

Final Report of the
Special Education Program Review
for the
Lewiston-Porter Central School District

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Executive Summary

The leadership of the Lewiston-Porter Central School District (hereafter referred to as LPCSD or the District) commissioned this review of specific areas that support special education programming and students with disabilities. In conducting this analysis the reviewers employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to gather and analyze pertinent information.

The qualitative analyses comprised: 1) a series of live interviews conducted via Zoom with LPCSD staff, parents, and students, 2) a review of various documents relevant to the delivery of special education services and 3) in-person visits to classrooms where students who receive special education services are assigned for courses.

Quantitative Analyses included: 1) analyses of staffing, caseloads, and offered special education programs, 2) analyses of survey results to several LPCSD constituencies, and 3) financial data pertaining to programmatic funding (e.g. IDEA Grants, Medicaid).

Methodology

As detailed in the agreed upon work plan, the methodology entailed a variety of data with regard to both types and methods of collection. Data used included the following:

- A review of documents
 - IDEA 611 and IDEA 619 grant documentation
 - Negotiated APPR documentation
 - Listings of personnel by type by school
 - Student enrollment counts by type
 - Medicaid Billing and Revenue submissions
- School Site Visits to both Integrated and Special Class rooms
- Surveys
 - LPCSD Staff
 - Families/Parents/Guardians
 - Students
- Confidential Interviews
 - Small group and Individual “Focus Group” interviews
 - LPCSD Staff
 - Families/Parents/Guardians
 - Students

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The data and information presented within this report were gathered from a variety of sources via a variety of methods, as such this report focuses on generally recurring themes rather than specific analyses of specific variables. Due to the fact that the focus of this analysis takes into consideration aforementioned multiple sources of data, the identification of specific schools, individuals, programs, etc. will be avoided wherever possible to maintain confidentiality and the integrity of the data collection procedures promised.

Acknowledgements

Additionally, the authors would like to recognize and commend the numerous people who assisted in this process. First, we would like to recognize Elisabeth Yack and Christian Rajniz, two graduate students at Niagara University who were integral to both the development of online surveys as well as to numerous Zoom sessions conducted as part of the live focus group portion of the program review.

Finally, we would like to thank the staff, students, parents, administrators, and Board of Education of the Lewiston-Porter Central School District. Participating in a program review such as this one requires honesty, candor, and a willingness to self-reflect in order to provide the most accurate representation possible. In every case our team was met with cooperation and support from all LPCSD stakeholders.

Climate, Culture, & Organization Considerations

Overview

Educational research has validated the importance of effects of climate, culture, and personnel capacity on student achievement. A natural extension recognizes that the success of a district's special education program is significantly connected to the culture, climate, and personnel capacity of a school district. As such, these components of the current analysis are addressed first.

Survey Findings

Surveys were administered in a voluntary fashion to LPCSD staff, parents, and students at the Middle School and High School. While all staff were invited to participate in the anonymous survey, only parents of students with disabilities and students receiving special education services themselves were invited to participate. Given the overall population of students with disabilities in LPCSD, the participation rate in the surveys is considered quite acceptable and allows for meaningful themes to be derived from the responses.

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Survey Participation	
Type of Survey	Participants
Staff Survey	89
Parent Survey	56
Middle School Student Survey	50
High School Student Survey	75
TOTAL	270

Supportive Environment

There was general consistency across all survey responses that parents, students, and teachers felt supported by the special education system and programs provided. The majority of respondents in each survey indicated that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the sentiment that special education services were appropriate and provided necessary support. Additionally, the majority of teachers noted that they felt administrative support in delivery of special education services.

Of note, however, are staff survey results that indicate a supportive environment and professional development as an area of need and future development. While, as mentioned, the majority of teachers indicated a feeling of support, a notable proportion of respondents (n=21; 23.6%) indicated that they do not feel they have received District-level support, resources, or training to the degree that they felt only sometimes or rarely could be “the kind of special education teacher they wanted to be.”

Continuum of Programming

Respondents identified delivering or receiving a variety of programming across the LPCSD continuum of services. This should be interpreted positively as it indicates both that a variety of perspectives were represented in the survey and that LPCSD is providing a variety of special education support across schools and programs.

As noted previously, there was a degree of inconsistency among respondents indicating several areas of need. First, throughout all methods of data collection it became evident that teachers (both special

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education and general education) were not consistently identifying the special education programs correctly. Some examples are provided here:

- Several staff thought students with 504 Plans were special education students
- Many staff confused Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) with Consultant Teacher (CT) programs
- Some special education teachers identified themselves as Consultant Teachers but described their services more similarly to Integrated Co-Teaching

A significant finding regarding LPCSD special education programming includes a recognition from all types of stakeholders that the continuum of services is felt to be inconsistent, sometimes arbitrary, and not designed with continuity of programming in mind. This is not to say that LPCSD does not provide a continuum of services, but rather to indicate that the services provided do not always align with perceived student needs, across schools, or with differentiated and specially designed programming in mind.

Most notably, based on data provided by the District, there is not a single special education program that exists across all four school locations. In some cases there are several schools with a continuous program (but not all). In other cases a program exists in a school, then does not exist in the next school, then exists again at a higher grade school (e.g. the PEC has a 15:1 Special Class; the IEC does not have the 15:1 program, then the Middle School has a 15:1 special class, but the High School does not have the 15:1 Special Class). Another example is illustrated by the fact that the Integrated Co-Teaching program appears to be fully supported at the Primary and Elementary Level (Grades K-5) but fully abandoned at the secondary school level (Grades 6-12).

Focus Group Findings

Over two weeks, thirteen focus groups were conducted with staff, parents, and students to gain insight into both areas of success and areas of need for the District's special education programming. The lead facilitator was Dr. Michael Lewis, and the co-group facilitators included Elisabeth Yack and Christian Rajnisz. Approximately 40 individuals participated in the focus groups. Each session began with an introduction explaining the parameters of confidentiality, followed by several open-ended questions to collect thorough perceptions. Once the predetermined questions had been asked, the facilitators opened up the group to allow participants to make any additional comments.

Specific themes emerged throughout the discussions across focus groups.

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Communication

Many staff believe there exists good communication and collaboration among stakeholders. Some examples supporting this theme include:

- “Currently I feel like we work well as a team. I feel that students who are identified do get the services they need.”
- “I think the special education teachers really value my input and will seek to collaborate with me.”
- “I think collaboration as a team is good and that people are quick about getting concerns to SST to get the students screened/evaluated”
- “We have good communication for getting teachers to share their concerns over related services and make that referral to SST team as well”
- “I came here after working in other districts and I was impressed by the way everyone works together, especially special education. I have a son in special education in a neighboring district and that district kept me at an arm’s length. They did not want any input from me and that was very hard. In our district, we have excellent communication with our parents and take into consideration what is going on at home.”

