



Walker Consulting at the Walker Trieschman Institute

Georgetown Public Schools
Program Evaluation of Services and Settings for
Students with Disabilities

EVALUATION REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Georgetown Public Schools Director of Student Services requested an evaluation of the special education programming across the District, including Pre-K, elementary, middle and high school. The purpose of the evaluation is to clarify the current status of the special education programming, contribute to planning for improvements in the services, and provide advice regarding future development of services and programs. Walker Consulting collected quantitative and qualitative data, examining the five focus areas formulated in collaboration with the District.

Walker Consulting completed this program evaluation over a period of three months and the findings and perspectives are detailed in this report and summarized here.

The District's move toward more inclusion has been quite positive from the perspectives of both staff and parents. Teachers cited challenges such as scheduling and inconsistency in staffing which may impact the ability of students with disabilities to access to the general education curriculum. Writing is another area of weakness and there is lack of clarity around what writing program is being used. The District can continue to improve in the area of data collection and review of data for students with disabilities. This is happening in some places but not across the district consistently. More professional development and thoughtful planning about what inclusion should look like will address these challenges and improve student outcomes.

Staffing of special education and related services in Georgetown is within typical ranges for similarly-situated districts. The stated concerns of parents in Georgetown reflect the concerns of parents in most public school districts. Staff turn-over, shortages of highly-qualified staff in some areas at some levels, and class and caseload size are all common parent concerns that are often shared by administrators and staff. These parents have identified two strategies for maintaining student progress and proficiency in the face of these challenges: 1) more specialized training for current staff, and 2) more on-going support for current staff. Staff similarly identified the current staffing structures as a challenge and cited the largest issue being the lack of consistency with how paraprofessionals are placed and the lack of common planning time with paraprofessionals. Observations suggested that the autism programs are exceptionally well staffed with special educators and highly trained paraprofessionals. The use of paraprofessionals in other settings was not observed to be highly effective or efficient.

In Georgetown, there are two challenges that affect student progress and proficiency as they move through the grade levels: articulation and alignment. Challenges in the area of articulation relate to the lack of clarity concerning the programming at the preschool, elementary, middle and high school levels, and to the weaknesses in structures and processes connecting the levels. Challenges in the area of alignment relate to the appropriateness of similarities and differences in programming for a student with disabilities as he/she moves through the levels, and the continuity of content and approaches utilized in instruction and services across the levels.

Special education administrators and staff work diligently to collaborate and engage with the parents of students with disabilities. There are many methods of communication in place across all levels and parents generally praised the timely and effective communication they received from special educators in the District. The collaboration and communication by general educators was not perceived as positively. Generally, school administrators and staff seem to recognize the importance of engaging parents actively in the special education process and in the larger educational processes of the schools. Such efforts appear to be effective with some parents and not effective with others.

Academic services in Georgetown are comparable to other similarly situated districts and of high quality. Parent feedback suggested that general education teachers at every level require more specialized training in working with students with disabilities and professional development in understanding disability.

The District has had an increased focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for the past few years and is continuing to expand its curriculum and practices in this area. There has been considerable professional development offered to staff in the area of SEL. The District's work this area is appropriate given that more students than in previous years are noted to have anxiety, attentional issues, and other social/emotional challenges. District administration would like to take a district-wide inventory on what is being done for SEL and develop a common philosophy and understanding of what is being done across the District. There are things happening at all levels but there is no clear alignment.

In the evaluation report, the detailed findings and specific related recommendations are organized in the report in alignment with the five focus areas. The recommendations are compiled and presented at the end of this report.

Introduction

Purpose of Evaluation

The Director of Student Services at Georgetown Public Schools engaged with Walker Consulting to conduct a review of the District's programming and services for students with special needs. Specifically, the goal was to identify what key stakeholders (families, staff, and administration) believe is currently working well, and what services can be improved upon.

Walker Consulting

The mission of Walker Inc. is to transform the lives of children and youth who are facing complex emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges by partnering with these children and youth, their families, and communities to nurture hope, build strengths, and develop lifelong skills. The Walker Trieschman Institute is committed to improving outcomes for children and adolescents with disabilities by supporting the effectiveness and efficiency of services and settings in schools and other child-serving organizations. Walker Consulting offers a portfolio of services that includes development of organizations, services and settings, leadership and management, and staff capability. Walker Consultants have conducted service and program evaluations in general education and special education school settings, in a wide variety of communities across the country. In the present evaluation, the Consultants planned the content, structure, and process collaboratively with the District, carried out data collection and analysis, and developed the report.

Methodology

The data for analysis in this evaluation includes both quantitative and qualitative data collected through document review and analysis; interviews with staff, administrators, and parents; observations of classes and other activities in the schools, and a parent survey. Walker Consulting developed and utilized the formats for this evaluation, including data and document requests, interview guides and observation frameworks. The timeframe for the evaluation spanned from October to December 2018. The initial project planning and development took place in mid-late October and consisted of internal planning meetings with Walker Consultants, phone conversations and ongoing email communications with Jack Tiano, Georgetown Director of Student Services, to identify the focus areas of the program evaluation. The Walker Consultant spent two full days in Georgetown Public Schools on Thursday, November 15th and Monday, November 19th. A Parent Survey was developed and sent out to families

The program evaluation consisted of data collection, review, and analysis, interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and a parent survey. Prior to and subsequent to the on-site days, the District provided Walker with the following documents to review:

