PUBLIC SCHOOLS of BROOKLINE

Report on Special Education Program Review Part I
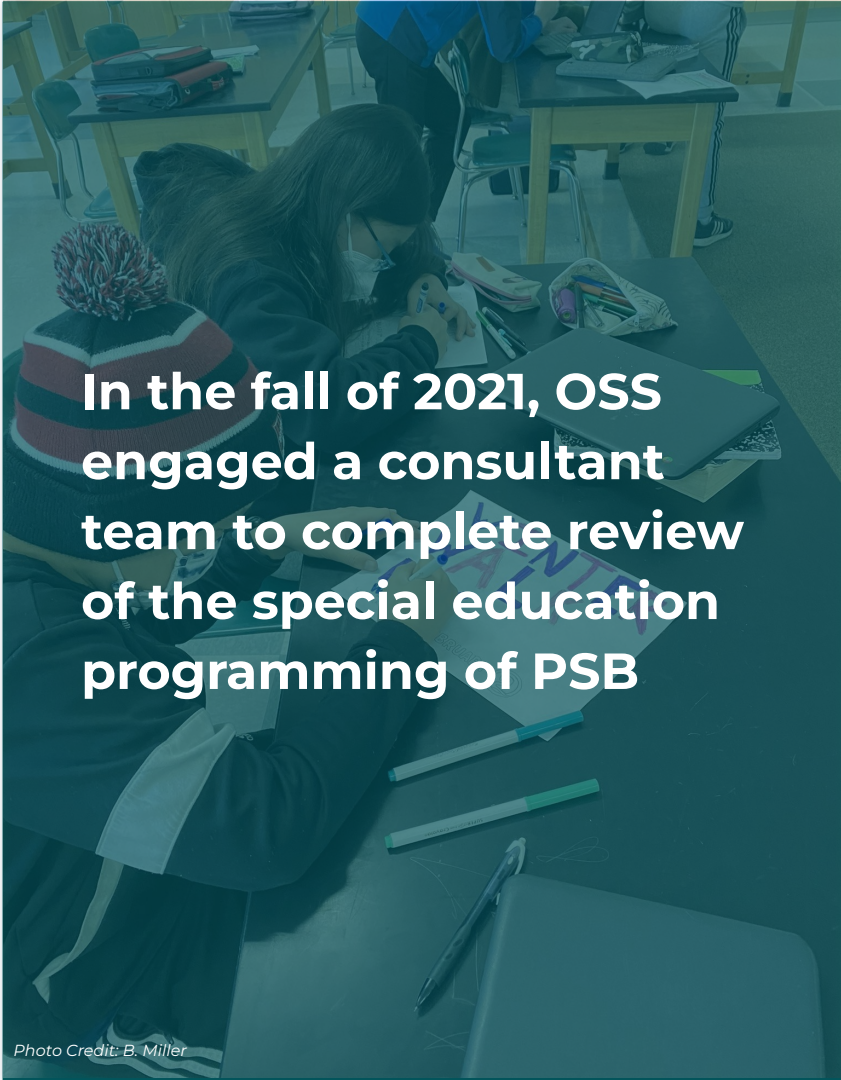
March 24, 2022

Agenda

I. Purpose of Program Review

II. Report Findings

III. Recommendations

In the fall of 2021, OSS engaged a consultant team to complete review of the special education programming of PSB

The purpose of the review was to identify key areas related to special education structures and services that are working well and areas that may require further analysis and strategic planning.

Guiding Questions

I. To what extent do all students have equal access to both general and special education programming?

II. What is the experience of families as they enter and engage in the IEP process and collaborate with school staff?

III. To what extent does the current SE administrative organizational structure support programming and supports?

Process

Interviews

Central Admin & Principals

General Educators

Special Educators

Guidance and Counseling

Parent/Caretakers focus groups

Data Analysis

Publicly available data

Brookline specific data*

- Census data, October 2021

- Initial Evaluation

- OOD placement

- Rejected IEP

- Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and Problem Resolution System (PRS)

*Redacted

Surveys

Parents/Caretakers of students with IEPs

Professional Special Education staff

General Education Staff

Special Education Paraprofessionals

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Equitable Access

General Education

- Majority stakeholders commented:
    - Special education and general education are siloed