In some degree of contrast however, some parent responses were mixed in that some expressed they do not experience the same communication and collaboration levels as teachers and educators mentioned. An overarching theme arose that the level of transparency between parents and school staff was inconsistent across academic years and buildings.

- “[The communication is] dependent upon the year...I have had receptive and helpful teachers but also teachers that were like, ‘this is where they’re at and this is where they’re going to be.’ It is challenging and I am also a teacher, so that has taught me a lot about communicating properly and how to be a team player, but there are years that it has been challenging.”
- “I think for me it’s dependent upon the year. I have had meetings now and they seem better about getting information to me ahead of time so I know what to expect. There are years I agree with everything and then there have been hour and a half long meetings where we go back and forth [...]. I can see how for parents with a younger child going into the district, how wildly intimidating those meetings can be especially if you’re not comfortable talking with those professionals or unfamiliar with everything involved, it can be extremely intimidating.”
- “I love his special ed teacher. She is wonderful. I feel like I don’t expect quick responses, for example, I sent an email at 8 pm warning her of a behavioral concern with my son just to keep her in the know. Within 20 minutes, she gave me a lengthy response about how she is going to support me. That has happened multiple times throughout the school year, she is wonderful and we love her. Our son is in an ICT classroom.”

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- “The general education teacher is good too, but much of my contact is with the special education teacher. I can tell they communicate and she’s great too but it seems like the special ed teacher communicates only with special ed student’s parents.”
- “[...] I honestly will tell you based on my experience through the district that they have great ratings because [the LPCSD] demographic is upper middle class. When they have problem children, they don’t know what to do as much and sometimes I feel as if I am not necessarily part of the team but an antagonizing factor. I am pretty easy going, I deal with a lot of behaviors at work so sometimes it is frustrating for me because they would constantly call me to pick him up if his behaviors would escalate when they have sufficient staff to handle it. At BOCES, this doesn’t really happen which is great, but I feel there was no reason he couldn’t have made it through at Lew-Port. They threatened to have a resource officer bring my son home to grab his homework that he had forgotten, which I perceived as very threatening.”

For students, their views on the level of collaboration and communication were mixed. Some students reported that they are able to communicate effectively with their teachers and educators, only describing issues such as timing.

- “Yes, I do email them [teachers] on Mondays and have a one hour process meeting. When I do email them to connect, they take a little bit to respond”
- “Yes, I can talk to them [teachers] when I want to.”

Conversely, another student mentioned that they did not feel like they truly had the opportunity to communicate and often did not attempt to due to constraints.

- “Yes I can, but then [my assignment] might be late so then I try to figure it out myself because I don’t want to get in trouble for being late.”

Program Opportunities/Consistency

Additional concerns emerged across all focus groups regarding program consistency across buildings and ensuring that special education programming truly meets each student’s individual needs. Program consistency as an opportunity for growth emerged among focus groups with staff, parents and students.

Specific staff comments include:

- “I would like to see more consistency regarding programming across the district. There is a wide range of needs but at times we will struggle to get the exact resources for a student’s specific needs”.
- “Right now, at the secondary level, special education is viewed as all or nothing rather than specifically what the student needs.”

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- “I know special ed costs a significant amount of money, and a lot of times they feel it is about numbers. What it should be about is the child as a whole, it’s not just about standardized scores when you are making recommendations for particular services or dismissal of other services. Sometimes students don’t always fit into a certain program. Our slogan is aiming higher and those kids getting services deserve the same treatment as all of the general education kids [...] so that they too can be successful. It is my opinion that the students we serve are getting the short end of the stick, it’s our job to provide them those skills to be successful.”
- “More fluency in the programs from one building to the next. We were talking about how a student that’s in that gray area might start off in 15:1 and it’s a small group. When they come into 8th grade we try to put them in the consultant teacher model in math so that they are able to be successful in math in high school. We currently have 8th graders that cannot handle the consultant teaching model for math and I am concerned for them when they go to the high school. We’ve had students that truly need the 15:1 in the high school because not all students at that level can be in a consultant teacher model. One kid, he moved on to the high school, failed the math class, is retaking it again, and is still not successful. I wish we had programs that fit those students and provided that opportunity at the high school level.”
- “[...] I feel our hands are tied for what we feel is appropriate for the students and what is available in programming. This is for a very small population of students. We try to bridge the transition from 5-6th grade and meet with teachers and look at those students that fall into the gray area to see how we can manipulate the program to make it work for the student.”
- “I wish we could change the transition from 8th to 9th grade to provide continuity and support the students that struggle.”
- “...I think some kids get put into a self-contained classroom all day long when it would really be appropriate for a specific subject rather than 6 hours, just more individualized programming is needed.”

In support of concerns over program consistency across buildings as well as appropriate placement, one parent stated:

- “Yes [my child’s programming has changed between buildings]. I think there is a gap because with the younger grades they’re clumping those kids that have individualized education programming with more services, and automatically putting that kid in a 12:1:1 instead of mainstreaming. Those students would be able to grow in those situations with an aide. Not the case for everyone. My son is currently mainstreamed with a 2:1 (but often 1:1) aide. He is growing, still behind, but he is absolutely growing.”

A student also added to this concern over the need to match placements with what is actually needed.

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- “I think they could accommodate my needs more because I know I’m in a couple of special ed classes that I don’t need but I’m still in there. I feel like it’s wasting my time to be in a placement that I don’t need.”

Caseload Management

For staff, increasing caseloads have been an area of concern. Across related service providers, for example, the caseload coupled with inconsistent scheduling opportunities has created the perception that proper service to students is challenging.

- “Related service providers have very large caseloads with limitations to group sessions...so acquiring more staff with another provider could allow other students to receive services.”
- “We are given a schedule and told when kids can or cannot be pulled from class. If they’re in reading, we can’t take them so the next best time is to pull them from science or social studies. So then we pull them and they don’t get science or social studies because they are in related services. This year I have [three grades]in the same ... sessions with significantly different needs that I am trying to teach at the same time because that’s the time I can pull them and they do need the services. Principals make these schedules without the related service providers present to provide input and it creates problems.”
- “We have offered suggestions about scheduling this year and they did take this into account. As professionals we need to have more flexibility as to when we can take a child every day. There isn’t enough time to take these kids. The window of opportunity to provide services and support have gotten smaller and smaller. We are all fighting for the same half hour time frame.”
- As staffing has decreased “the caseload has not changed but we are told to make it work. I think a better allocation of resources would be to make sure staffing numbers are appropriate to meet the number of students we serve. Just because a time slot is labeled a certain way does not mean that is how it is used. Medicaid and testing are the last things we put into our scheduling because we don’t get them every day and time allotted is not sufficient...”