1. Georgetown Administration List
2. Special Education Directory of staff
3. District Program Staff Members list
4. Program descriptions (Autism and SEL)
5. Powerpoint presentation to School Committee on Inclusion (Spring 2018)
6. Professional Development Agendas between 2016-2018
7. Description of Enhancement and Enrichment
8. Individualized Education Programs (redacted)

The Walker Consultant spent two days in Georgetown meeting with administrators, staff and parents and observing classrooms. The first day consisted of a visit to the Perley School where interviews with the District's special education administrators (Jack Tiano, Kris Oldoni and Katelin Kennedy) took place as well as an observation of the Pre-K Autism (Greenhouse) program. The remainder of the first day was spent at Penn Brook Elementary School. At Penn Brook, this consultant met with a parent focus group and two focus groups of staff which included general education and special education teachers, instructional paraprofessionals, and other service providers. For purposes of this program evaluation, the term "other service providers" includes speech and language pathologists, adjustment counselors, school psychologists and BCBA's.

Quantitative data regarding schools, staff, and students were collected from the District by the Consultant. Document review, observations, and interviews were planned and implemented to address the specific areas of focus for the evaluation. Documents included both local materials and District profile data available on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Structured observations spanned every level pre-K to High School and included small group, general education, inclusion and substantially separate settings. Among the interviewees were central office and school administrators, and general and

special education teachers, counselors, and other support professionals. Additionally, two focus groups with parents were held.

Due to the fact that not all parents could participate in one of the focus groups, an online Parent Survey was developed. The survey included 10 questions centered around the focus areas of the program evaluation. The survey link was made available on the District's website and emailed out to families. There were 40 responses submitted. The link was available from December 6, 2018 through December 13, 2018. One limitation of the survey is that in order to maintain the confidentiality of survey participants, there was no mechanism in place to limit an individual's ability to complete the survey more than once. Nonetheless, it is viewed as another valuable data source.

The results of this program evaluation are organized around the areas of focus. Each substantive section includes the Consultant's perspectives on the current status and recommendations relating to the focus areas and questions. The Consultant also identified issues for further investigation not treated completely in this evaluation that may expand the depth, breadth, clarity, and/or value of the findings contained in this report.

Focus of the Evaluation

The Special Education Administrators in the Georgetown Public Schools, in collaboration with Walker Consulting, identified five areas of focus for the program evaluation. These areas form the specific Focus of the Evaluation:

1. Access to Grade Level Curriculum by Students with Disabilities
2. Effectiveness and Efficiency of Staffing
3. K-12 Program Alignment
4. Collaboration between Special Education Staff and Parents
5. Academic, Social/Emotional and Behavioral Support

Findings and Recommendations

For each Focus Area, the Findings and Recommendations are organized as follows:

- Critical Questions
- Current Status
- Consultants' Perspectives
- Recommendations for Improvement

Focus Area #1: Access to Grade Level Curriculum by Students with Disabilities

Critical Question

Are students with disabilities at Georgetown Public Schools given full access to grade level curriculum through the continuum of services offered, which include related services, inclusive services, small group instruction, and District programs?

Current Status

The general feedback from administration and staff on this question was that the District is moving in the right direction with regard to this focus area. This question led to conversations about the following topics: the District's move toward inclusion, differentiation of instruction, progress monitoring, MCAS, scheduling, and writing as a particular area of challenge for the District.

Curriculum discussed during interviews or observed in classrooms included Everyday Math, Number Worlds, Math in Focus, Big Ideas Math (middle - HS), Keys to Literacy, Foundations, Second Step, and Edmark. Writing was mentioned as an area where students with disabilities are not doing well. It was suggested this was in part because there is no consistent writing program being used across the District. It was noted by one staff member that that students make more progress in writing with push-in services in the general education classroom and that the ideal would be to have a special educator in the classroom for writing every day. One staff focus group suggested it would be helpful to streamline graphic organizers across the district and clear guidelines on what approaches to use for different types of writing.

Inclusion

By and large, staff at all levels reported that the District's move toward inclusion has resulted in more students with disabilities having access to grade level curriculum. At the middle and high school, staff believe that having students included in the general education classroom, rather than pulled out for small group, has improved providing students with IEPs access to the grade level curriculum because now all students are taught using the same curriculum, with individualized support, accommodations and modifications. Some staff reported that small group was less effective because there was no clear curriculum and student groupings were not always well planned. Feedback was given that the move to inclusion has been great but the question did arise whether it was done in a planful, thoughtful way. Staff suggested they would like more training and discussion about what effective inclusion looks like. More clarification appears to be needed on the roles and requirements of the special education teacher pushing into the general education classroom and what this should look like. As it stands currently, staff are figuring it out as they go and believe it is coming together somewhat organically. There are, however, missed opportunities when general education teachers do not know when the special education teacher will be present in class. This is not as helpful to the classroom teacher as it

could be. Another challenge at the upper levels is if the special educator is not specifically trained in the content area.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Director of Curriculum and Instruction highlighted the District's efforts to select curricula that meets the needs of all students. At the Elementary level, a new science curriculum is in place and it specifically provides extra supports for diverse learning needs. There is also a guided reading model at the Elementary level which includes teaching students in small groups using targeted interventions.

At the Middle/High School level, the NEASC accreditation process, most recently completed in 2018, has resulted in unit plans for every course having accommodations and interventions built in. The area cited by staff for continued growth is progress monitoring data for all students. The goal is to build a data dashboard and then use the results to see tangible results. Structures are currently in place, particularly at the elementary level to allow conversations about the data and how it can inform teaching and learning. Currently, data points are used to place students, looking at students' strengths and struggles.

