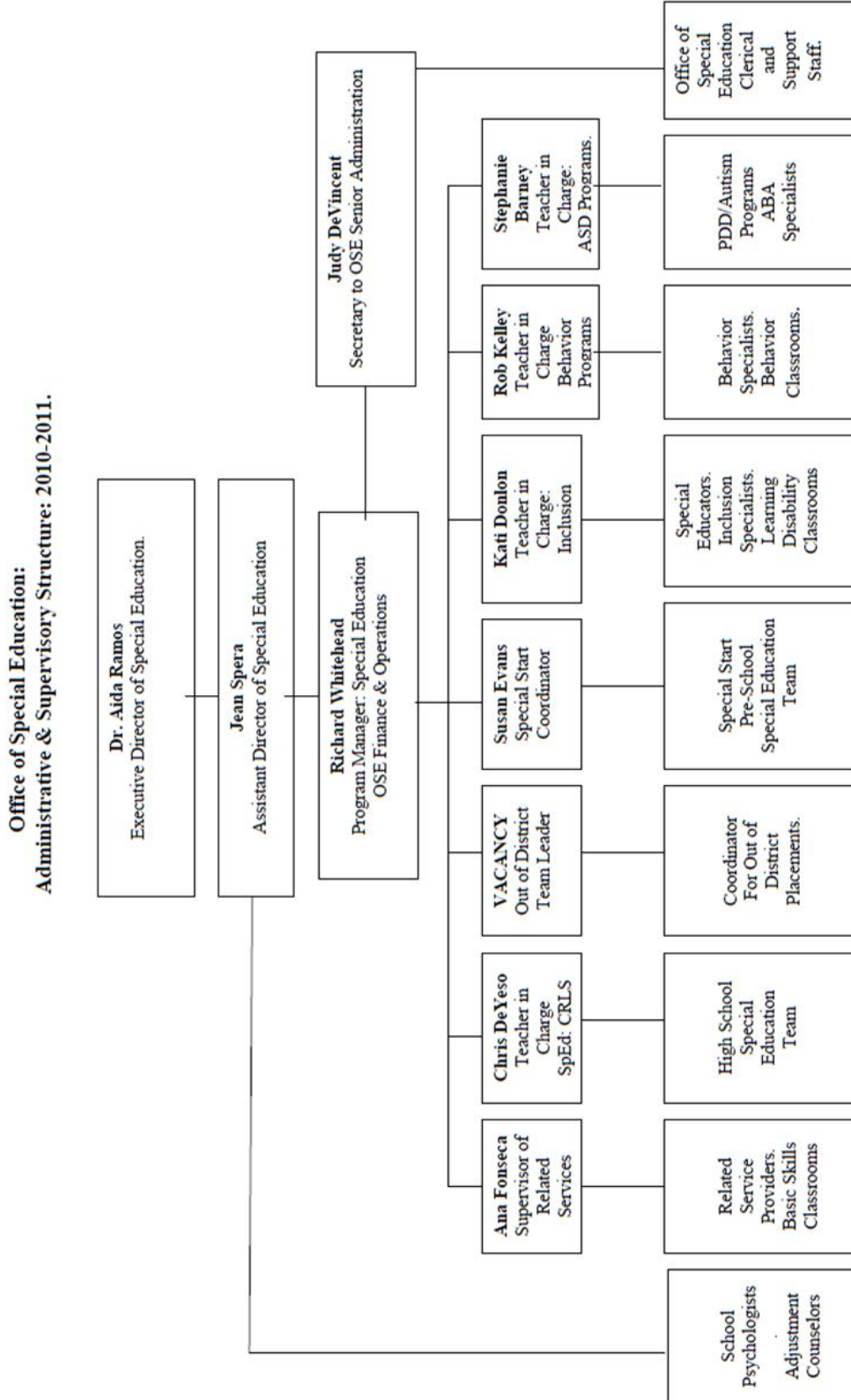
**Note:** Indicators for Evaluation and IEP sections are based on MA DESE forms on *Special Education Eligibility and Reevaluation Determination* and *Individualized Education Program*.





# Appendix I

## Office of Special Education Organizational Chart



9/14/2010

# Appendix J

## Complete Parent Focus Group Report

### CAMBRIDGE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW PARENT FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Prepared by Nancy Hurley, Senior Research Associate  
Learning Innovations at WestEd

#### BACKGROUND/PURPOSE

WestEd was contracted in the fall of 2010 by the City of Cambridge Office of Special Education to conduct a program review of the special education program. The purpose of the program review was to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, and costs of special education programs and services to determine (1) if the district is meeting the needs of students with disabilities including their entitlement to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and (2) if district resources are being used appropriately and effectively.

An evaluation plan was designed in collaboration with the OSE and the Steering Committee for this review, and parent focus groups were selected as one method for gathering data from parents/guardians of students with IEPs in Cambridge public schools. The purposes of conducting focus groups are three-fold:

- Information from the focus groups is used to inform the development of a subsequent parent survey;
- Focus groups provide an opportunity for participants to be heard by sharing their experiences and ideas and listening to others share theirs on topics relevant to the program review; and
- Focus groups build awareness of and buy-in for the program review.