- Majority educators surveyed expressed support for general educators to provide tiered supports but also found efficacy of tiered support process varied from school to school

- Initial evaluations yield finding of no eligibility approx. 30% of the time

- Variables affecting no eligibility rate include the following:

    - Robust general education supports

    - Clear eligibility procedures

    - Parent confidence in system

Equitable Access

- Eligibility data varies in part due to presence of programs in selected schools but the variation may also be related to available general education supports in each school

In PSB, it may be that attending to robust general education supports and clear eligibility procedures will increase level of parent confidence and lead to lower rate of both referral for evaluation and findings of no eligibility for special education.

Equitable Access

- Eligibility predictability

    - Black/African-American students are **twice as likely** to be found eligible for special education

    - Latinx/Hispanic students almost **twice as likely**

    - Asian-American/Pacific Islander students **half as likely**

    - Students of lower Socioeconomic Status (SES) are **twice as likely**

- Developing and improving robust general education supports is current focus of the administration and deserves both continued attention and strong support.
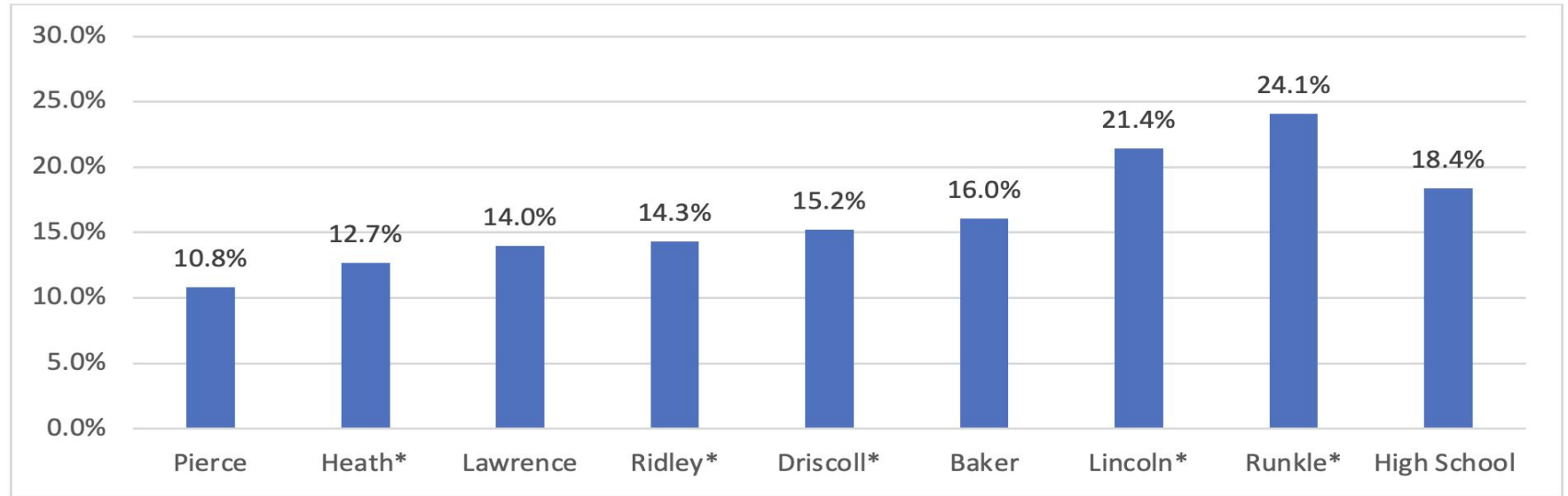
Equitable Access

- As students in special education progress through the grades, they seem to be placed in **more restrictive** environments (e.g., learning center)

- Most of the students going OOD do so during the middle school grades (6th-8th).

- PSB has the **lowest** percentage of students placed OOD compared to similar communities.