A review of the District's professional development agendas from the 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and the current school years indicate that a broad range of topics have been covered in professional development sessions at every level. During the 2016-2017 school year, there was an large emphasis on providing ABA training for paraprofessionals. In the 2017-2018 school year the District rolled out PBIS and Second Step. Other topics have included: social skills curriculum development, CPI training, Keys to Literacy workshop, the Role of the SLP, Sensory Motor Development, Setting Fine Motor Goals, Case Management training, Foundations, and SEL workshops on topics such as student resilience, empathy and brain development, asset building and student relationships, teen depression, and how to increase awareness about mental health issues. In addition to this professional development, Landmark was brought in to do training on teaching students with language-based learning disabilities.

Differentiation

Staff interviews at all levels suggested that differentiated instruction is an area for improvement. One comment was that instruction needs to be more student-centered and that staff would benefit from professional development on what differentiated instruction looks like.

Progress Monitoring

It was reported that, at the elementary level, there are established processes in place for review of data and progress monitoring. Specifically there are data meetings every month for both ELA and Math, including data review for students with IEPs. According to administration, there are no such data meetings at the Middle/High School currently but they would like to adopt the model being used at the elementary level.

Scheduling

When asked about students with disabilities having access to grade level curriculum, scheduling was mentioned as a possible barrier to access. Specifically, scheduling was cited as an ongoing challenge in two regards. First, students may miss content area instruction to receive services outside of the general education classroom. The second scheduling challenge mentioned on multiple occasions by staff was the lack of consistency in staffing. Staff indicated that this lack of consistency results when instructional paras are pulled or moved in response to student needs or staffing shortages on a particular day.

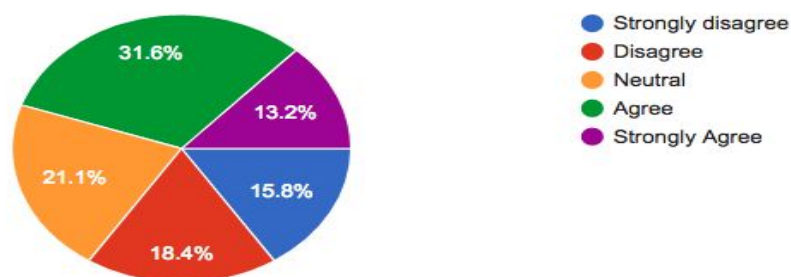
MCAS

The MCAS was mentioned by staff and parents as one data point to gauge how students with disabilities are accessing the curriculum. The District's results from the 2018 Next Generation MCAS are available online at MA DESE School and District Profiles, under the Assessment tab. The link is provided in the Data section at the end of this report. Staff reported that they meet regularly to review MCAS data to target areas of student need and to plan interventions for students. The Middle School indicated that they developed a strategic action plan to bring MCAS scores up. Staff would like to increase student's endurance with the exam as results have suggested that they start of strong but lose stamina as the test goes on. A few parents shared their concerns that their child may not pass MCAS however it was noted by administration that in recent years, all students have passed MCAS and graduated with a diploma, with the exception of students who participate in the MCAS-Alt.

Parent Survey Results on Focus Area #1

Students with disabilities are provided with full access to grade level curriculum.

38 responses



These results indicate that nearly half of parents (44.8%) who responded to the survey feel that students with disabilities are provided with full access to grade level curriculum. Another more than 20% were neutral. Just over one third of parents (34.2%) responded that they disagree or strongly disagree that students with disabilities are provided with full access to grade level curriculum.

Consultants' Perspectives

The District's move toward more inclusion has been generally positive. More professional development and thoughtful planning about what inclusion should look like to improve student outcomes is needed. Scheduling and inconsistency in staffing present the greatest challenges to teachers and may impact the ability of students with disabilities to access to the general education curriculum. Writing is an area of weakness and there is lack of clarity around what writing program is being used. Data collection and review of data for students with disabilities is happening at the Elementary level but is not solidly in place at the middle and high schools yet.

Recommendations for Improvement in Access to Grade Level Curriculum by Students with Disabilities

The District should provide professional development, supervision, and support for all instructional staff regarding:

- Approaches to differentiation of instruction at the various developmental levels and grade levels
- Universal Design for Learning
- Approaches to individualization, strategic grouping of students, managing learning experiences for diverse groups of learners
- Co-teaching strategies and inclusion collaboration
- Curriculum development in writing

The District should arrange and support consultation between with Elementary teachers and administrators and their counterparts at the secondary level on how data collection, monitoring, analysis, and utilization is working in the elementary schools and the development of similar approaches in the middle and high schools.

Focus Area #2: Effectiveness and Efficiency of Staffing

Critical Question

Are the staffing patterns at Georgetown Public Schools efficient and effective in assuring that the various needs of all students are met?