#### METHODS

Five focus groups were conducted on September 27 and 28, 2010 for parents/guardians of children on IEPs. Notification of the focus groups with an invitation for participation was sent by the Cambridge Special Education Director in the “welcome back” newsletter on September 1, 2010. Further communication was sent encouraging principals to remind parents to attend the focus groups.

Focus group locations, accommodations, and logistics were handled by the Office of Special Education (OSE) and included in the notice to parents. The invitation was also posted on the CPS Web site and the Web site for the Cambridge Parent Advisory Council on Special Education (C-PAC). Focus group meetings were offered at various times, during the school day, after school and in the evening to accommodate parent schedules. Interpreters and child care were provided. Two WestEd staff members conducted each focus group, one to facilitate and the other to take notes using a laptop computer.

Notes from the focus groups were compiled and shared by the WestEd facilitators with the WestEd Project Director, summarized and coded using standard qualitative analysis procedures. The team has reviewed and agreed upon the themes highlighted herein. The focus group protocol is included in Appendix D.

## RESULTS

A total of 24 parents participated across the five focus groups. Two were males, the rest females, representing children of most grades, a range of disabilities, in-district and out-of-district placements, and members of the C-PAC. It is important to note that the participants in these focus groups were almost entirely Caucasian, thus African American, Hispanic, Asian and other ethnicities were not represented.

Parents were asked to share about the successes and challenges for themselves or their children in the CPS special education program, and for suggestions for improving the program. Parents were also asked, among other topics, about their experiences with the IEP process, communication, equity across schools, transitions, and school and district climate and culture.

### Successes

In every focus group, parents were first asked to share the successes they or their children had experienced through the Cambridge Special Education Program.

### *Specific Schools, Principals and Teachers*

Several parents mentioned their child had experienced success because of the particular school approach to special education, or because a teacher, service provider, instructional aide or guidance counselor had shown knowledge and understanding about the child's disability, and had gone the extra mile to ensure the child received the needed assistance. Specific schools were often mentioned; and Special Start was noted as a very positive and successful model for early childhood special education. For example:

*“My success is about the Special Start program. That was really good for our [child] who has a language based learning disability. We were extremely frustrated that they don't continue an appropriate program like that at least into Kindergarten and through the primary grades.”*

*“The successes my child had at Haggerty were due to teachers who stood on their heads to make [my child] feel accepted ... and a principal who modeled inclusion ... an exceptional principal.”*

*“The Graham & Parks school culture and climate is very supportive. [There] is a new principal who understands special education is education.”*

*“I feel lucky to be at King Open – the inclusion specialist who's the team leader seems to have a way of getting what the kid needs.”*

*“An exceptional Kindergarten teacher who could meet the needs of students, especially those with behavioral issues.”*

*“Exceptional Kindergarten teacher ... never raised her voice, respectful, treated kids in a kind way. High expectations for children. Helped explain disabilities to other non-disabled kids as ‘part of everyday life.’”*

*“Physics class ... my [child] was challenged there; felt respected; assignments were perfectly laid out so it worked for him.”*

*“Teachers helped my son to see his strengths and provide him with opportunities to shine.”*

*“There was a terrific special education teacher at Graham & Parks – one thing she did at the IEP meetings was so helpful – you felt like she represented you and your child at the meeting. Her job was to explain to the teachers what was needed.”*

Comments were made about effective leadership and parents noted how some principals had successfully advocated for children’s needs. For example:

*“Principal was big on inclusion and modeled it. His motto was: ‘Everyone is different, but everyone belongs.’”*

*“The Principal at King Open was great. At certain points he instructed the [IEP] team to listen to us. He said, ‘Listen to the parents.’ That’s huge.”*

### ***Out-of-District Placement***

The next success most often mentioned by parents was a sense of relief parents experienced when their child was moved to out-of-district status and placed in a school outside of Cambridge. Parents related that students who were placed out-of-district were experiencing more success, being treated well, and were happier. One parent gained a clearer understanding of the IEP process when exposed to it out-of-district; and another wondered aloud why Cambridge has not implemented certain programs that work well in other places. For example:

*“Successes only started when we went to a hearing and were awarded ‘out of district placement.’”*

*“As a parent, the greatest success was when I got a good educational consultant and lawyer who knows every player in the field, and we, with great difficulty, won an out-placement.”*

*“[My child] moved to out of district placement. For the first time, has friends in his classroom; was much more able to cope; and is proficient in all areas of the MCAS.”*

*“[My son’s] school provides lots of kindnesses ... kids are not targeted by bullies.”*

*“When we hear about successful programs like at ‘Carroll’, we wonder ‘Why don’t we use those and make system-wide changes [in Cambridge]?’”*

*“At the [special education school] was the first time I ever understood the IEP. Cambridge needs to study that.”*

### ***Other Successes***

Parents shared about successes that had been achieved, as they put it, “through a lot of hard work and struggle on the part of the parent,” and emphasized that these successes could not be credited to the Cambridge Public School System or to the Office of Special Education. These parents pointed out some of the efforts they had to expend to succeed in getting their children the services they needed. For example:

*“My child succeeded with a great deal of work on our part as parents. Nothing about the school system. My [child] was immediately flagged for a [visible disability] ... got services for that. Things went well until the OG provider got ill and didn’t show up. No one told us [parents].”*

*“When [our] child was first diagnosed, we asked for OG or a Wilson certified instructor. We were told there was no such person in the district. After mediation, [the district] got someone who was Wilson certified. Eventually, the special educator went out and got certified in Wilson and bought in wholeheartedly.*

*“We had to fight to get an in-class aide. Any progress our [son] has made over the last two years has been a result of this aide. This constant aide has been a huge gift. Based on the*

*marvelous qualities of this individual ... not anything systemic or replicable ... [it's] so subtle and intuitive."*

### **Challenges**

Parents were articulate and expressive when they shared about the challenges they and their children have experienced in the Cambridge Special Education Program. A wide range of frustrations with many components of the system was described, such as inconsistency of services; poor communication; inaccessible and unresponsive staff, specialists and OSE personnel; inadequately trained staff; rude and disrespectful treatment; a fearful and dishonest climate; and insufficient support for teachers. Parents claimed they spend a lot of time educating themselves so they can educate the teachers and OSE about their children's disabilities. If there is an orientation for parents, most were not aware of it. In one group, one out of six parents stated they received some type of orientation or guidance.

*"There's no one to help you through this as a parent – you're in denial at first. Had to read a dozen books and become an expert on Asperger's Syndrome. Every kid is completely different."*

*"There seems to be a gap in understanding what's legal or illegal by just about everyone. That's why parents have had to hire lawyers and advocates and educate themselves."*

### **Equity**

When asked to what extent they believed services for special education students are equitable across all schools in the district, parents shared concerns about inequities in services and also in the way parents are treated. They noted that under-represented populations in Cambridge were likely not able to advocate for their children in the same ways as other populations. Most agreed with statements like *"There is no equity in the provision of special education services,"* from their own personal observations. A few shared that they had "heard" about inequities, e.g., *"Well, for me ... I'm not really in a position to know, but I [know someone] who works in the district who says, 'It's the parents who have the confidence and the money to push for a result that get it.'"* Other comments included:

*"... white, highly educated parents that can afford legal counsel are the ones that can successfully advocate for their children."*

*"I am concerned about equity. If I am having these problems -- understanding the special education process and getting the services that my [child] is entitled to -- I can't imagine what happens to parents that do not speak English, or come from other cultures, or parents that are poor."*

*"It makes me super nervous from an equity perspective for kids whose parents don't have the time or the language capacity ... or for those who had bad experiences in school. I think Graham & Parks goes a long way to be open and welcoming. But there's people who can't or don't want to [go] there ... so my personal communication struggles make me concerned for other kids."*

*"You can imagine what they do to foreigners who have a language issue ... what they do to others."*

*I think the school system is doing the bare minimum of engaging parents and showing them they are important. I've heard too many times '...but parents don't come.' Why? Fix that! It's a systemic problem! Even in this room, there's a lack of diversity ... here we are ... predominantly white."*

Other equity issues were also discussed, such as the imbalance of parent volunteerism at different schools, and the unfair expectations of some teachers/staff. For example:

*"... I haven't spent that much time in other schools, but I'm not sure the SPED PAC has had this kind of conversation. It's acknowledged, but my concern is about parent volunteerism ... there is a huge discrepancy school to school."*

*"One thing that the Special Ed staff and General Ed staff almost always get wrong is that LD students must, first and foremost, advocate for themselves. Many of these kids cannot do so and are left to fend for themselves because they have broken this cardinal rule. I think that the teachers must take responsibility for reaching out to these kids. The kids should not be made to reach out to the teachers first."*

### ***Inconsistency of Services***

Sometimes parents noted their child had experienced a good start in either a particular school or with a particular intervention or strategy, and as the child grew and moved up in grade level, those services tended to deteriorate. Others shared that a particular strategy or curriculum or intervention had been working well for their child, and then suddenly it changed or ceased, sometimes without notice or explanation to the parent. Still others had to move their child to a different school in order to get needs met. For example:

*"... at one point when [my child] had a truly great year with a great teacher, they took all the supports away. The next year went disastrously."*

*"Every year it's a new battle --- one year, a good general education teacher and a good special education teacher might be there, and things go well. The next year, back to ground zero, starting all over again. No consistency across the district or across grades of the level of quality of services, instruction, professionalism, understanding, etc."*

*"My [child] started at [one] school where the principal just didn't 'get' special education at all and that filtered down to the staff. Moved [the child] to [another school] ... did much better; child feels accepted. Teachers go out of their way to maximize the child's strengths."*

Another inconsistency of services reported by parents had to do with students being forced to change schools throughout the elementary years due to the set-up for substantially separate classrooms. This concern was raised often, and one parent explained it this way:

*"Children in substantially separate classrooms for behavioral disabilities or autism spectrum disorders must change schools three times during their educational careers. The Superintendent tried to push for this to change, because that kind of disruption is bad for these most vulnerable special education students. It also raises a question of whether kids in substantially separate classrooms are truly included in their school community ... if they and their parents have to get to know new schools every few years, how does that affect the parents' ability to advocate for their child? How does that affect the children's sense of belonging to a school community? This is truly unjust, and I don't think the PAC has*

