

# **MONTCLAIR SCHOOL DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW**

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# INTRODUCTION

- CONTRACTED DECEMBER 2020
- BEGAN JANUARY 2021
- COMPLETED APRIL 2021
- PROCESS-BASED APPROACH
  - APPROPRIATE FOR DETERMINING SYSTEMIC EFFICACY OF PROGRAMS.
  - IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW WELL THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESSES FUNCTION ACROSS THE DISTRICT AS A UNIFIED SYSTEM OF SERVICE.



# METHODS

CASE STUDY DESIGN WITH MIXED-METHODS TO CONDUCT THE REVIEW.  
QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA WERE COLLECTED REMOTELY AND  
ON-SITE.

- FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS
- INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS
- SURVEY
- DOCUMENT REVIEW
- QUANTITATIVE DATA FROM NJSMART, NJDOE REPORTS, AND IEP  
DIRECT



# STAKEHOLDERS

INTERVIEWS WITH MORE THAN 205 PEOPLE REPRESENTING MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS:

- PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS, REPRESENTING MAJOR PROGRAMS AND CLASSIFICATIONS IN THE DISTRICT
- BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS
- RECENT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
- SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPERVISORS
- CST MEMBERS
- CENTRAL OFFICE
- PRINCIPALS
- ELEMENTARY TEACHERS
- MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS
- HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS
- ADVOCATES



# DATA ANALYSIS

- QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS WAS USED TO ANALYZE INTERVIEW AND SURVEY DATA FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP.
- SINGLE-CASE AND CROSS-CASE ANALYSES WAS USED TO IDENTIFY MAJOR THEMES AND SUB-THEMES WITHIN EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP AND ACROSS GROUPS.



# DISPROPORTIONALITY CALCULATIONS

- THE TEAM PERFORMED CALCULATIONS TO EXAMINE THE POTENTIAL OF RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY IN THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM - SPECIFICALLY THE MRE - AND AN OVERALL CALCULATION TO DETERMINE THE PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN EACH RACE CLASSIFIED.
- \*\*THERE ARE VARIOUS METHODS FOR CALCULATING DISPROPORTIONALITY.
- IN MANY CASES THE DIFFERENCES IN METHODS ARE A RESULT OF THE QUESTION BEING ASKED.



- THE TEAM FOLLOWED THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND FORMULAS FROM THE *METHODS FOR ASSESSING RACIAL/ETHNIC DISPROPORTIONALITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE. (USDOE)*
- WHAT WAS THE LIKELIHOOD FOR [SPECIFIC RACE] CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES INSIDE THE GENERAL CLASSROOM < 40% OF THE SCHOOL DAY OR OUT-OF-DISTRICT COMPARED TO THE LIKELIHOOD FOR ALL OTHER CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE DISTRICT?



# NOTE

- **\*\*NOTE: DATA ON NUMBER OF STUDENTS CLASSIFIED, TIME IN THE LRE, AND RACE AND ETHNICITY, OBTAINED FROM IEP DIRECT DOES NOT MATCH OCT 15 REPORT IN TERMS OF NUMBERS OF STUDENTS CLASSIFIED, RACIAL MAKEUPS, AND % OF DAY IN VARIOUS SETTINGS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OCTOBER 15<sup>TH</sup> COUNT FOR 2019 INCLUDED 663 STUDENTS RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES WHEREAS THE REPORT WE RAN FROM IEP DIRECT WAS ABLE TO ACCOUNT FOR 1011 STUDENTS. IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR SOME DISCREPANCIES TO OCCUR BETWEEN STATE AND LOCAL REPORTING, BUT SOME LARGE DIFFERENCES EXIST THAT MERIT THE DISTRICT REVIEWING THEIR DATA ENTRY PROCEDURES AND TRAINING PROTOCOLS.**



**Table 1: Placement by Race\***

	<b>Over 80%</b>	<b>&lt; 40%</b>	<b>OOD</b>	<b>Total 1011</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>428 (84%)</b>	<b>27 (5%)</b>	<b>52 (10%)</b>	<b>507</b>
<b>African American</b>	<b>220 (73%)</b>	<b>37 (12%)</b>	<b>42 (14%)</b>	<b>299</b>
<b>Latino</b>	<b>100 (82%)</b>	<b>11 (11%)</b>	<b>10 (10%)</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>49 (75%)</b>	<b>8 (12%)</b>	<b>8 (12%)</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Native American</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>19</b>