Current Status

The Special Education staffing in the District is as follows:

- Administration:
 - Director
 - 2 Special Education Coordinators
- District-Wide
 - 1.5 Physical Therapist
 - 1.0 School Psychologist
- Perley:
 - Teacher/Director,
 - Greenhouse Teacher
 - 3 Paraprofessionals
 - 1 Speech Pathologist
 - 1 Nurse (0.5)
- Penn Brook:
 - 8 Special Education Teachers
 - 15 Instructional Paraprofessionals
 - 1 BCBA, 2 Speech Pathologists, 1.0 COTA
 - 1.5 School Adjustment Counselors
 - 1.5 Nurse
- GMHS -School-wide
 - Social Worker
 - Cognitive Behavioral Therapist
 - Speech Pathologist
 - BCBA
 - Nurse
- Middle School
 - 4 Special Education teachers
 - Tutor
 - 4 Instructional Paraprofessionals
- High School
 - 2 Special Education Teachers
 - Alt Room Teacher
 - Compass Teacher
 - Job Coach

- 7 Instructional Paraprofessionals

The current program staffing is as follows:

Program	Staff
Autism	
Greenhouse	1 teacher, 3 paraprofessionals, BCBA consulting to program
Sprouts K-3	1 teacher (BCBA), 5 ABA trained paraprofessionals and BCBA consulting to program
Compass 4-6	1 teacher, 1 paraprofessional, BCBA consulting to program
Compass - Middle	1 teacher, paraprofessional support as needed, 1:1 para, BCBA consulting to program
Compass - High School	1 teacher, 1 paraprofessional, job coach, BCBA consults to program
Social Emotional	
SEL -Elementary	1 teacher, 3 paraprofessionals, BCBA and School Adjustment Counselor consult to the program
SEL Middle	1 teacher, 1 paraprofessional, BCBA and Cognitive Behavior Therapist consult to program
High School Alt	1 teacher, 1 paraprofessional, BCBA and Cognitive Behavior Therapist consult to program

Staffing Data from Classroom Observations

Perley and Penn Brook Observations (November 15, 2018)

Class or Program	Staffing	# of Students	Student/Staff Ratio
PreK Greenhouse (observed class pushing into gen ed)	4 adults	14	14:4 (3.5:1)
Elementary Sprouts	1 teacher, 5 paraprofessionals, 1 BCBA	5	5:6
5th grade inclusion	1 gen ed teacher, 1 special education teacher	23	23:2 11.5:1
Elementary SEL	1 teacher	1	1:1

Staffing observed during Middle and High School Observations (November 19, 2018)

Class or Program	Staffing	# of Students	Student/Staff Ratio
Middle School Compass	1 teacher/1 paraprofessional	1	1:1
MS Inclusion	1 teacher/1 paraprofessional	19	19:2 or 9.5:1
MS Study Skills	1 teacher	5	5:1
HS Study Skills	1 teacher/1 paraprofessional	8	8:2 or 4:1
HS Inclusion	1 teacher/1 paraprofessional	16	16:2 or 8:1
HS Alt	1 teacher, therapist, 1 paraprofessional	3-5 (movement in and out of the class)	5:3
HS Compass	1 teacher, 1 paraprofessional, 1 job coach	1	1:3
HS Learning Skills	1 special education teacher, 1 paraprofessional	8	8:2 or 4:1

Pre-K and Elementary Observations

The Greenhouse PreK class was observed in the general education classroom having snack and then listening to a story. The staff in this setting operated collaboratively. It was clear that one of the staff was the lead teacher of the general education class and another staff member introduced herself as the teacher of the Greenhouse class. The two additional adults were paraprofessionals. Throughout the 30 minute observation, all 4 staff were busy and engaged with students. One paraprofessional was primarily focused on preparing materials and the three other adults helped the students with their snacks, prompted the students to use the bathroom,

modeled appropriate conversation, redirected attention or behaviors as needed, and collected data.

The paraprofessionals in the Sprouts program were all working on discrete trials in a 1:1 student:staff ratio. These paraprofessionals are trained in ABA and discrete trial training and collected data throughout the observation. At one point, the lead teacher and BCBA briefly consulted on the spot about how to address a particular student behavior.

The 5th grade inclusion setting was supported by a general education teacher and a special education teacher who appeared to work well together. The general education teacher led the lesson but the special educator walked around the room providing support to students. After delivery of the lesson to the whole class on the smart board. The general education teacher took a group of three students to one area of the room to work and the special educator had another four students working with her in a different area of the room. The other students were working in pairs or small groups on the assigned tasks.

The observation of the elementary SEL classroom included the classroom teacher and one student working on a Foundations lesson. There were no additional students in the room. The program's paraprofessional did come in and out of the room at one point. A behavior management plan was being implemented during the Foundations lesson with the student's on-task time being tracked and the student earning a break after accomplishing a certain amount of work.

Middle/High School Observations

In the middle school inclusion classroom, the paraprofessional came in late and it was later mentioned that the para was new to the classroom as of that day and had no familiarity with the class. In the high school inclusion classroom, it was not clear that a second adult was a paraprofessional as the staff member had no interactions with the students or the teacher and sat at a desk in a corner of the classroom.

The Middle School Study Skills classroom was facilitated by a special educator with 5 students in the classroom. This appeared to be a highly effective academic block. The teacher spent the time reviewing a concept that had previously been reviewed in the general education classroom and the level of student engagement was very high. The learning environment was excellent with great visuals, the daily schedule, agenda and objectives for the lesson posted. During the observation in the High School Study Skills, there were two staff members (teacher and paraprofessional) and 8 students in the room. In this setting, the two adults checked in with the students individually and helped them determine what they needed to be doing (taking a quiz, making up missed work, preparing for upcoming tests, etc.).

During the High School Learning Skills observation, there were 8 students in the room with a special education teacher and a paraprofessional. The second special education teacher was in and out of the room but then working in another space. This classroom was very organized with

each students expected work during the block posted on the board. Reminders, Expectations and Objectives were posted. The teacher spoke to the entire class and did individual reminders with each student and then spent a period of time meeting with one student individually to determine what work she needed to make up. The paraprofessional checked in with one student and reminded another that she had a vocabulary quiz to do. The paraprofessional travels in the classes with the students so she is aware of what they are doing in the general education classes.