Placement Patterns by School

Table D: Percent of Students Eligible for Special Education by School: October 1, 2021
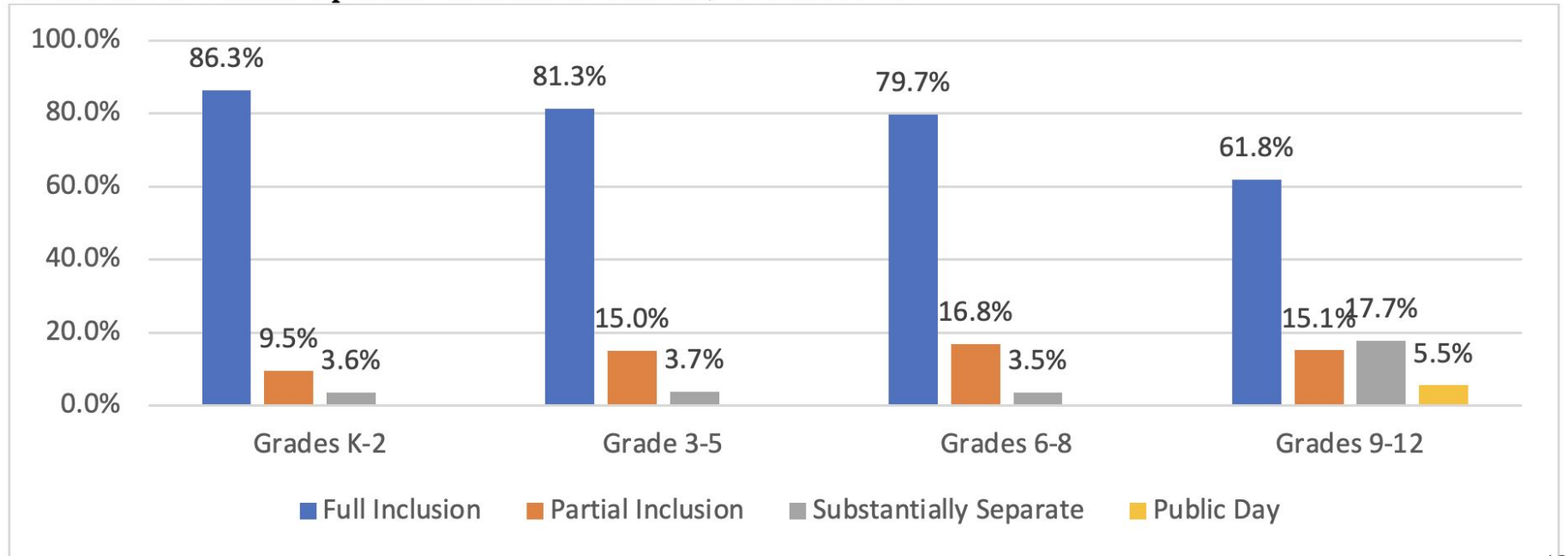Source: MA DESE School Profiles

*These schools have district-wide programs.

Placement Patterns by Grade

Table H: Within District Placement Patterns by Grade
Source: Brookline Special Education Census, October 2021*

This data represents a moment in time. These numbers will vary slightly over the course of the year.

Grade Level at Time of Out of District (OOD) Placement

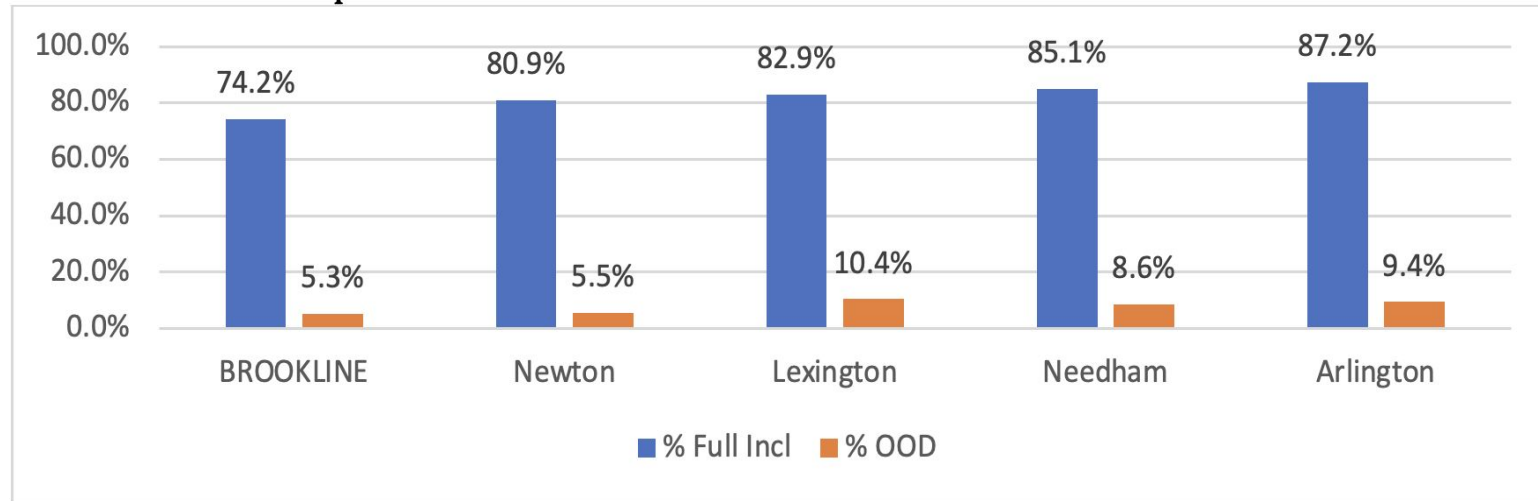**Table I: Out of District Data: Grade Level and Disability at Time of Placement for Current OOD Students**