\*494 students classified as OHI



THE RESULTS MUST BE INTERPRETED WITH CAUTION, DUE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF DATA ERRORS WITHIN THE IEP DIRECT DATABASE. THE RESULTS SHOULD BE VIEWED AS APPROXIMATIONS WITHIN A POSSIBLE RANGE DUE TO THE STANDARD ERROR OF MEASUREMENT ASSOCIATED WITH THE DATA.

Black: 19% of race is classified

1.6 times more likely to be placed in self-contained or out of district compared to all other races combined.

Asian: 18.1% of race is classified

1.23 times more likely to be placed in self-contained or out of district compared to all other races combined.

Hispanic: 14.2% of race classified

1.07 times more likely to be placed in self-contained or out of district compared to all other races combined.

White: 15% of race is classified

.65 times likely (less than 1.00) to be placed in self-contained or out of district compared to all other races.



# THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- THE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE ORGANIZED THEMATICALLY. THE TEAM USED DATA TRIANGULATION TO DEVELOP THE RECOMMENDATIONS (ALL RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVE FROM AT LEAST THREE DATA POINTS).



# SYSTEM APPROACH

- IMPLEMENT A SYSTEMS-BASED APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATION THAT PROVIDES THE PROTOCOLS, PROCESS, PRACTICES, AND OVERSIGHT NECESSARY TO ENSURE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND QUALITY ACROSS PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS. *(E.G., IEP DEVELOPMENT, DETERMINATION OF THE NEED FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS, DATA COLLECTION FOR PROGRESS MONITORING AND REPORTING, DYSLEXIA SCREENING, I&RS, RTI).*
- STRENGTHEN THE LINKAGES BETWEEN THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AND PUPIL SERVICES TO PROVIDE BEST-PRACTICE SUPPORTS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING ACROSS THE DISTRICT.  
*(E.G. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN AREAS SUCH AS BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS, READING INTERVENTIONS, ACCOMMODATIONS VERSUS MODIFICATIONS, EFFECTIVE CO-TEACHING, AND DYSLEXIA SCREENING AND INSTRUCTION).*



- PROVIDE SCHOOL SCHEDULING OVERSIGHT AND SCHEDULING SUPPORT TO INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY WITH THE DEPLOYMENT OF IN-CLASS SUPPORT SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND THE USE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS.
- CREATE A SYSTEMIC PK-5 APPROACH TO LANGUAGE ARTS IN GENERAL EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION SETTINGS THAT INCLUDES BEST PRACTICE INTERVENTIONS, REVISED CURRICULUM, AND FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES FOR LITERACY.
- *“AS SOMEONE WITH MULTIPLE CHILDREN, IN MULTIPLE PROGRAMS AND GRADE LEVELS, I CAN SAY THE PROGRAM IS VERY INCONSISTENT. IT REALLY DEPENDS ON WHO YOU GET YEAR TO YEAR. SOMETIMES YOU GET LUCKY, SOMETIMES, YOU DON'T.”*



# REBUILD THE CULTURE FOR EQUITY

- CHANGE THE GENERAL PERCEPTION OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION EVALUATION AND CLASSIFICATION PROCESS TO BE MORE COLLABORATIVE BASED ON INFORMATION AND DATA SHARING.
- THE DATA SUGGEST THERE IS A GENERAL FEELING THAT INFORMATION IS NOT FORTHCOMING AND THAT PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS ARE MADE TO “*FIGURE THINGS OUT*” AS THEY MOVE THROUGH THE PROCESS.
- THERE IS EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS WHO COME INTO THE PROCESS WITH MORE RESOURCES (E.G. ADVOCATES, ATTORNEYS, PRIVATE EVALUATIONS), GET MORE RESOURCES OUT OF THE PROCESS. THIS CREATES EDUCATIONAL INEQUITIES WITHIN THE SYSTEM.