During the observation in the High School Alt classroom, there was a special educator and 2 students in the main classroom. A few additional students were in the side room. A therapist came in and out of the room during the observation. A paraprofessional also entered the room but did not engage with any other staff or students but instead sat at a computer in the corner of the room.

In the Middle School Compass program, the paraprofessional brought the student into the classroom to start the day and the student spent the observed period working 1:1 with the special education teacher. There were no additional students in the room. During the observation period in the HS Compass program, the special education teacher and job coach were in the room and one student was in the classroom. The teacher and student worked 1:1 for the period of time observed and a paraprofessional entered the room and joined them at a table during a discussion on Of Mice and Men.

Perspectives from Interviews:

General education staff commented that there have been some great hires by the Student Services department resulting in highly skilled paraprofessional staff joining the District. A fairly high rate of turnover in paraprofessional staffing was also noted and the suggestion made to find out for those who leave, why they are leaving. The most common comment by staff was that there is a lack of consistency in staffing which creates challenges and is disruptive to teachers and students. Specifically noted was that paraprofessionals are frequently getting pulled to cover staffing shortages or address certain student needs. The approach was described as reactive as opposed to proactive. In the programs where the para support had been consistent (Elementary Sprouts and High School Learning Skills), it was felt that things were going well and the consistency was beneficial to both teachers and students alike.

The second most common theme raised by staff was the lack of common planning time for paraprofessionals and teachers. It was mentioned that common planning time with paraprofessionals occurs at the preschool level but nowhere else. It was conveyed that communication between teachers and paraprofessionals tends to be on the fly with very little time built in for consults. Both teachers and paraprofessionals cited this as a frustration and indicated that they felt it would be incredibly beneficial to have a more formal consultation process in place and that this would positively impact students.

Another challenge cited is the scheduling and grouping of students. Staff suggested that it sometimes felt that the students with the greatest needs were grouped in the same classes. This year the Student Services administrators handled all of the scheduling over the summer.

Parent Perspective on Focus Area #2

Parents shared concerns about the staffing available in the District to support students with disabilities. Specifically, kindergarten parents were concerned that the classroom does not have a full time paraprofessional. Parents questioned whether there was an appropriate level of staffing in the classroom considering students with IEPs and 504 plans. Another parent asked whether some related services staff had been reduced. Parents wondered about the use of paraprofessionals who may not be highly trained and are shuffled around the school building. One parent commented that if a paraprofessional is implementing an IEP, s/he should understand what the services are.

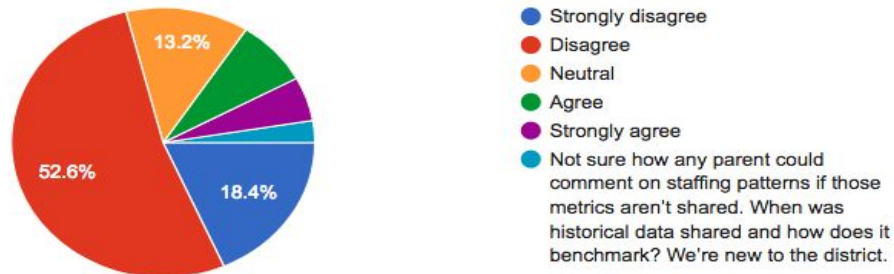
Some comments from the open ended questions (What is District doing well, what can the District improve upon and additional comments) from the Parent Survey are as follows:

- Special education staff has been greatly improved and is moving in a positive direction
- The staff turn over rate is concerning. Not having consistent highly qualified staff has hindered the service delivery of many students.
- Staff need to be offered more specialized training. Seems there is high turnover for specialists (i.e. speech pathologists, etc.). More should be done to retain highly specialized staff. Additional staff should be hired to keep up with the high demand for services (i.e. more BCBA's and Speech Pathologists). Start early screening for Dyslexia for all students.
- The District needs to provide better staff to student ratios especially in lower grades. It is not fair or acceptable for a classroom teacher to be expected to have 20+ students, no help (instructional assistant) and be expected to follow a student's IEP.
- Having more instructional paras available.
- The special education staff really cares about our children. They work really hard for them to succeed.
- Staff is hard working and dedicated to the kids.
- There are some talented teachers who do well with very little support.

Parent Survey Results on Focus Area #2

The staffing patterns at Georgetown Public Schools are meeting the needs of all students (consider special education, general education, paraprofessionals, etc.)

38 responses



This data illustrates that the majority of parents (71%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the assertion that the staffing patterns are meeting the needs of all students. Additional feedback provided during the focus groups and on the parent survey suggested that this is a major area of concern for parents.

Consultants' Perspectives

Staffing of special education and related services in Georgetown is within typical ranges for similarly-situated districts. The stated concerns of parents in Georgetown reflect the concerns of parents in most public school districts. Staff turn-over, shortages of highly-qualified staff in some areas at some levels, and class and caseload size are all common parent concerns that are often shared by administrators and staff. These parents have identified two strategies for maintaining student progress and proficiency in the face of these challenges: 1) more specialized training for current staff, and 2) more on-going support for current staff. Staff similarly identified the current staffing structures as a challenge and cited the largest issue being the lack of consistency with how paraprofessionals are placed and the lack of common planning time with paraprofessionals. Observations suggested that the autism programs are exceptionally well staffed with special educators and highly trained paraprofessionals. The use of paraprofessionals in other settings was not observed to be highly effective or efficient.