Climate, Culture, Organization Recommendations

Based on the findings outlined in the preceding pages, the following recommendations are provided.

Professional Development

- Professional development for general education staff on the models of special education service delivery, types of services, and how special education services connect to success as a student is warranted.

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- Professional development on types/models of related service delivery (inclusive of school psychology, school counseling, and school social work roles) may alleviate some of the strain expressed by providers regarding caseload management, time to perform tasks, and challenges meeting IEP mandates within scheduling limitations.
- Professional Development on delivery of the Integrated Co-Teaching model vs. the Consultant Teacher model is strongly encouraged.

Continuum of Services

- A thorough analysis of special education programs and services is warranted
 - The lack of consistent, predictable, and continuous programs across schools is an area of need that needs to be evaluated further and addressed.
 - The impression that services are identified partly based on the school in which a student is enrolled as opposed to their academic, social emotional, or cognitive needs should be considered as part of a larger and more thorough review.
- Caseload reviews of special education teachers and other services providers should also be considered.
 - Based on student program enrollment and feedback from data collection it appears as if some programs are over-enrolled while others are under-enrolled.
 - Related services and staff-to-student ratios for certain providers and services appear inconsistent.
 - It is possible that a more granular review of student needs may result in the creation of a classroom because students could be returned from BOCES or private special education placements.
- A review of how special education teacher and service provider schedules are created is warranted. There appears to be meaningful differences in the methods and outcomes of school-level schedules that create differences among programs. In every case, effort should be made for special education and related services to be scheduled consistently, regardless of the school in which services are provided.
 - It is also a possibility that evaluation of these methods would result in a more flexible scheduling outcome that allows for more consistency in program opportunities or more diversity in program offerings.

Other Recommendations

- Effort should be made to differentiate the supplies and materials budgets of special education teachers, related service providers, psychologists, etc.

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- It is unclear from where the special education supply and material budget is derived. A consistent note of concern is that classes who service students with increased needs do not have a consistent and predictable budget that is differentiated based on the level of service provided. For example, based on data collection, it appears as if a consultant teacher receives the same allocation as a special class teacher despite the increased use of manipulatives and “hands-on” materials in that more restrictive setting.
- Consider the realignment of the Director of Special Education Role. During the course of this program review it was announced that the current Director of Special Education is retiring at the end of the current 2020-2021 school year. Given the nature of this review and the timing of this particular retirement a convenient opportunity to reevaluate roles and responsibilities is possible and appropriate.
 - It appears as if the Director of Special Education is engaged in evaluations, meetings, etc. which take a significant portion of time that could be addressed by other trained staff allowing for time to be more efficiently focused on curriculum, instruction, professional development, and inter-office collaboration.

Financial Analysis

Medicaid/SSHSP

The School Supportive Health Services Program (SSHSP) was developed jointly by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the New York State Department of Health (DOH). SSHSP applies to the 5-21 year old population pursuant to §4410 of the Education Law. The purpose of the program is to assist school districts and counties in obtaining Medicaid Reimbursement for certain diagnostic and health support services provided to students with disabilities. Participation in this program is mandatory for all public school districts.

A brief review of the budgeted and actual revenue for SSHSP programs was conducted as part of this program review. While there is a discrepancy between the budgeted amount of SSHSP revenue and the actual revenue it should be noted that revenue realized by LPCSD is appropriate for a district of its size and level of special education service.

Evidence of billed services are submitted electronically whenever possible and directly supported by a locally-based specialist in Medicaid/SSHSP billing. These are appropriate steps already taken by the District to maximize revenue.

School Year	Budgeted amount	Revenue Earned	% of Budgeted Amount	% Year over Year
2016-2017	\$198,282.00	\$80,981.04	40.84%	--
2017-2018	\$109,000.00	\$220,168.31	201.99%	271.87%
2018-2019	\$109,003.00	\$261,318.22	239.73%	15.75%

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2019-2020	\$109,000.00	\$197,846.81	181.51%	-32.08%*
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*The reduction in year-over-year revenue is likely due to the significant reductions in billable services provided due to school closures that began in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

State Special Education Grant Allocations

IDEA 611

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) provides all public school districts with funding passed through the United States Government as a means to supplement the special education services and programs in each respective school district. These take the form of entitlement grants calculated based on a formula essentially derived from the number of students with disabilities identified in any particular district. Allocations change annually based on a variety of factors determined by the NYSED. They are called the IDEA 611 and 619 grants. The 611 grant is for school age supplement while the 619 grant is for preschool-aged supplement. The current review considered the past 5 academic years of IDEA 611 grant funds and expenditures (2016/17-2020/21).

Year	Original Budget	Expended Budget	Percent Expended	Carryover
2016-2017	\$522,544.00	\$522,544.00	100.00%	----
2017-2018	\$526,704.00	\$529,388.00	100.50%	\$10,156.00
2018-2019	\$530,827.00	\$537,578.00	101.27%	\$7,472.00
2019-2020	\$531,660.00	\$524,363.00	98.62%	\$721.00
2020-2021	\$547,969.00	---	----	\$8,018.00
5-year average	\$531,940.80			

As the chart above indicates, LPCSD received an average IDEA 611 allocation of \$531,940 over the past 5 years, with that allocation increasing by a total of \$25,425 over that timeframe. A review of the annual documentation reveals that the entire allocation is assigned to pay salaries of certified special education teachers (under “Professional Staff”) or mandatory agency fees as required by NYSED regulations (under “Professional Services”). In rare instances funds were allocated for non-mandated services like specialized vocational assessments. In no case were funds used for anything to supplement the special education program other than the aforementioned mandated expenses or teacher salaries. For example, funds could also be budgeted for supplies, materials, specialized equipment, curricular supplements, specialized professional development, or employee benefits.

In each year reviewed funds were expended appropriately. NYSED allows for the over-expenditure or under-expenditure of funds based on final year outcomes. This is represented in the “Carryover”

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column and represents that amount of unspent funds from prior years that can be spent should an unanticipated expense arise.

IDEA 619

The same review of IDEA 619 funds was conducted as was done for the IDEA 611 funds. IDEA 619 funds are typically far smaller amounts than the IDEA 611 allocation and are typically expended on NYSED mandated services based on special education services provided to PreK students. The chart below shows 5-year allocation and expenditure figures for this grant.

Year	Original Budget	Expended Budget	Percent Expended	Carryover
2016-2017	\$16,711.00	\$16,988.00	100.16%	---
2017-2018	\$16,711.00	\$16,711.00	100.00%	\$1.00
2018-2019	\$17,282.00	\$17,282.00	100.00%	\$1.00
2019-2020	\$17,695.00	\$17,693.00	99.99%	\$1.00
2020-2021	\$17,816.00	---	---	\$3.00
5-year average	\$17,243.00			

In all cases LPCSD budgeted for and expended these funds appropriately.