Source: Brookline Special Education Census Data, October 2021

	ASD	Emot	Intell	Health	Neuro	Multi	SLD	Comm	Total
PK	2		1			1			4
Grades K-4	6	3	2	2	1	1	1		16
Grades 5-8	**9**	**8**	**2**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**		**27**
Grades 9-12+		5	3	1		1		1	11
Move In		1							1
Total	*17*	*17*	*8*	*5*	*4*	*4*	*3*	*1*	*59*

Full Inclusion and OOD - Comparables

Table B: SY21: Percent of Students with Disabilities (SWD's) in Full Inclusion and Out of District Placements
Source: MA DESE Special Education RADAR: SY21

Note: The most current state target for full inclusion is 61.5% and for OOD is 5.4%

Equitable Access

- PSB performs comparably to similar communities and well above the state average:

    - Eligibility rate for special education

    - Inclusive and within-district placement patterns for SWDs

    - Performance on Grade 10 MCAS

While this review has identified areas for further investigation and improvement, it is clear that most students with special needs in Brookline continue to grow and progress because of the ongoing attention of skillful and dedicated staff and effective programs

Guiding Questions

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Photo Credit: J. Yadoff

Parent/Caregiver Engagement

Both parents and school staff characterize Brookline as a district with highly engaged parents

In both surveys and focus groups, parents/caregivers cited dedication of individual teachers and several programs, including BEEP as strengths

- **72%** of parents/caregivers characterized their role in IEP meetings and nature of communication between home and school as positive

- **49%** felt communication about progress was frequent enough to be helpful

- **55%** of parents/caregivers surveyed were satisfied with quantity of services

Educational Team Facilitators (ETFs) are typically parents/caregivers' go-to person

Parent/Caregiver Engagement

ETFs are holders of information specific to special education programming and staffing.

- Outside of the IEP process/meeting, changes to programming and staffing require administrative follow up, which take time and collaboration with Principals and Directors.

Parents/caregivers described Directors as gatekeepers, and expressed concern that their presence at IEP meetings might change nature of conversation.

Given sense of lack of transparency and responsiveness of system, some parents have sought other means to understand rights either through advocates or formal complaints.

- Between 2017-2021, PSB received 33 cases filed with Problem Resolution System (PRS).

Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA) indicates over 3 years, 27% of IEPs were fully or partially rejected (state average 6.5%).
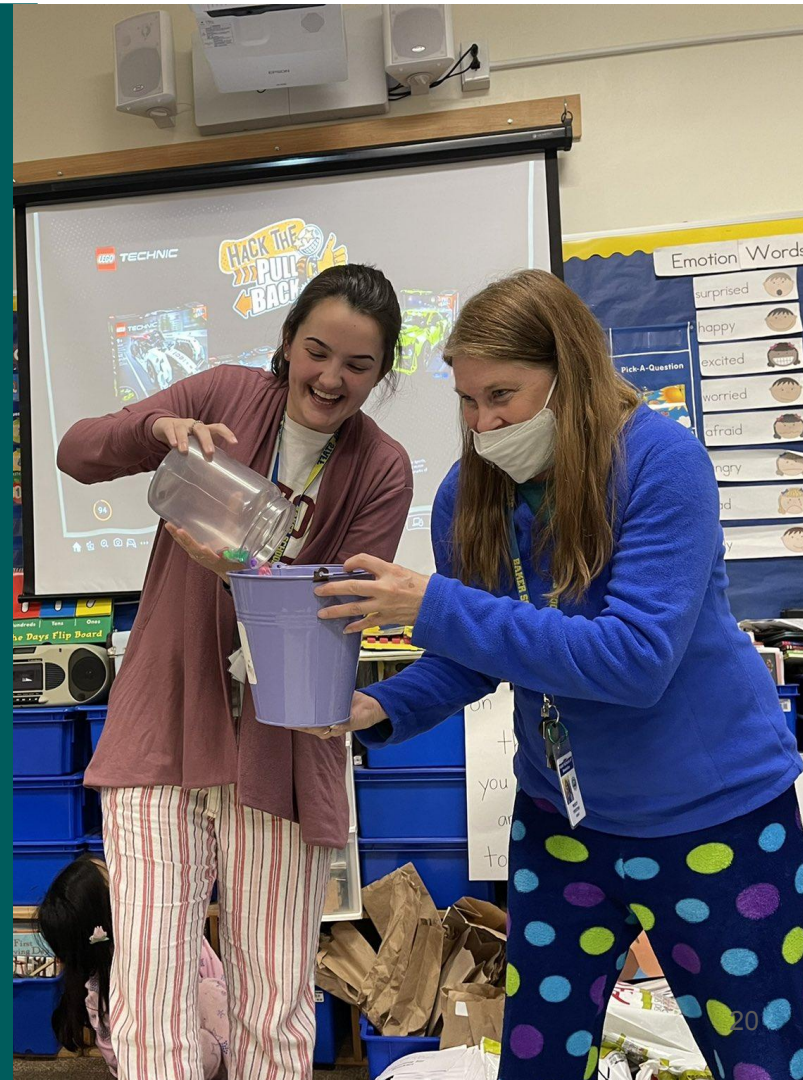
Parent/Caregiver Engagement

- Data reviewed represents an unusually high number of formal actions

- While this data points to a need to address areas of non-compliance, it is more important to consider underlying reasons for parents' choosing to use formal means to express concerns

It is the opinion of the reviewers that the current administrative structure is a significant contributor to parent distrust. Having a greater presence at the building level would provide support for parent concerns to be managed proactively; greater ease of communication to support higher level trust and provide greater transparency in decision making; and promote a higher level of consistent procedural compliance

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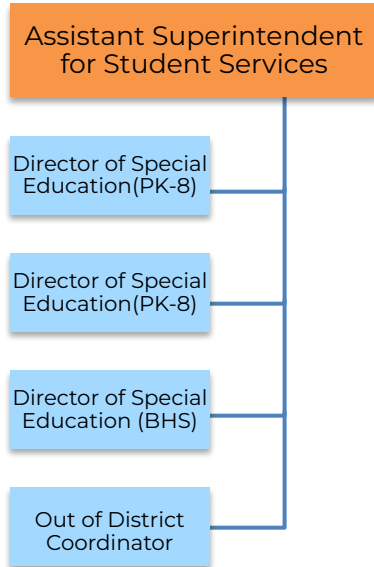
Current Administrative Structure of Special Education Department - Identified Needs
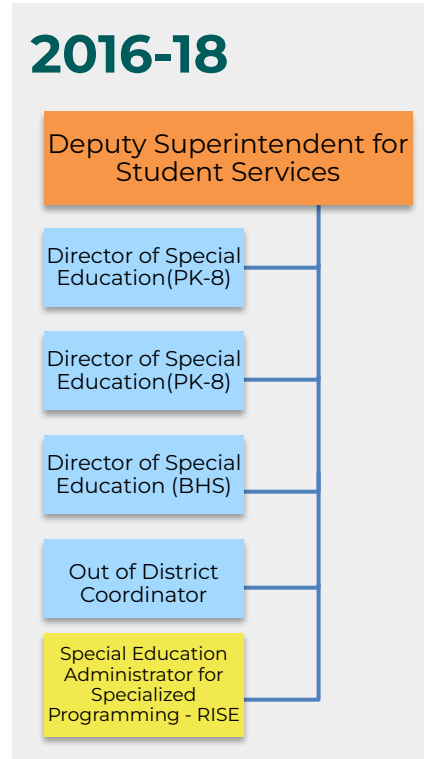
- Transparency in communication and decision-making between building level and central office administration due in part to broad scope of job for 3 Directors of Special Education