Recommendations for Improvement in Effectiveness and Efficiency of Staffing

The District should engage in an analysis of the level of turnover among professional and paraprofessional staff, the reasons for this turn-over, and identify the interventions that would most likely have a positive effect on reducing the turn-over.

The District should arrange for common planning time and specific transformational professional development for the staff - general education, special education, and related and support services - who are providing services to students with disabilities.

The District should develop and provide transformational professional development and support in co-teaching and other inclusive instructional practices. The focus of the professional development program should be on developing common research-based practices to foster common skills among staff and consistent implementation across staff and settings.

The District should explore opportunities to develop

- Interdisciplinary teams as a central feature of staff organization
- Multiple levels of organizational support for the teams - direct service, school leadership, and District policy
- Regular expert consultation to the teams in both the academic and social-emotional-behavioral domains

The District should pursue increasing the allocation of resources to staff providing social-emotional-behavioral interventions, supports, and services.

Focus Area #3: K-12 Program Alignment

Critical Question

Are the District programs at Georgetown Public Schools fully aligned K-12+, and are appropriate criteria in place to ensure appropriate services and supports for students?

Current Status

Currently, the Perley School serves preschool age students. Penn-Brook Elementary serves grades Kindergarten through Grade 6. The Georgetown Middle School includes Grades 7-8 and the High School is Grades 9-12. The middle school and high school are located in one building.

The two K-12 highly specialized programs in the District are for students with autism and students with emotional impairments (SEL). These were developed after an analysis of the greatest areas of need for students and the desire to create strong programming for students who may need substantially separate settings, as well as the opportunity to be included in the general education classroom as appropriate. The autism programming covers Pre-K to 12+ (Greenhouse, Sprouts, Compass). Previously there was a substantially separate program for students with learning disabilities but due to the small size of the District, there was not a cohort for this program. The District engaged Landmark to do training and staff were trained in Landmark strategies. Students with learning disabilities currently receive language-based instruction, support and interventions in co-taught ELA and Math classrooms with special educators and general educators.

During transition years (Pre-K into Kindergarten, 6th grade into 7th, and 8th grade into high school) there are transition meetings to help support students as they move up to the next level. Staff feel that by doing this they are helping to ensure K-12 alignment. At the preschool level, the elementary teachers will join the preschool staff during meeting in the Spring to help plan for the transition and prepare families for what to expect as their child moves to the new school building. The same happens at the Elementary level - 7th grade teachers will join the Elementary IEP teams to help support the transition process. The fact that Georgetown has a combined Middle/High School helps ensure a smooth transition as students move from middle school into high school.

Per staff report, it is typically an easy transition for students moving from Greenhouse into Sprouts as the programs are very similar with a high level of staff support for students in these programs. The transition from elementary school into middle school was noted to be the most challenging. Moving from a substantially separate setting into inclusion was also noted to be more difficult for students. This year, administrators also mentioned that there were some inappropriate placements made as students transitioned to the next level. These placement issues have been resolved through the Team process.

During staff interviews, a few challenges to K-12 alignment were mentioned. For example, there is no dedicated time provided by the District for supporting the transitions between levels and staff do this on their own time. In addition, staff felt that they were making decisions about the next level without really knowing the programs. This was felt to be especially true for the transition from elementary to middle school. Middle school staff felt that they needed to be more involved to help elementary staff make appropriate decisions regarding students' IEPs and placement as they move into 7th grade. Another concern was ensuring that IEP benchmarks are written in a way that makes sense as the student moves to the next level.

Generally, staff felt that there has been more consistency in recent years in terms of program alignment; however alignment of curriculum was felt to be more of a challenge, due a a lack of consistency at the District level.

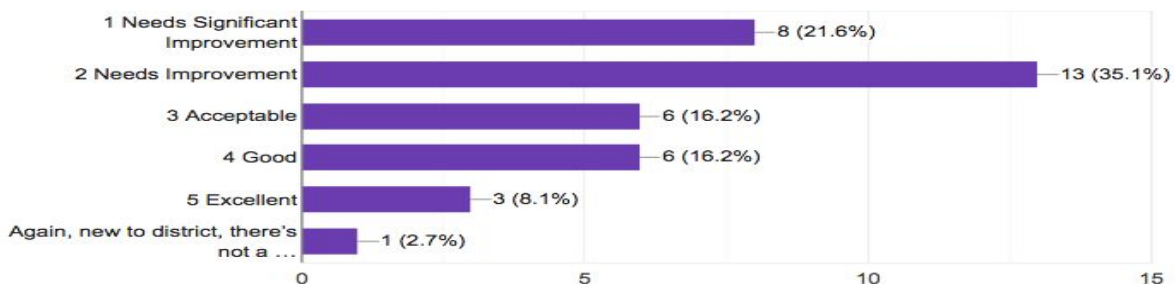
Staff from the Learning Skills classes would like the opportunity to work with administration to clarify expectations and consistency for these classes.

At the elementary level, students in the social emotional program tend to spend more time in a substantially separate setting than they do at the middle/high school level. Positive feedback from parents included that when students transitioned into 7th grade, there were more opportunities for inclusion and students have had a lot of success. It was expressed that there were some gaps in learning for students who arrived to the middle school after being in a substantially separate setting during elementary school.

Parent Survey Results for Focus Area #3

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the alignment of the district programs as the students move through grades K-12+? (consider consistency and structure of the programs as students move across grade levels).