Financial Recommendations

- Consider diversifying the manner in which allocated funds are spent across allowable areas. For example, the grant allocation cannot support (i.e. pay for) specialized professional development, necessary equipment, supplies and/or materials in excess of standard items for classrooms, etc. based on how the funds are currently allocated.
 - This would require planned and purposeful offsetting of salaries from grant-based sources to the general fund. It may have, based on a significant variety of factors, the impact of increasing the general fund budget amount.
- Consider allocating funds in a manner by which an increased amount of carryover may be maintained. Carry-over can grow over several years and “spend-downs” of those funds can happen over longer periods of time. Allowing the carryover amount to increase and be maintained would essentially provide LPCSD with a financial “reserve” should necessary or unanticipated expenses arise for special education programming that were not initially budgeted for.

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- Consider identifying specific special-education related budget lines that SSHSP/Medicaid revenue could be assigned to as a way to supplement the department budget and allow for greater flexibility in use of financial resources.

Response to Intervention (RTI) & Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

It appears that LPCSD is in the process of transitioning from a “problem-solving” RTI model where individual concerns about individual students are brought to a team of school staff for consultation to one of a “standard protocol” model where students are eligible for RTI or ineligible for RTI based on predetermined criteria as defined by performance on universal screening tools (e.g. aimswebPlus). A review of the school-level RTI plans reveals this transition, but also shows that schools are at relatively differing stages of development toward the standard protocol model.

A district such as LPCSD is incredibly well-positioned to systematically address conceptualizations of general and special education service delivery in such a manner where general and special education intervention is *progressive* and serves as a regional model. District size and existing supports are the primary factors leading to the viewpoint on the ease with which the district could transition to a more progressive approach. The percentage of students identified as students with disabilities in LPCSD at 15.5% is concerning. Given the size of the district and its resources, LPCSD stands to be a potential exemplar of progressive general education and special education practices, which should inherently limit the number of students identified as students with disabilities. Shifting access to rigorous intervention into general education should serve to help abate parent concerns about their children requiring assistance (and subsequent pushes for classification) if implemented properly.

Kindergarten through Grade 8 schools in LPCSD are well positioned to transition to a more consistent and rigorous approach to academic RTI and MTSS as a whole. The dedication of leadership and staff are strengths. Reconceptualization of the master schedule, as well as the selection of high-quality evidence based reading and math interventions is a needed starting point. MTSS as a whole, including arms of MTSS dedicated to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives and executive functioning, should be incorporated. Adequate time for planning MTSS and resource allocation is essential.

It appears as if significant effort has recently been expended in identifying various reading interventions based on different grade levels and/or levels of need. This is a positive development but should be continued while also allowing for the core reading curriculum to augment or enhance the

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uniform provision of explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and the science of reading as a whole.

While more “balanced” literacy approaches are helpful for students who have already mastered the code, most children require highly explicit instruction in foundational reading skills that are not inferential or exposure oriented in nature. Evidence of explicit instruction practices, particularly for students who are struggling to learn to read, seem to be strongest at the primary level at this time. Further buttressing the entirety of the curriculum to ensure that all students K-8 have access to such explicit instruction opportunities (via the core and RTI for K-6, and via RTI for 6-12) is incredibly important. Lack of adequate explicit instruction is one of the primary causal factors involved in the overidentification of students as reading disabled.

It appears that the role of the school psychologist in the district still remains very driven by special education classification practices, as opposed to other work for which they are prepared, such as proactive social/emotional/behavioral and academic intervention with children. This trend is more pronounced at the intermediate, middle, and high school levels. While this point in isolation requires attention, any trends in the continued overuse of school psychologists in this manner is generally indicative of a larger general and special education culture and trend toward high volume classification of students with disabilities. This trend results in the need to use school psychologists heavily to “keep up” with assessment demands stemming from initial and reevaluation reviews, as opposed to using their vast expertise to proactively address student concerns before they necessitate classification. This perspective was reinforced during our data-gathering.

RTI/MTSS Recommendations

- The District should give strong consideration to universalizing their approach to MTSS, particularly at the primary, intermediate, and middle school levels, where uniform policies and procedures are more natural and realistic. This includes the establishment of universal use of certain types of data for screening and progress monitoring, data teaming, implementation of high quality and rigorous interventions, and data based decision making procedures.
 - This effort appears to be underway but has not been universalized as evidenced by 3 different RTI models for 3 different schools.
 - This requires careful and planful coordination and reconceptualization of student scheduling to facilitate access to intervention blocks.
- School psychologists should play a critical role in the conceptualization of district MTSS initiatives.

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- School psychologists should play a prominent role in the RTI/MTSS process, as well as in intervention development and implementation for students who are ultimately identified as requiring special education support.
- Consider an ELA curriculum designed to incorporate direct approaches to instruction for all learners, including those requiring RTI, AIS, or special education services.
 - While not an endorsement of a specific program, Scholastic, Inc. for example, has a comprehensive ELA curriculum that allows the teacher to account for readers of all levels in their class while also providing specific grade-level supplements for readers of all abilities.