- Building-based Special Education administrative presence

- For parents/caregivers:

    - Better understanding of the IEP process as a whole

    - More consistent, evidence-based approach to early literacy across district

    - More supports for students with emotional and behavioral needs

- Improved general education tiered system of support

- Current focus on equity and inclusion does not seem to include students with disabilities

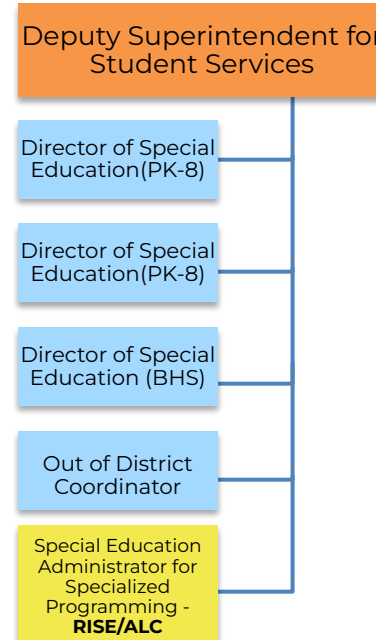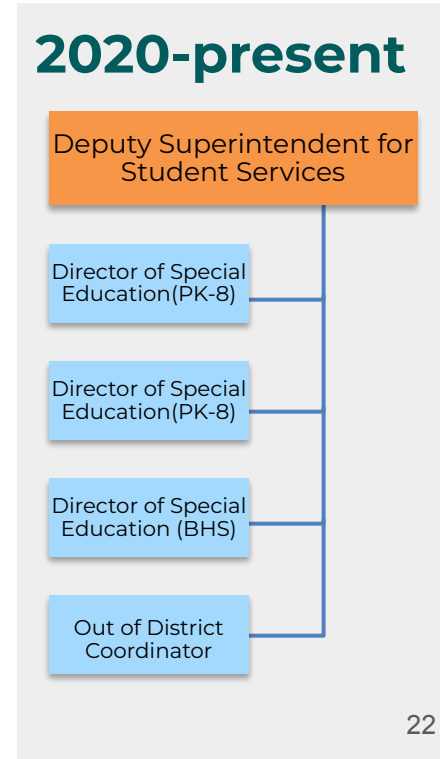# Historical: Administrative Structure of Special Education since SY2015

2015

Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

- Director of Special Education(PK-8)
- Director of Special Education(PK-8)
- Director of Special Education (BHS)
- Out of District Coordinator

2016-18

Deputy Superintendent for Student Services

- Director of Special Education(PK-8)
- Director of Special Education(PK-8)
- Director of Special Education (BHS)
- Out of District Coordinator
- Special Education Administrator for Specialized Programming - RISE

2019

Deputy Superintendent for Student Services

- Director of Special Education(PK-8)
- Director of Special Education(PK-8)
- Director of Special Education (BHS)
- Out of District Coordinator
- Special Education Administrator for Specialized Programming - **RISE/ALC**

2020-present

Deputy Superintendent for Student Services

- Director of Special Education(PK-8)
- Director of Special Education(PK-8)
- Director of Special Education (BHS)
- Out of District Coordinator

22

Historical: PSB Special Education Enrollment since SY2015

School Year*	% of PSB	# of PSB
2015-16	16%	1189
2016-17	15%	1177
2017-18	16%	1209
2018-19	16%	1241
2019-20	16%	1268
2020-21	17%	1171
2021-22 (Current)	17.5%	1212

*All data taken from DESE School and District Profile during October 1 of every school year.