*spoken out against it. The school committee failed to implement the Superintendent's recommendations."*

Other concerns parents raised with regard to inconsistency of services included children missing important class time due to pull-outs; a slow start-up of services as the new year begins, with fewer supports being provided near the end of the school year; important information about a child getting lost or never being passed on to the next teacher; lack of summer programs, and students not getting what is written in their plan, i.e., "[My child's] supposed to get one-on-one; but the aide had half the class." Parents also noted transitions were not well planned and that once a child reached high school, there was a strong push to "get them off IEPs and onto 504s." For example:

*"Cambridge tries to get kids off IEPs in high school, onto 504s. This is so they won't have to deal with transition to adulthood as required by the IEP."*

*"Way too many pull outs altogether; kids having to make up what they miss. Need for more self-contained classrooms."*

*"For the first three to four weeks and the last two to three weeks [of the school year], the service delivery is highly variable at best. While I understand the 'reality' of school schedules at the beginning and end, it is not helpful to [my child or other kids] particularly those with needs because these transitional times are when they need their supports the most."*

*"[Activities] don't get started right away in September ... things are still getting set up. Should have been done over the summer. Kids are still waiting."*

*"Frustrating when someone 'gets your kid' and works with you and problem solves ... then it gets lost, and you have to reinvent the wheel."*

*"Things don't happen quickly enough ... planning that should have been done over the summer are still getting set up at [at end of September] – pull-outs, social skills, system wide activities not in place."*

*"Lack of summer programs ... even though the neuropsychs state they need summer programs."*

### **Communication**

Parents described issues with communication ranging from not receiving the basic notices that they believe should be sent home, such as when a teacher or aide is out sick, to not being informed about the C-PAC, to not hearing about important issues in a timely or accurate manner, to an overall sense of miscommunication or lack of honest communication. For example:

*"Parents don't get informed when their kids' teacher or service provider goes on leave, or is sick, or just doesn't show up. Basic communication lacks."*

*"Communication is contradictory – I hear from a teacher that [my child's] doing great, just great; then I hear three weeks later, 'Oh, this week was much better than the last three... Huh? I never heard about [that] ... just that [my child] was doing great. So, it's hard to trust it."*

*"I have never gotten anything from the OSE directly related to my child."*

*"At school, some of the most successful interactions I've had have been informal – like when the special educator walks by and I'm in the library ... serendipitously. And that's not good enough. I have tried so many times to put communication in the IEP; but meetings don't get set up unless I insist."*

*"Teachers are under extreme constraints not to say anything – no one said what [my child] needed was out of district placement. Not until after we finally got it did the teachers say, 'Oh,*



*that's good, that's what s/he needed.' There's a huge atmosphere of mistrust and people not being able to tell the truth."*

### **Individual Education Plan**

Many parents described the IEP process as “painful.” They stated that sometimes OSE staff were not present at the meetings or when they were, they were seen as blockers and gate keepers to save resources, not to engage or express interest in the welfare of children. Parents noted that often they did not feel acknowledged or heard during IEP meetings; and they find it necessary to bring in advocates, doctors, or legal representatives.

They also mentioned that the IEPs are “cookie cutter” or “boiler plate” documents that don’t allow for individualization; consist of many pages and are not easy to understand; often don’t contain what the parent expected, often have language that is too vague and doesn’t ensure the child will receive the appropriate or promised intervention/accommodation. Parents noted that OSE staff refers to just one page – a grid – that shows what will be done, but often lacks a formal plan.

Another stated that the “*onus is on the child to fit whatever model or teaching appropriation or intervention*” the OSE decides to put in place. For example:

*“The formation of the IEP is a frustrating process. Even with assistance and insistence on language that includes clear and measurable goals, I feel we still have this progress report run around where [goals] are not clearly measured. Or accurately reported is maybe more the issue. The document itself is enormous ... 16 or 18 pages with progress reports. And they only work with the service delivery grid – that seems to be the only part they look at. Not the vision statement or the description of your child’s disability. My child needed accommodations [that were] clearly written and weren’t delivered.”*

*“The document and process has to be fluid, flexible; parents need to be real partners, be respected and recognized by the IEP team.”*

*“I have seen the district write things in the IEP and then not do it.”*

*“Sometimes the OSE staff is intimidating and not helpful at IEP meetings.”*

*“At some IEP meetings, there is no decision maker; thus nothing gets done, even though that means they’re out of compliance. Certain decisions cannot be made unless the head of OSE is present, i.e., out of district placement.”*

*“The [external consultant] I paid to come said it was the worse meeting they’d ever been in – very unprofessional – teacher was arrogant – I’m crying – there was one special educator ...”*

*“We have concerns that evaluations are probably not objective since they are done by specialists hired by the district.”*

*“Teachers start talking about their rights, versus [we’re] here to help this kid.”*

*“Why can some parents get specific things written into the IEP, and others cannot? For example, ‘multi-sensory’ ... not Wilson. Another’s says ‘a consultant certified in floor time’ ... elsewhere in the IEP it’ll say ‘play-based’ ... this way they can do whatever they want.”*