Comparison of Matched School Districts

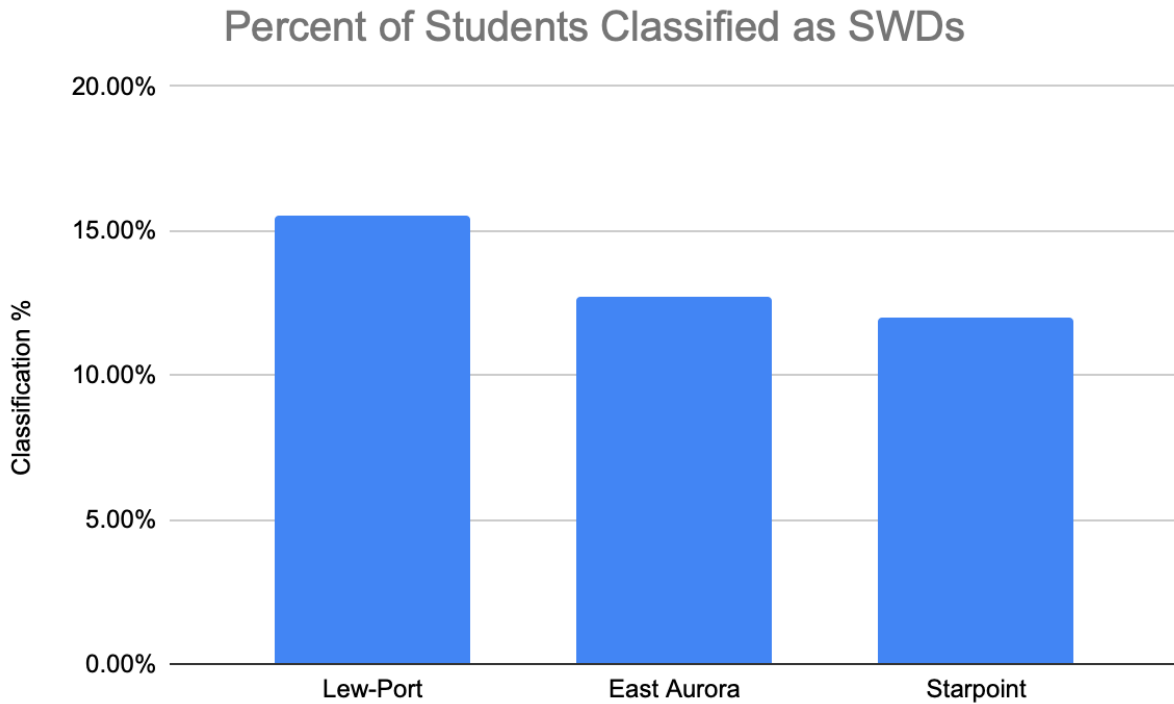
Part of this review encompassed a comparison between Lewiston-Porter Central School District (LPCSD) and a matched school district across several special education-related data. After consultation with district administration it was determined that the East Aurora Union-Free School District (EAUFSD) would serve as an appropriate counterpart to Lew-Port for the purpose of these comparisons. Reasoning for this choice included similar enrollment size where LPCSD has a total enrollment of 2361 pupils while East Aurora has a total pupil enrollment of 2304. Furthermore, the socio-economic status of both districts, while maintaining some unique characteristics, is quite similar. Finally, Lewiston-Porter and East Aurora often score and are ranked very close together in regional rankings across numerous metrics (e.g. Business First Rankings). Each area of comparison will be shown, described and explained separately so as not to integrate different types of data across several different outcome metrics.

It should be noted that all data used for the purposes of these evaluations were matched by year, based on availability. For example, since the COVID-19 Pandemic essentially cancelled all NYS assessments last year that data reflects the most recently available year of 2018.

Percent of Classified Students

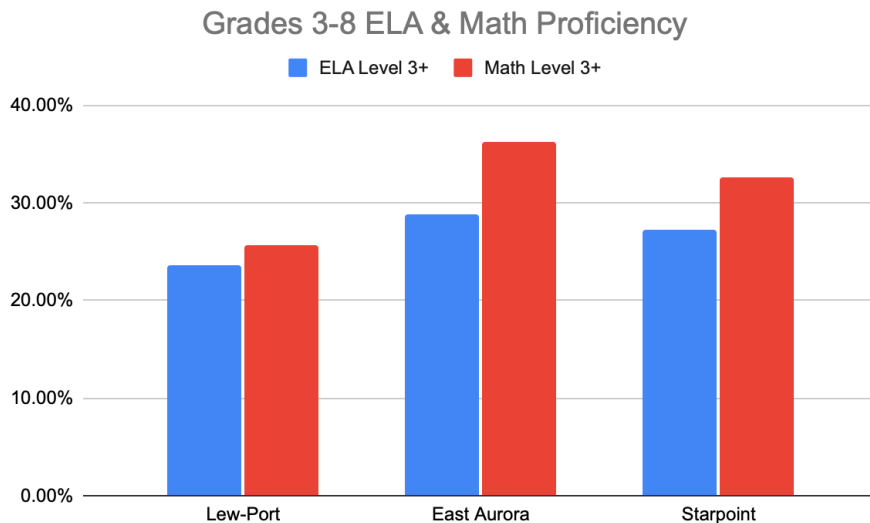
An initial comparison between districts included a review of the overall percentage of students classified as requiring special education services, i.e. Students with Disabilities. LPCSD's classification rate is 15.5% compared to East Aurora's classification rate of 12.7% and Starpoint's at 12%. For similarly sized districts this represents LPCSD as having an 18% higher classification rate than EA and 23% higher than Starpoint.

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State Assessment Performance of SWDs

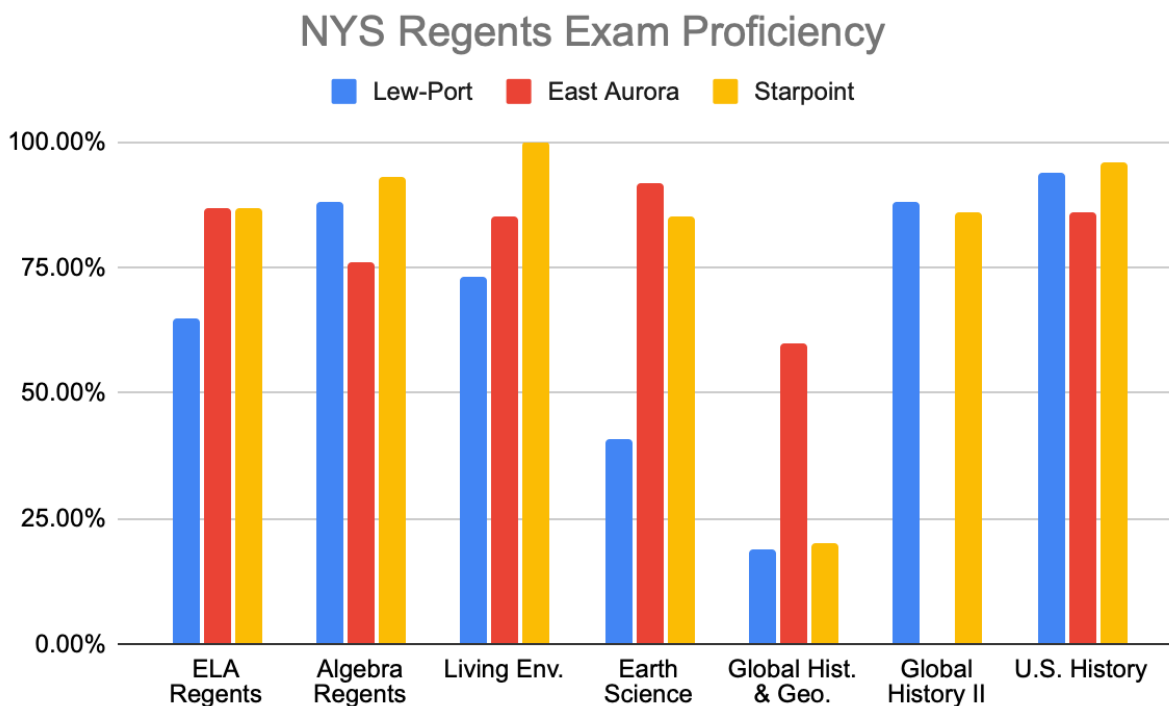
A review of performance on state assessments of SWDs was also conducted. A review of Grade 3-8 Math Assessments and Grade 3-8 ELA Assessments revealed that in both cases East Aurora and Starpoint outperformed LPCSD with regard to the number of students who scored “proficient” on that grade band’s respective assessment.