- **CREATE A MORE COMPREHENSIVE DIRECTORY OF SERVICES THAN WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS AND THEN IMPLEMENT THE SERVICES LISTED WITH FIDELITY ACROSS THE DISTRICT. THE DIRECTORY SHOULD LIST EVERY PROGRAM, WHERE THAT PROGRAM EXISTS, AND WHO THE PROGRAM IS BEST SUITED TO SERVE. PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS AND TEACHERS COULD BE IMPORTANT RESOURCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH A DIRECTORY.**
- **DEVELOP A CLEAR CHAIN OF COMMAND DOCUMENT WITH SPECIFIC LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY SO PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS KNOW WHO TO CALL WITH QUESTIONS OR INFORMATION.**



# IEP DEVELOPMENT

- IEPs NEED TO BE CUSTOMIZED TO THE STUDENT AND REFLECT THE STUDENT'S NEEDS. A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO PROGRAMMING IS NECESSARY.
- IEPs NEED TO BE THOROUGHLY REVIEWED FOR ERRORS. A SYSTEM OF RANDOM AUDITING SHOULD BE SET UP TO MONITOR IEP ACCURACY.
- IEPs MUST BE READ, CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD BY SPECIAL EDUCATION, GENERAL EDUCATION, AND PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFF, AND IMPLEMENTED WITH FIDELITY.
- ENSURE THAT ITEMS LISTED AS ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS MEET THE DEFINITION OF SUCH.



# SHARING THE INTERVENTION

- **A CULTURE OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTION MUST BECOME PART OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT ACROSS THE DISTRICT.**
- **GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS MUST BE SUPPORTED SO THEY BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE AND CONFIDENT WITH IMPLEMENTING CLASSROOM-BASED INTERVENTIONS, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND MODIFICATIONS FOR ACADEMICS AND BEHAVIORS.**



# PROGRESS MONITORING

- PROGRESS MONITORING MUST BE BASED ON ACTIONABLE DATA. THE CURRENT PRACTICES OF PROGRESS MONITORING ARE SOMETIMES OPAQUE AND NOT SYSTEMIC.
- SYSTEMATIZE DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING FOR THE PURPOSES OF PROGRESS MONITORING IEP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES. THERE NEEDS TO BE A CULTURE OF PROGRESS MONITORING BASED ON SPECIFIC AND ACTIONABLE DATA.
- DATA SHOULD BE USED TO DRIVE PROGRAMS & HELP UNCOVER STUDENT STRENGTHS AND IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES TO PROVIDE SUPPORTS TO MOVE THE STUDENT ON THE LRE CONTINUUM. (ASSET-BASED APPROACH)



# PARAPROFESSIONALS

- DISTRICT MUST DEVELOP CLEAR OPERATIONAL STANDARDS FOR DETERMINING WHEN PARAPROFESSIONAL SUPPORT IS NEEDED FOR A STUDENT WITH DISABILITIES AND WHEN MORE STUDENT INDEPENDENCE CAN BE FOSTERED.
- REVIEW PARAPROFESSIONAL NEED IN CLASSROOMS THAT HAVE AN EXISTING LARGE PROPORTION OF ADULTS TO STUDENTS SUPPORT. OVERUSE OF 1:1 PARAPROFESSIONALS CAN STYMIE EFFORTS TO BUILD STUDENT INDEPENDENCE AND MOVEMENT ON THE LRE CONTINUUM. [BASED ON STUDENT NEEDS]
- WHEN PARAPROFESSIONAL SUPPORT IS NO LONGER NEEDED THERE SHOULD BE A SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND MECHANISM FOR TRANSFERRING THE SUPPORT TO AN AREA OF GREATER NEED.