37 responses



The majority of parents (56.7%) suggested that the District needs to improve or significantly improve in this area. 15 of the 37 respondents (40.5%) thought that district alignment is either acceptable, good, or excellent.

Consultants' Perspectives

In Georgetown, there are two challenges that affect student progress and proficiency as they move through the grade levels: articulation and alignment. Challenges in the area of articulation relate to the lack of clarity concerning the programming at the preschool, elementary, middle and high school levels, and to the weaknesses in structures and processes connecting the levels. Challenges in the area of alignment relate to the appropriateness of similarities and differences in programming for a student with disabilities as he/she moves through the levels, and the continuity of content and approaches utilized in instruction and services across the levels.

Recommendations for Improvement in K-12 Program Alignment

The District should organize ad hoc working groups of administrators, staff, and parents to develop for each program:

- Program descriptions, including the program purposes, the program goals and objectives, the critical program features, the adopted approaches and the tiered services available in both the academic and the social-emotional behavioral domains
- Program procedures manuals, including entry and exit criteria and procedures, approaches to the monitoring of student progress and proficiency,

The District should implement the practice of having transition planning meetings for students with Section 504 Plans. This should be done in the spring prior to a student transitioning to middle or high school.

The District should provide informational professional development for all special education staff so that everyone has a better understanding of what each program looks like at every level.

Focus Area #4: Collaboration between Special Education Staff and Parents

Critical Question

How can the special education staff form a more positive collaboration with parents and families to gain stronger parental support and trust?

Current Status

There is a high level of parent and family engagement in Georgetown. There are mechanisms in place to promote collaboration between special education staff and families. The traditional forums for such collaboration are Open Houses at the beginning of the school year and then Parent-Teacher Conferences in the fall and spring. Participation in these opportunities are up to the discretion of parents. In addition to these in-person meeting opportunities, there are other modes of communication, such as emails, home-school communication logs, phone calls, daily or weekly communication notes. These forms of communication vary teacher to teacher and student to student.

Additionally, the District's student portal is an important tool, promoting collaboration with families. Grades are updated regularly in the portal, along with homework and links to other resources. The staff perspective on the portal is that it has greatly improved parents knowing what is going on in terms of homework and grades. Students also use the portal to stay on top of things. Students and staff can send email through the portal. The school District's calendar is also accessible to students and families through the portal. Parent feedback on the portal was largely positive, with the one caveat being that teachers do not all use the portal in the same way, or with the same consistency.

The frequency of communication also varies depending on the age of the student. At the preschool level, communication and collaboration with families is very important and there is a strong school/family partnership in place. There are daily communication notes handed out to parents to update on feeding, toileting, etc. Communication at this level is typically on a daily basis, especially as many families are at drop off and pick up providing the opportunity for face to face communications. This is similar to the Elementary level and staff there indicated that they work very hard to maintain open communication and collaboration with families and be responsive to concerns in a timely manner. A similar sentiment was expressed at the middle and high school although it does appear to taper slightly at the high school level as students are more independent and navigating more of the educational process on their own by communicating directly with their teachers.

In addition to communication and collaboration with teachers, counselors communicate with families and also talk with outside therapists when releases to share information are in place. Guidance counselors are also in frequent communication with students and families and meet regularly with teachers to discuss student concerns and issues.

It appeared that the majority of communication with families is handled by the special education teachers and that this was a large aspect of the job. A few special education teachers suggested that they are in constant communication with families. General education teachers commented that special education teachers do a great job in with communication.

A common staff perspective is that parents often want more communication than is given but staff are unsure what else could be put in place on top of those forms of communication that are already in place. Another perspective shared was that for the home school communication log, communication is only one way - the school sends home a lot of information but does not always get a lot back.

Teachers believe that strong communication between staff is very important to support collaboration/communication with families. The staff perspective was that communication and collaboration are strong at the elementary level. The Principal and Special Education Coordinator meet every day, either formally or informally and the Director of Student Services joins them for a weekly meeting. This promotes open communication and healthy dialogue. There is a similar meeting in place at the middle/high school level where the Principal, Special Education Coordinator and Director meet weekly. There was a suggestion that building based communication at the middle and high schools could be improved upon.

Parent Perspective

During the Parent Focus groups, the feedback provided for Focus Area 4 was primarily positive. Parents expressed that communication has really improved and that response time is fast - usually on the same day or within 24 hours. Parents feel that they are getting information or being invited to meet in person for further discussion. A few parents expressed appreciation about their children's teachers and how great they are about communication and responsiveness to parent questions. It did seem that parents of students at the preschool and the middle/high school level were generally more satisfied than parents with children at the elementary level. One parent commented that her child's teacher (7th) had really taken the time to get to know her child and keeps her updated with all of the information she asks for and more. Parents also commented that they had been very happy with communication with Guidance staff. Another common feeling among parents was that communication is "great" or "excellent" with special education staff but hit or miss with general education teachers.

A few people commented that things have greatly improved since Jack Tiano has been the Director of Student Services and that the special education staff in the District now has drastically improved. Parents suggested that the previous director was challenging for families to work with. It was noted that Mr. Tiano made an effort to immediately engage with parents and improve the situation that was created by the previous director. Other positives cited were that Mr. Tiano was proactive, connected with the right resources and that there are more productive team meetings now. Parents feel that IEP teams are now more receptive to their input and listen

to their concerns. Areas that were cited as problematic were when a staff member went out on a leave and families were not notified. This was felt to create a challenging year for the students without any sharing of information with families.