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New York State Regents exam comparisons were also conducted, revealing variable differences among Districts. New York State Regents Exams are summative assessments that are required by the State Education Department for graduation with a Regents or Local Diploma. Proficiency is established based on the number of students scoring a 65 (low-proficiency) or higher (proficiency). While there are numerous Regents Exams that a single student can take in New York State, only 5 are mandated for graduation with a Regents Diploma (1 Science, 1 Math, 1 ELA, Global History, & US History). There are several alternative pathways to obtaining a diploma as well which fell outside the scope of this program review.

LPCSD outperformed East Aurora (but not Starpoint) on both the Algebra and U.S. History Regents Exams. East Aurora and Starpoint outperformed LPCSD on English Language Arts, Earth Science, Living Environment, and Global History & Geography. Notably, LPCSD sat students for the Global History II exam and performed nearly identically as well as Starpoint. East Aurora's available data revealed they did not seat any students for this exam. There is not a simple explanation for why two districts sat students and one did not for this specific exam.



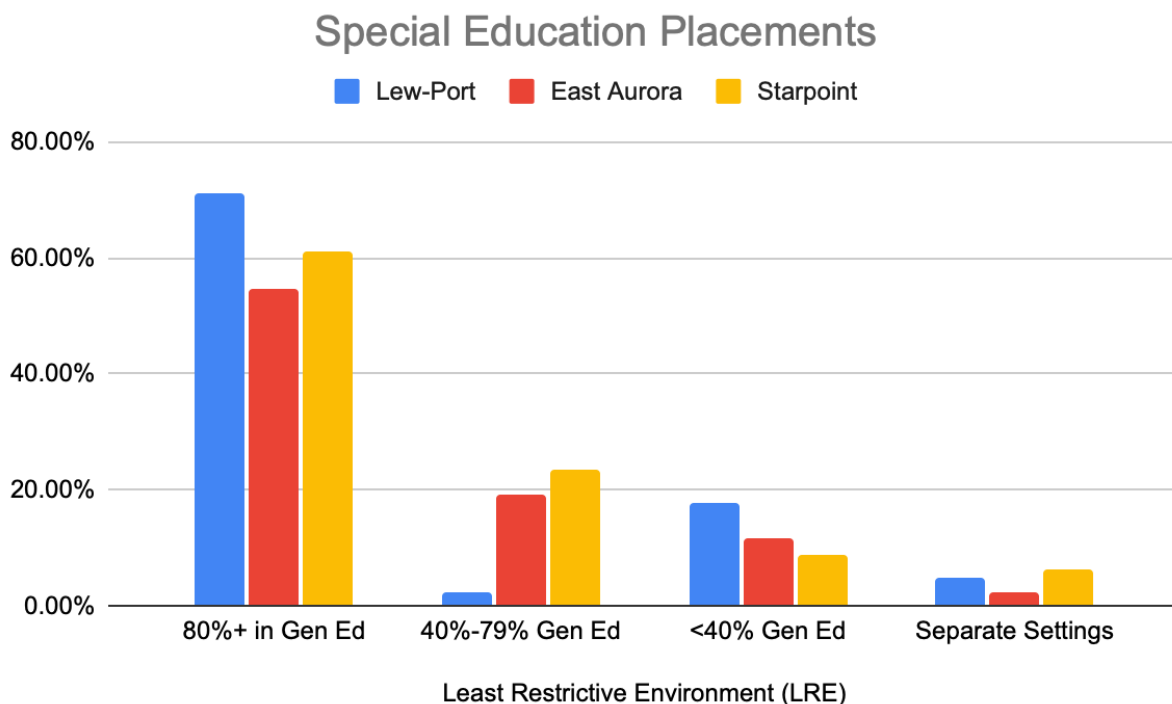
Special Education Placements

The data indicate that in several instances Lew-Port is placing students in more restrictive special education settings when compared to East Aurora. This data is variable when compared to Starpoint. The data do in fact indicate that LPCSD has a greater percentage of SWDs placed with general

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education peers 80% of the time or more than does East Aurora or Starpoint. Of concern, however, is that LPCSD appears to place nearly double the number of SWDs with general education peers less than 40% of the time overall or in entirely separate settings as East Aurora and Starpoint.

While all CSE decisions are made on an individual student basis, these data indicate that LPCSD appears to adhere to an “all-or-nothing” approach where a student is either in fully integrated special education programs or fully self-contained special education programs; a perspective that was also shared in other areas of data-gathering. East Aurora and Starpoint appear to more specifically tailor their programming where students could be partially placed in integrated programs and self-contained programs. This would explain the meaningful difference between LPCSD and the other two districts in student placements that are between 40%-79% in the General Education Setting.



SWD Graduation & Credentials

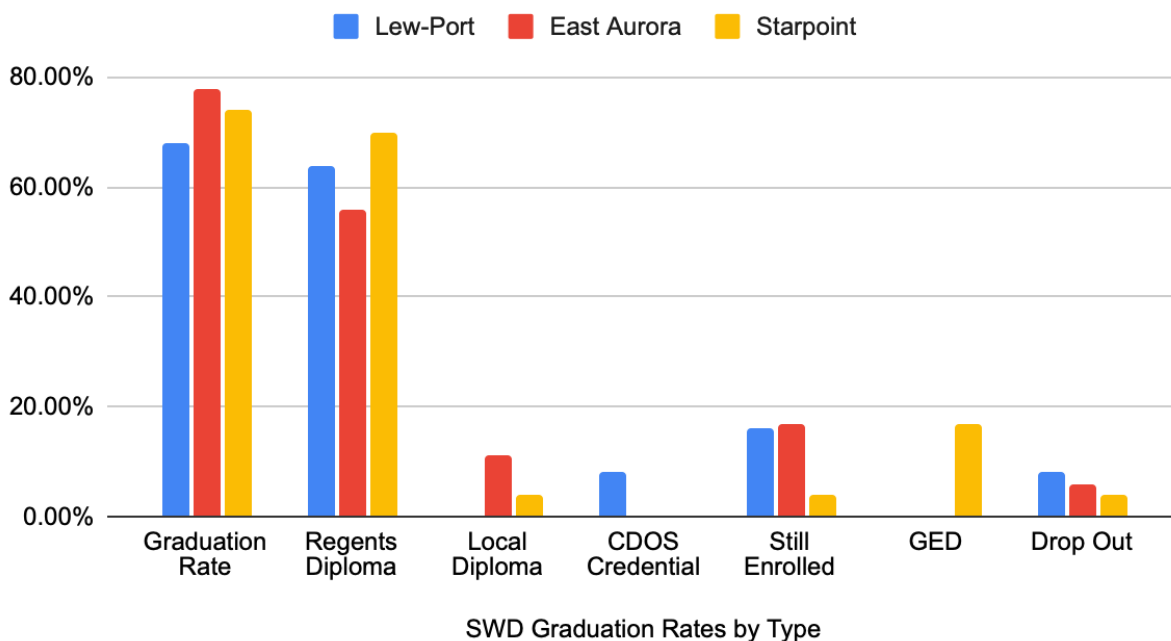
A review of graduation rates and types of graduation credentials yielded variable results as well. Based on the most recently available data. EA’s overall graduation rate of SWDs is 13% higher than that of LPCSD. Starpoint’s overall graduation rate of SWD’s is 8% higher than LPCSD’s. Alternatively, East Aurora had a graduation rate where 78% of SWDs graduated, Starpoint had a rate of 74% of SWDs graduating, while LPCSD had a graduation rate where 68% of SWDs graduated.