### **School Atmosphere, Climate, Approach**

Parents described variations they find in the atmosphere in schools, the attitude of teachers, staff and administrators, and the approach being taken toward special education students across the 13 schools in Cambridge. One noted “*The climate is dependent on the individual classroom teacher.*” Parents stated they believe teachers are unable to speak the truth, and won’t write up things that work from fear of getting in trouble. It was also heard that teacher/parent relationships can start off collegial, but when parents ask for more services or begin saying what they think their child needs, i.e., an out-of-district placement, the collegiality dissolves. For example:

*“Accommodations that teachers do that work are not written in IEPs and are hidden from OSE staff ... or they risk being in trouble.”*

*“I think well of the teachers and the principal, but it was not so collegial when we started saying we think this child needs an out-placement.”*

*“Lack of flexibility – rigid school days. A special educator was willing to come in early and was told she couldn’t do that anymore.”*

*“The schools are too ready to expel, suspend kids.”*

### **Staff Responsiveness, Accessibility and Expertise**

Parents in Cambridge reported they believe staff expertise and qualifications for teaching special education students varies greatly across the district. They also noted that general education teachers lack training in inclusion and how to teach with special education students in their classrooms.

*“A big challenge is the lack of skills among staff. The way progress reports and goals statements are written that mask a lack of progress. And that performance in the pull out room, for example, which doesn’t translate to the classroom or the home ... that’s considered progress.”*

*“It becomes a mindset clash – teachers who don’t get it or refuse to get it – and mistreat kids with language that is inappropriate.”*

*“Teachers do no learning on the job – no collecting of data – no thinking about what’s working or what isn’t – both special education and general education – there’s no questioning by the teachers – the onus is put on the child – he’s not responding to this approach or this therapy – there’s something wrong with the kid. It’s backward – onus on the child to fit whatever model or teaching approach or intervention ...”* “The frustration the teacher feels is funneled onto the child. ‘Why doesn’t this child respond? The problem is the child.’ That’s backwards.”

*“General educators and special educators need to be certified in Orton Gillingham, a program that’s proven to work well for dyslexia; Cambridge keeps using Reading Recovery which doesn’t work for these kids. A simple solution is to go to OG, but [Cambridge] wastes energy on things that don’t work.”*

*“Specialists who know nothing about your child’s disability are treating them.”*

*“Some specialists are very good but are spread too thin.”*

*‘Differences between kids with disabilities are so subtle sometimes ... not always visible ... no two kids are exactly the same.’*

### **Additional Feedback**

#### **District/OSE Climate**

Focus Group parents strongly suggested a need for a change in the “climate” in the Office of Special Education. They noted that upon entering, no one personally welcomes or greets visitors, and visitors have to wait to be asked if they could be helped.”

*“The general climate ... contrary to what’s in the Strategic Plan ... the District operates in a scarcity model. That resources are limited, if we give to you, can’t give to someone else ... then the guilt plays in. Then there’s competition. Then [they] sit back and have this gate*

*keeping role that doesn't feel like it's serving your kid. [They're] protecting the whole pie without meeting the needs as fully as they could."*

*"Change the energy ... [OSE staff] spend a lot of energy resisting ... energy that could be spent getting our kids better ... I have no doubt they could improve the lives of our kids, but they spend their energy resisting ... our kids get worse, and the clock is ticking."*

*"Old school thinking on the part of administration and some teachers; not comfortable doing the accommodations ... even when it's written that the child needs something, i.e., being in a different room for a test. Teacher said, 'Oh I didn't want to make [the child] feel different.'"*

*"They wear people down."*

*"Controlled choice, controlled chaos ... if this school doesn't work, go someplace else. But there's the importance of being in a community and staying with your peers ..."*

### **Suggestions from Parents**

Parents in all focus groups were asked for suggestions to improve the special education program in Cambridge. They had many ideas, most of which follow:

- *"Use the first conversation/interview [of the school year] with parents to provide information about special education programs, specific disability information, and introduction to PAC support, in addition to other required legal documents."*
- *"Borrow from other schools; Newton North has separate classes in core subjects for students who are really bright and really socially estranged from mainstream. Until you make the school a place kids like ours are comfortable, learning is the last thing they'll be able to do. Lexington has a safe room at the junior high ... place kids can go between classes."*
- *"I think a signal from Superintendent Young to everyone in Special Education that addresses this problem of the scarcity model. It has to come from him."*
- *"Join a collaborative. That really [would] stop the position that we don't need help as a school system ... when all others do."*
- *"Get more people involved; so there's a little more time ... lots of kids need more attention from caring adults."*
- *"The school system must take the pressure off the teachers to make it look like everyone is progressing. Tell the truth! I thought the teachers were excellent; but resources were few, classes too big for a kid like mine."*
- *"[If I] had a magic wand, what would I change? I would have longer class periods and fewer students. More resources at the school level, i.e., shop, real art, and I would increase the flexibility."*
- *"Training for teachers and parents. Maybe teachers and parents could have some training together? Maybe the PAC [could explore that]?"*
- *"Understand when inclusion is working and when it is not so appropriate changes can be made."*
- *"Provide an 'unbiased way' for teachers to provide their input."*