Administrative Structure*

Collaborative Leadership

Supports robust general and special education relationships and inclusive practice

Administrative Leadership

Supports well-resourced and responsive programming

Instructional Leadership

Supports effective supervision and ongoing professional learning

Technical Leadership

Supports compliance with laws and regulations

Based on survey and interview responses, the current administrative model faces some challenges in each of these areas, despite the presence of talented individuals in the current roles

Collaborative Leadership

- Need for shared vision and model what special and general education collaboration looks like

- Effective collaboration between principals and special education administrators to model and support shared ownership of at-risk learners is needed

- Lack of district-wide expectations

  - Eligibility for special education
  - District-wide programs - entrance and exit criteria
  - General education system of tiered supports
  - Implementation of literacy supports for at-risk readers

Instructional Leadership

- Opportunities for effective professional learning for special educators in surveys and interviews

- In surveys, general educators expressed need for more professional learning related to at-risk learners

- All stakeholders identified need for more support for paraprofessional staff, both in training and in supervision

- Need for consistent onboarding and training for new Special Education staff

Technical Leadership

- District was found to be in compliance in recent Tiered Focus Monitoring Review by DESE, completed in Spring 2020.

- Number of complaints to Problem Resolution System (PRS) and the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) concerning specific situations of non-compliance which required corrective action.

    - Each complaint requires the time and attention of administration to investigate and prepare an action plan, if required, and sometimes more meetings to resolve the areas of disagreement.

Technical Leadership

- Complementary review - "Self-Assessment" to TFM occurs this year

- Significant Disproportionality - required activities from DESE

- Needs Assistance (NA) determination from DESE

  - Annual determination

    - Graduation and dropout rates

    - Public school monitoring compliance findings

    - **PRS findings**

    - Federal compliance indicators

    - **Significant disproportionality**

Administrative Leadership

- It is the opinion of the reviewers that the current administrative model of 2 Directors of Special Education responsible for PK-8 is not sufficient to provide adequate building-based special education administrative presence.

- Building-based staff are appreciative of the expertise of district administrators but feel that their limited availability has resulted in a sense that the communication between them and central administration is not timely and decision-making is either not transparent or top-down.

Reviewer Recommendations

Photo Credit: L. Anderson

Reviewer Recommendations

1. Review various models for increasing special education administrative support for PK-8 and develop strategic plan to increase level of support using a model that fits structure and culture of PSB

2. Engage with general education administrators to review supports for at-risk students

3. Review and develop consistent, district-wide special education procedures related to eligibility process, placement in district-wide programs, including clear entry and exit criteria and a referral process for these programs

Reviewer Recommendations

4. **Review need for more programming at the middle school level for students with specific disabilities and develop programs as appropriate**

5. **Engage in investigation of change placement patterns through grade levels to determine if further action is needed**

6. **Engage parents in proactive efforts to understand the special education process and current programs and services through both school-based and SEPAC information sessions and improved web-based information sharing**

District Next Steps

Review and Deep Dive

- Senior Staff - OTL, OEE

- Special Education Directors & Principals

Staff and Community Engagement

Prioritize Work

- Remainder of school year

- SY2022-2023

For the Taxi Cabs that Pass Me in Harvard Square
by Clint Smith

When the first cab passes you,

    wonder if you've been rendered

    an autumn tree, derelict

    monument amid the white noise

    of Massachusetts Ave.

When the second cab passes you,

    pull off your hood & hat

    even though the ice is fresh.

    You don't want to be mistaken

    for a shadow, a threat.

When the third cab passes you,

    pull out your Ivy League ID,

    & wave it in your hand

    like the curb was a desert island.

When the fourth cab passes you,

    think of 5th grade. Mrs. Capperson holding

    all the boys in for recess to tell us if we don't

    get tattoos, grow out our hair, pierce our ears,

    Or sag our pants everything will be all right.

For the Taxi Cabs that Pass Me in Harvard Square
by Clint Smith

When the fifth cab passes you,

    know everything is not all right.

When the sixth cab passes you,

    imagine yourself a puddle

    existing as both transparency

    & filth. Something that won't be there

    by the afternoon.

When the seventh cab passes you,

    remember how Grandma said this is how

    long it took the Good Lord to build

    the world.

Thank You