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These findings play out when doing a deeper review of the types of reported graduation outcomes. To provide some context, the only recognized high school graduation diplomas in NYS are the Regent’s Diploma and the Local Diploma. There are numerous pathways for SWDs to earn either a Regents or Local Diploma. Other “end-of-schooling” outcomes are possible but are not technically considered “diplomas.” For example, the CDOS (Career Development & Occupational Studies) credential, eligible to all students is a valuable credential that shows work-readiness. The CDOS earned without an accompanying diploma, however, would constitute a “non-graduate.” and should not be reflected in the graduate rate.

It is important to note that while LPCSD outperformed East Aurora in SWDs earning a Regents Diploma, Lew Port had zero (0) students earn a local diploma while East Aurora had 11 students earn one and Starpoint had 4 students earn one. Further variability is indicated by the finding that while LPCSD focused on students earning a CDOS, both Starpoint and East Aurora had zero (0) CDOS credentials earned. One could reason that LPCSD may have focused on earning a CDOS credential while East Aurora focused on struggling SWDs following one of several local diploma pathways. Finally, both LPCSD and East Aurora reported zero (0) GED students while Starpoint had 17 students in this category. All three districts reported SWDs dropping out of school where LPCSD reported 8 students, East Aurora 6 students, and Starpoint 4 students.

SWD Graduation Rate & Rate by Type of Credential



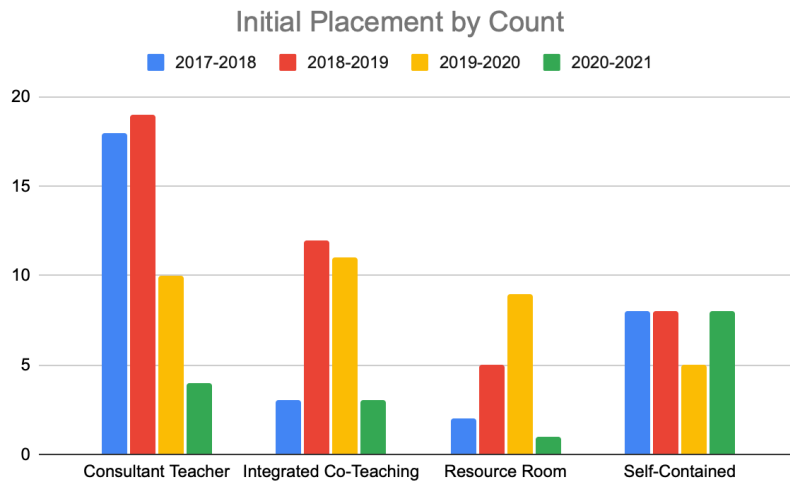
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Recommendations

- Consider reviewing potentially blended Special Education programming for individual students.
 - Evidence exists that LPCSD does this already but perhaps should consider doing so to a greater degree
- Consider targeted support for students with disabilities that supports earning a Local Diploma.
- Thoroughly review trends in initial classification/CSE placements. It is possible that with a proscribed approach once a student is placed in a self-contained setting or program with limited general education exposure, that student then has limited access to general education programming throughout their schooling.

Initial Special Education Placements

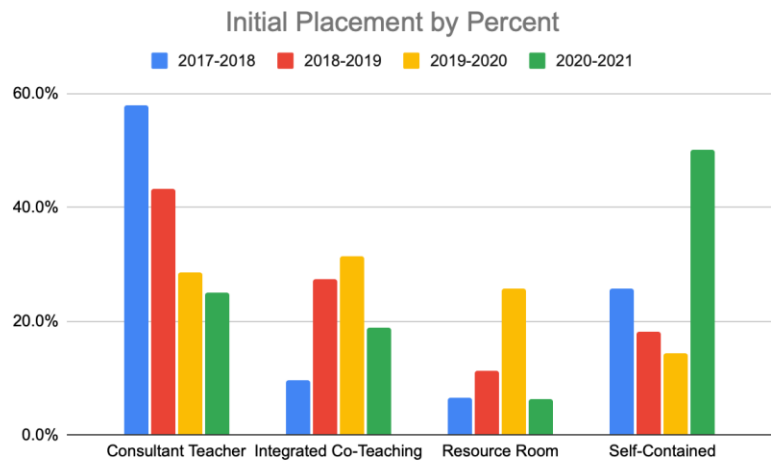
At the request of the LPCSD Special Education Committee an analysis of the Initial Placements of special education students was conducted. To elaborate, an initial placement is the programming identified in a student’s IEP the first time they are classified as an SWD. The data are presented below.



When considering whole numbers of students, there is a clear trend towards placing students in general education or “integrated” programs, even if only part of a larger set of special programs.

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When considering initial placements as a percentage of total placements there appears to be a recent trend towards higher percentages of placements in more restrictive settings with lower student ratios that are not part of general education or integrated settings.



It is important to recognize some limitations in the data presented. First, LPCSD often initially places a student in more than one kind of program. This means that the counts and percentages of placements will not align in a 1-to-1 fashion with the number of students identified that year. Second, the 2020-2021 data represents only a partial year of initial classifications. Third, several students were omitted from this data because they attend parochial school or other non-public school programs that would complicate the information presented. Based on the best available data, however, there does appear to be a trend indicating a greater percentage of initial placements are in more restrictive settings. Further, as evidenced in other data, there does appear to be support for a meaningful proportion of all SWDs placed in programs that are outside of general education setting more than 40% of the time.