- **SCHOOL SCHEDULING SUPPORT SHOULD BE PROVIDED AT THE BUILDING LEVEL TO AID WITH THE EFFICIENT USE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS AND CERTIFIED IN-CLASS SUPPORT SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS. THE WAY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE SCHEDULED AT THE SCHOOL INFLUENCES THE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE USE OF STAFFING RESOURCES AND THE QUALITY OF SERVICES RECEIVED BY STUDENTS.**
- **IN SOME CASES, PARAPROFESSIONALS ARE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE DIRECT ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION AND/OR BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS THAT ARE QUITE COMPLEX, YET THEY ARE NOT SPECIALISTS IN THOSE AREAS. USING PARAPROFESSIONALS FOR TASKS IN WHICH THEY ARE NOT WELL PREPARED CAN REDUCE STUDENT INDEPENDENCE AND PROGRESS TOWARD THE LRE.**



# STAKEHOLDER EDUCATION

- COLLABORATE WITH THE SEPAC TO CREATE A NEW AND IMPROVED SPECIAL EDUCATION ACADEMY TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION AND DEMYSTIFY THE PROCESS AND PROCEDURES.
- DISSEMINATING INFORMATION WILL REDUCE THE CULTURE OF MISTRUST THAT EXISTS IN SOME CASES AND REDUCE ADVERSARIAL FEELINGS THAT CURRENTLY EXIST. QUERY PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS ON TOPICS.



- **CREATE AN INFORMATION KIT FOR PARENTS NEW TO SPECIAL EDUCATION. INCLUDE THINGS LIKE A DIGITAL POST CARD WITH THE STEPS AND TIMELINES FOR THE PROCESS, LINKS TO THE *DIRECTORY OF SERVICES*, CHAIN OF COMMAND, AND FAQ, AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE PARENT HAS THE RIGHT TO EXPLORE SUPPORTS NECESSARY FOR LRE.**
- **CREATE AN FAQ DOCUMENT FROM THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS HAVE AND ATTACH IT TO THE *DIRECTORY OF SERVICES* OR CHAIN OF COMMAND DOCUMENTS.**



# DYSLEXIA

- THERE NEEDS TO BE A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO DYSLEXIA IDENTIFICATION, INSTRUCTION, AND TIERED SUPPORTS THAT ARE AVAILABLE IN EVERY SCHOOL.
- ESTABLISH A STANDARDIZED SYSTEM OF DYSLEXIA SCREENING ACROSS THE DISTRICT IN WHICH STAFF ARE TRAINED, PROVIDED THE RESOURCES, AND HELD ACCOUNTABLE TO USE THE SYSTEM.
- THE SCREENING TOOL SHOULD BE A RECOGNIZED TOOL FOR SCREENING DYSLEXIA AND TEACHERS NEED TO BE SUPPORTED WITH ITS IMPLEMENTATION AND INTERPRETATION.



- **THE CHALLENGES STUDENTS FACE BECAUSE OF DYSLEXIA MUST FIRST BE ADDRESSED IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM. WAITING FOR A SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSIFICATION TO ADDRESS WHAT IS, IN SOME INSTANCES, A GENERAL EDUCATION ISSUE, IS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE AND CAUSES YEARS OF WASTED TIME FOR STUDENTS.**
- **THERE IS A LACK OF CONTINUITY OF INTERVENTIONS FOR DYSLEXIA ACROSS THE DISTRICT AND A LACK OF FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THOSE INTERVENTIONS DUE TO DIFFERENCES IN RESOURCES AND LACK OF TRAINED STAFF. [STARTING TO ADDRESS THIS]**
- **STAFF NEED TO BE SUPPORTED TO ADDRESS DYSLEXIA AND THE OUTCOMES NEED TO BE MONITORED.**



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **TEACHERS WOULD WELCOME TARGETED AND DIFFERENTIATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT ALLOWS THEM TO COLLABORATE (SPECIAL EDUCATION AND GENERAL EDUCATION) ON ISSUES THAT THEY FACE.**
- **THE DISTRICT SHOULD INVESTIGATE A DIFFERENTIATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL THAT BALANCES DISTRICT REQUIREMENTS WITH TEACHER NEEDS. THIS CAN BE DONE THROUGH A MIX OF VIRTUAL AND FACE-TO-FACE VENUES.**



# CHANGE TAKES TIME

- MULTI-YEAR INITIATIVE
- OUTLINE THREE-YEAR PLAN — JUST ONE SET OF IDEAS
- BE CONSISTENT AND SYSTEMIC
- CHILDREN FIRST