- *“Hire a professional ‘ombudsman’, someone who is objective, someone we can take our concerns to before we are forced to go to hearings.”*
- *“Have a parent advocate who knows special education law and can provide support to other parents.”*
- *“Tell the district to follow the law.”*
- *“Set [up] more programs for kids with behavior problems. Programs like PBIS ... but make sure they are implemented system-wide.”*
- *“OSE lacks its own budget; Cambridge has plenty of money ... but have to go to the school committee for every line item ... so that’s part of why things take so long.”*
- *“Create transparency in every realm. I saw a newspaper article that Cambridge got more money than expected from the State – went to the ‘rainy day fund.’ How did that happen? [We have] spoken commitment without anything substantial.”*
- *“There’s an achievement gap due to ‘dinosaur thinking in the OSE” ... when I hear from parents of out-placed kids that they’re all passing the MCAS, [I know] it’s not the disability ... it’s the old school thinking.”*
- *“Cambridge has enough kids with language based [disabilities] that [we] should be replicating what the Carroll School does.”*
- *“Lacking in good programming for behavior ... some school districts have taken on positive behavior supports and everyone did much better. I think they should look into that, and summer programming, better transition programming ... and they need to follow the law ... which would go a long way towards alleviating a lot of problems.”*
- *“Come to the table with honesty and integrity. Trust is a huge issue.”*
- *“[Hire] an expert who can help parents cope with disruptions in family life.”*

## REFLECTIONS

For the most part, this parent group was very discouraged and talked mainly about negative experiences and concerns they have that they believe strongly are serious ones. In all five focus groups, parents were slow to articulate successes; but with some prodding, they did enumerate a number of positive points. However, these parents emphasized that many of the successes they had achieved could not be credited to the OSE or the school district. Parents in Cambridge have had to “fight hard” for what they believe their special education children need and deserve. Parents are under the impression that the Cambridge staff lacks an appropriate understanding of the laws governing special education, and varies tremendously in expertise, approach, acceptance and attitude toward special education students.

The perception of this group is that there is failure to include, engage with, or reach out to parents from diverse populations. Parents believe that upper class, college-educated parents were able to not only advocate for their children, but “get their wishes,” but that was not so for parents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Many also brought up other situations that seem unfair to them, such as vague language on IEPs which results in students not getting appropriate services, staff unknowledgeable or unskilled in their child’s disability, teachers who misunderstand or mistreat children with disabilities, slow program start-up and decision-making, and the lack of programs in Cambridge that would keep students from being placed out-of-district.

This small but vocal group of parents need to know they are being heard, and need some direct attention from district staff. The parents gave some very good suggestions on how to improve the

current situation in Cambridge, and the evaluators respectfully suggest those be taken into consideration by the OSE and Central Office staff. A facilitated meeting of OSE, Central Office, and C-PAC members to discuss the findings of this program review is strongly suggested as a way to ensure everyone has a clear understanding of the issues, potential solutions, and next steps.

# Appendix K

## List of Acronyms

ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
APR	Annual Performance Report
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
C-PAC	Cambridge Parent Advisory Council on Special Education
CPS	Cambridge Public Schools
CRLS	Cambridge Rindge and Latin School
CPR	Coordinated Program Review
ELA	English Language Arts
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
HSEP	High School Extension Program
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MADESE	Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
MCAS	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
OSE	Office of Special Education
OT/PT	Occupational Therapy/Physical Therapy
PBIS	Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports
PDD	Pervasive Developmental Disorder
PK	Pre-school/Pre-Kindergarten
SLP	Speech Language Pathologist
SPP	State Performance Plan
RTI	Response to Intervention
SWD	Students with Disabilities
TAT	Teacher Assistance Team

**Categories of Disability**

AU	Autism
DD	Developmental Delay
IN	Intellectual Disability
HR	Sensory: Hearing
VS	Sensory: Vision
DB	Sensory: Deaf Blind
NL	Neurological
EM	Emotional
CO	Communication
PH	Physical
SL	Specific Learning Disability
HE	Health Impairment
MD	Multiple Disabilities

# Appendix L

## Resources for Cambridge Public Schools – February 2011

### Inclusion

**Building Level Indicators of Effective Practices** - The purpose of this document/self assessment “is to provide school leaders with a tool to complete a simple, yet comprehensive, self-assessment of their schools. The assessment is a product of “The Principal’s Project.” This project supported principals from Maine, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Colorado to engage in reflective practice and action research to inform their building level school activities. These schools and principals were selected for this project because they were actively engaged in school-wide reform and their classrooms included students with a range of abilities, including those with significant needs. The assessment is based on an extensive review of literature and the common experience of highly effective school leaders.”

[http://www.urbanschools.org/pdf/BLI\\_FINAL1.pdf?v\\_document\\_name=Building%20Level%20Indicators](http://www.urbanschools.org/pdf/BLI_FINAL1.pdf?v_document_name=Building%20Level%20Indicators)

**Pathways to Inclusive Practices; Systems Oriented, Policy Linked, and Research-Based Strategies that Work** – This Guide was developed by practitioners for parents, practitioners, administrators, and policy-makers seeking to make schools and classrooms more responsive to the educational needs of all students, including those with disabilities.