SUMMARY

It is clear that LPCSD has involved families, caring and informed staff, and support from all levels of administration to see the special education program evolve as would be expected of all divisions of a public school system.

Much of LPCSD's special education program is going well. Staff are highly qualified, students are active and engaged, overall the majority of students are receiving the support necessary to access curriculum and be successful students.

Additional and more thorough review of individual-level data may support programmatic changes that further differentiate programming and improve instruction. Continued collaboration among stakeholders could reveal additional creative ways to support students in a way that further enhances special education programming. Careful consideration of financial procedures and practices may allow for targeted financial support of necessary programs to support student success. Finally, enhanced professional development may result in a better understanding of the types and kinds of special education services that can be provided in the most efficient and specially-designed way possible.

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The authors would again like to thank the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education, superintendent, central office leadership Team, school administrators, as well as the staff, families, and students of Lewiston-Porter Central School District for their cooperation, candor, and open participation in this program review process.

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APPENDIX 1: Consolidated Recommendations By Area

Climate, Culture, Organization Recommendations

Professional Development

- Professional development for general education staff on the models of special education service delivery, types of services, and how special education services connect to success as a student is warranted.
- Professional development on types/models of related service delivery (inclusive of school psychology, school counseling, and school social work roles) may alleviate some of the strain expressed by providers regarding caseload management, time to perform tasks, and challenges meeting IEP mandates within scheduling limitations.
- Professional Development on delivery of the Integrated Co-Teaching model vs. the Consultant Teacher model is strongly encouraged.

Continuum of Services

- A thorough analysis of special education programs and services is warranted
 - The lack of consistent, predictable, and continuous programs across schools is an area of need that needs to be evaluated further and addressed.
 - The impression that services are identified partly based on the school in which a student is enrolled as opposed to their academic, social emotional, or cognitive needs should be considered as part of a larger and more thorough review.
- Caseload reviews of special education teachers and other services providers should also be considered.
 - Based on student program enrollment and feedback from data collection it appears as if some programs are over-enrolled while others are under-enrolled.
 - Related services and staff-to-student ratios for certain types of providers and services appear inconsistent.
 - It is possible that a more granular review of student needs may result in the creation of a classroom because students could be returned from BOCES or private special education placements.
- A review of how special education teacher and service provider schedules are created is warranted. There appears to be meaningful differences in the methods and outcomes of school-level schedules that create differences among programs. In every case effort should be made for special education and related services to be scheduled consistently, regardless of the school in which services are provided.

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- It is also a possibility that evaluation of these methods would result in a more flexible scheduling outcome that allows for more consistency in program opportunities or more diversity in program offerings.
- Consider reviewing potentially blended Special Education programming for individual students.
 - Evidence exists that Lew-Port does this already but perhaps should consider doing so to a greater degree

Financial Recommendations

- Consider diversifying the manner in which allocated funds are spent across allowable areas. For example, the grant allocation can not support (i.e. pay for) specialized professional development, necessary equipment, supplies and/or materials in excess of standard items for classrooms, etc. based on how the funds are currently allocated.
 - This would require planned and purposeful offsetting of salaries from grant-based sources to the general fund. It would have the impact of increasing the general fund budget amount.
- Consider allocating funds in a manner by which an increased amount of carryover may be maintained. Carryover can grow over several years and “spend-downs” of those funds can happen over longer periods of time. Allowing the carryover amount to increase and be maintained would essentially provide LPCSD with a financial “reserve” should necessary or unanticipated expenses arise for special education programming that were not initially budgeted for.
- Consider identifying specific special-education related budget lines that SSHSP/Medicaid revenue could be assigned to as a way to supplement the department budget and allow for greater flexibility in use of financial resources.
- Effort should be made to differentiate the supplies and materials budgets of special education teachers, related service providers, psychologists, etc.
 - It is unclear from where the special education supply and material budget is derived but what was a consistent note of concern is that classes who service students with increased needs do not have a consistent and predictable budget that is differentiated based on the level of service provided. For example, based on data collection, it appears as if a consultant teacher receives the same allocation as a special class teacher despite the increased use of manipulatives and “hands-on” materials in that more restrictive setting.

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RTI/MTSS Recommendations

- The District should give strong consideration to universalizing their approach to MTSS, particularly at the primary, intermediate, and middle school levels, where uniform policies and procedures are more natural and realistic. This includes the establishment of universal use of certain types of data for screening and progress monitoring, data teaming, implementation of high quality and rigorous interventions, and data based decision making procedures.
 - This effort appears to be underway but has not been universalized as evidenced by 3 different RTI models for 3 different schools.
 - This requires careful and planful coordination and reconceptualization of student scheduling to facilitate access to intervention blocks.
- School psychologists should play a critical role in the conceptualization of district MTSS initiatives.
- School psychologists should play a prominent role in the RTI/MTSS process, as well as in intervention development and implementation for students who are ultimately identified as requiring special education support.
- Consider an ELA curriculum designed to incorporate direct approaches to instruction for all learners, including those requiring RTI, AIS, or special education services.
 - While not an endorsement of a specific program Scholastic, Inc, for example, has a comprehensive ELA curriculum that allows the teacher to account for readers of all levels in their class while also providing specific grade-level supplements for readers of all abilities.

Other Recommendations

- Consider the realignment of the Director of Special Education Role. During the course of this program review it was announced that the current Director of Special Education is retiring at the end of the current 2020-2021 school year. Given the nature of this review and the timing of this particular retirement a convenient opportunity to reevaluate roles and responsibilities is possible and appropriate.
 - It appears as if the Director of Special Education is engaged in evaluations, meetings, etc. which take a significant portion of time that could be addressed by other trained staff allowing for time to be more efficiently focused on curriculum, instruction, professional development, and inter-office collaboration.
- Consider targeted support for students with disabilities that supports earning a Local Diploma.
- Thoroughly review trends in initial classification/CSE placements. It is possible that with a proscribed approach once a student is placed in a self-contained setting, or program with

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limited general education exposure, that student then has limited access to general education programming throughout their schooling.

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APPENDIX 2: Acronyms for Reference

AIS: Academic Intervention Services
BOCES: Board of Cooperative Educational Services
CDOS: Career Development & Occupational Studies
CPSE: Committee on PreSchool Special Education
CSE: Committee on Special Education
CT: Consultant Teacher
DOH: New York State Department of Health
EAUFSD: East Aurora Union Free School District
ELA: English Language Arts
ICT: Integrated Co-Teaching
IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP: Individualized Education Plan
LPCSD: Lewiston-Porter Central School District
MTSS: Multi-tiered System of Supports
NYSED: New York State Education Department
RTI: Response to Intervention
SEL: Social-Emotional Learning
SSHSP: School Supportive Health Services Program
SST: Student Support Team
SWD: Students with Disabilities