“Our specific intent is to share information that can help others think about and advocate for inclusive approaches to policy and practice at the state and district level. We focus on large-scale strategies that have changed the way that states, districts, and schools think about services, and the way they use resources to ensure that all children and youth, including those with the most significant disabilities, are meaningfully included in neighborhood schools. With this as our focus, we also want to be clear about what is not addressed in this booklet. We do not focus on change strategies at the individual student level, nor do we provide detailed information about inclusive classroom-based support strategies. Many others have done an excellent job of that, and the reader interested in this type of information is referred to the Resource list at the end of this guidebook.”

[http://www.urbanschools.org/pdf/ptip.pdf?v\\_document\\_name=Pathways%20to%20Inclusive%20Practices](http://www.urbanschools.org/pdf/ptip.pdf?v_document_name=Pathways%20to%20Inclusive%20Practices)

**Principals of Inclusive Schools** – This document outlines the characteristics, skills, and actions needed by principals to support inclusive schools. “Inclusive schools need principals who are familiar with the research literature and know that inclusive services and supports produce educational benefits for students with and without disabilities, teachers, and families.”

[http://www.urbanschools.org/pdf/principals.inclusive.LETTER.pdf?v\\_document\\_name=Principals%20of%20Inclusive%20Schools](http://www.urbanschools.org/pdf/principals.inclusive.LETTER.pdf?v_document_name=Principals%20of%20Inclusive%20Schools)

**LRE Self-Assessment Tool** - The LRE Self-Assessment Tool is used to examine site practices for students with disabilities in general education environments. This tool was developed by the California Department of Education in collaboration with the LRE Resources Project at WestEd



and is applicable to schools and districts anywhere. The LRE Self-Assessment Tool comes with a guide for using the tool.

[http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/wested/download/rs/164/LREsite.r.doc?x-r=pcfile\\_d](http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/wested/download/rs/164/LREsite.r.doc?x-r=pcfile_d)

**Preventing Disproportionality by Strengthening District Policies and Procedures** – An Assessment and Strategic Planning Process – includes a rubric for districts to use in self-assessment – from NCCRESt, 2006. The document contains a self-study tool that assists district teams to examine policies, procedures, and practices in general and special education that have been shown to contribute to institutional factors that surround disproportionality. The tool addresses four standards: core functions, instructional services, individualized education, and accountability.

[http://www.nccrest.org/PDFs/district\\_rubric.pdf?v\\_document\\_name=District%20Rubric](http://www.nccrest.org/PDFs/district_rubric.pdf?v_document_name=District%20Rubric)

**Equity in Special Education Placement: A School Self-Assessment Guide for Culturally Responsive Practice**, Form A – from National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) - The “self-assessment instrument is designed to assist elementary school practitioners (all professionals and paraprofessionals working in the schools, such as special and general education teachers, counselors and administrators) in creating schools that are culturally responsive in their programming and instruction so that optimal achievement might occur for all students including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.”

Form B – is the actual assessment.

<http://www.nccrest.org/publications/tools/assessment.html>

**Moving Toward Inclusive Education**, Giangreco, Michael. This is a brief (2-page overview article that provides seven specific characteristics of inclusive education.

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/archives/mgiangre/MovingTowardInclEd2003.pdf>

**Extending Inclusive Opportunities: How can students with disabilities meaningfully participate in class if they work many levels below classroom peers?** Giangreco, Michael F.

[http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/archives/mgiangre/EL0764\(5\)34-37.pdf](http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/archives/mgiangre/EL0764(5)34-37.pdf)

**Problem Solving Methods to Facilitate Inclusive Education**, Giangreco, Michael; Cloninger, Chigee; Dennis, Ruth; & Edelman, Susan. Describes several problem solving strategies and includes forms and templates to use with problem solving teams.

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/archives/mgiangre/ProblemsolvingmethodsCreativity.pdf>

**Guidelines for Making IEP Decisions about IEP Services**, Giangreco, Michael; Provides guidance to IEP Teams for making decisions about services to be included in the IEP.

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/iepservices/pdfs/decision.pdf>

**The Schoolwide Applications Model**; Wayne Sailor; The Schoolwide Applications Model (SAM) is a strong structural school reform process using data-based decision making, a response to intervention (RTI) logic model, and fully integrated resource coordination;

<http://www.samschools.org/index.php/home.html>

## **Paraeducators**

**Paraeducator Support Project**, Center on Disability and Community Inclusion, University of Vermont, 2001, <http://www.uvm.edu/%7Ecpci/parasupport/>

- Shared Understanding: Beliefs, Values, and Principles
- A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports
- Paraeducator Resource and Learning Center – training modules

**The Paraprofessionals Guide to the Inclusive Classroom: Working as a Team**, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Doyle, Mary Beth. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

<http://www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/doyle-69247/index.htm>

This interactive guide helps teachers and paraprofessionals work together to create the most effective inclusive classrooms. Collaborating on creative and enlightening activities, teachers and paraprofessionals will learn how to

- work more effectively with students who have a variety of disabilities, including autism
- clarify their roles and responsibilities
- provide individualized curricular and instructional support for each student
- improve communication among members of the educational team
- use positive behavioral support to successfully address behavior challenges

**National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals** – This site is in partnership with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and includes numerous resources including links to paraeducator/professional handbooks and manuals.

<http://www.nrcpara.org>

**Montana Paraeducator Development Project** – This project includes resources, guidance, tools, and templates for recruiting and hiring, evaluation, orientation, training, and links to other sites with Paraeducator resources.

[http://www.opi.mt.gov/Programs/CSPD/index.html?gpm=1%207#gpm1\\_7](http://www.opi.mt.gov/Programs/CSPD/index.html?gpm=1%207#gpm1_7)

## **Parent Engagement and Collaboration**

**Massachusetts Federation for Children with Special Needs** – “The Federation is a center for parents and parent organizations to work together on behalf of children with special needs and their families. Organized in 1975 as a coalition of parent groups representing children with a variety of disabilities, the Federation offers workshops and training, advocacy and resources to parents of children with special needs and the professionals who serve them.”

The Federation, with support from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, offers an institute for school district teams of parents and professionals entitled, *Advancing Parent/Professional Leadership in Education (A.P.P.L.E.) Institute*. This year’s 3-day Institute is scheduled for May 18-20, 2011 at the Holiday Inn, Dedham, MA. “At the Institute, up to 6 teams consisting of 4 - 6 parents whose children have IEPs, plus one member of your district’s special education administration, will learn and apply collaborative leadership skills. Working in an atmosphere of trust, you will create and implement mutually beneficial action plans for parent involvement through your district’s special education parent advisory council (PAC).”

<http://fcsn.org/index.php>

**Educating Our Children Together: A Sourcebook for Effective Family-School-Community Partnerships**, Consortium for Alternative Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE).

Although the focus of the sourcebook is on building-level strategies for school personnel, the ideas should be useful to others as well: family members, community members, and policy makers. This sourcebook is based on the belief that schools that make an investment in developing family and environments where educators work closely with families avoid becoming “islands separated from the families they serve” (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 232). Schools that demonstrate a commitment to open communication and collaborative problem solving with families can go a long way toward preventing the onset and escalation of adversarial school-family relationships that inevitably detract from the mission of helping children learn.

[http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/pdf/educating\\_our\\_children.pdf](http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/pdf/educating_our_children.pdf)

**The CADRE Continuum** - CADRE’s Process and Practice Continuum offers a database of dispute resolution activity in special education. Users are able to move from broad to more narrow process descriptors and program details, and can explore dimensions such as formality, satisfaction, approach, training and role of the neutral. The CADRE Process and Practice Continuum is drawn from, [Beyond Mediation: Strategies For Appropriate Early Dispute Resolution In Special Education](#). A complete version of the CADRE Continuum including clarifying dimensions is available through a link on the opening page.

<http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/aboutcontinuum.cfm>

**A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement** – “Many policymakers, administrators, and funders ask for evidence that parent involvement helps student achievement, including test scores. This report provides some useful answers.”

<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

**Learning Outside of the School Classroom: What Teachers Can Do to Involve Family in Supporting Classroom Instruction** – This brief describes ways to support classroom instruction with effective family and community involvement programs that are designed to do the following:

1. Link with student achievement goals and school standards
2. Engage families in activities that focus directly on issues related to student learning
3. Use a variety of communication strategies to keep family members informed on what is happening in the classroom and what is needed to support student learning
4. Build a school culture that is inclusive and supportive of family and community involvement

<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/research-brief2.pdf>

**Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections with Schools; What Can School Leaders Do?** – Evidence practices for school leaders to implement a plan for increased family and community connections.

<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/research-brief3.pdf>

## **Instructional Interventions**

**National Center on Response to Intervention (RTI)** - Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems. With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities. This website includes many resources, tools, and templates, including an archive of presentations various RTI topics.

<http://www.rti4success.org/>

**Center on Instruction** – This site provides a ‘cutting-edge collection of scientifically based resources on instruction. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, COI develops and identifies free resources that Regional Comprehensive Centers and state, district, and local educators can use in their pursuit of high quality instruction.’ The site includes links for syntheses of recent research, practitioner guides, professional development materials, tools for educators, and examples from the field.

<http://www.centeroninstruction.org/>

**National High School Center** – “The National High School Center, based at the American Institutes for Research, provides the latest research, user-friendly tools and products, and high-quality technical assistance on high school improvement issues.” It includes an “early warning system” tool that enables schools and districts to identify students who may be at risk of dropping out of high school and to monitor these students' responses to interventions. There are also numerous resources on high school improvement topics, including transitions into high school and high school literacy.

<http://www.betterhighschools.org/>

**National Center on Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** – This site explains UDL, provides the research in support of its effectiveness, and provides examples and resources. Among the resources is an “educator checklist” with links to specific tools and resources to help design **UDL curricula** that reduce barriers to all students' achievement.”

<http://www.udlcenter.org/>

**Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and Learning Improvement; The Wallace Foundation**

<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationLeadership/Pages/central-office-transformation-for-district-wide-teaching-and-learning-improvement.aspx>



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