There were also some parents who feel that “everything seems to be a big secret” and that “the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing”. A disconnect was noted between the schools and one example was when a student with a 504 Plan moved up to the next level and there was no planning or transition supports in place. Students with IEPs who moved up to 7th grade were reported to be having a very positive experience this year.

Additional parent comments provided in response to the Parent Survey:

- The District has improved communication and access to specialists
- Very good communication from entry into the District as a new family, counseling along the way to the student as they transitioned into the sped program and new school
- The teachers genuinely care; they want the kids to succeed. Communication has gotten much better and there seems to generally be less "push back" on services that are needed for our kids to be successful.
- I believe Georgetown does a good job of offering services to my daughter based on her needs. They are understanding of her needs and are great at communicating with me as well

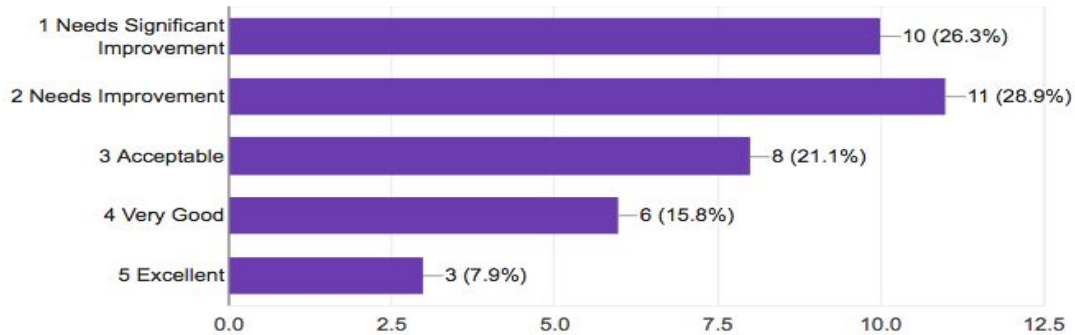
When asked what could be improved upon, a few comments were related to communication and collaboration:

- Better communication between parent and pertinent staff.
- More honest communication
- Communication of options for academics with students on IEPs
- Communication and willingness to admit when there needs to be improvement. I think parents would be more willing to work thru improvements if they didnt feel like employees are trying to CYA and aren't scared of telling parents about how things are actually going. I've had teachers tell me things that are “off the record” as far as what my child is actually receiving for services vs what is in their IEP. I feel that teachers feel like they are in the “middle” of many situations and don't want to get in “trouble”.
- Communication. There was a lot more communication between parents and teachers in Pre-K.
- Better communication with parents at least monthly to say what's good and what needs work

Parent Survey Results on Focus Area 4

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the communication and collaboration between families and staff?

38 responses



Please note: The validity of these results may be diminished as there is no distinction between communication with special education staff versus general education staff and there is no break down by level to see where these perspectives are coming from.

Consultants' Perspectives

School administrators and staff seem to recognize the importance of engaging parents of students with disabilities actively in the special education process and in the larger educational processes of the schools. Their efforts appear to be effective with some parents and not effective with others. This variability in effectiveness may be related to the varying needs among parents and a lack of sufficient differentiation in the approaches to communication and collaboration utilized by some administrators and staff.

Recommendations for Improvement in Collaboration between Special Education Staff and Parents

The District should provide professional development and parent development programs addressing improved engagement and partnership between schools and families.

The District should examine existing structures and processes for communication and collaboration with families, and make adjustments that provide for greater differentiation of approach and more support for obtaining information and feedback from parents.

The District should insure that parents have access and training in using the portal to communicate with staff and administrators.

The District should review home-school communication forms to see if they provide an opportunity for parents to share information back with the school. If not, create forms that have space designated for more back and forth communication to increase collaboration. This may include a parent section to include such information as what the child had for breakfast, amount of sleep the night before, toileting issues, behaviors observed, outside activities such as extracurricular, private therapies or medical appointments, etc.

Focus Area #5: Academic, Social/Emotional and Behavioral Supports

Critical Question

Are the academic, social/emotional, and behavioral supports offered at Georgetown Public Schools appropriate in meeting all the unique needs of its student population?

Current Status

A. Academics

The current special education administration has made a concerted effort to improve in the area of academics and identifying what is being done and what needs to be done to help students with disabilities make progress. At the Elementary level there are monthly data meetings to review ELA and Math data. Prior to the current administration, there was not a lot of data available for students with IEPs. Progress monitoring is now in place for students receiving special education services and they are seeing areas of growth over time. There is not a similar data collection and progress monitoring process in place at the middle and high school currently although the goal is to adopt a similar model to what is happening at the elementary level in this regard.

Students in grades K-3 are receiving specialized instruction in reading through Foundations. There were differing views about how students with disabilities are doing with reading. One perspective was that Wilson is being used for a lot of students but they are not seeing a ton of growth with this method. Some students are doing Wilson for an hour per day, missing time in the classroom, and not making any progress with their reading. One possible suggestion was to revisit the IEPs for students who have Wilson to really assess progress and determine whether that is the best program for them. It was suggested that comprehension is also a significant challenge for students with disabilities.

Writing is felt to be an area where students with disabilities are not doing well across the board. Staff suggested this was the result of not having a consistent writing curriculum in the District. Despite this shared opinion by elementary staff, it was also suggested that writing is improving as students are spending more time in inclusion. It was suggested that it would be ideal to have a special education teacher push into the classroom for writing on a daily basis.

At the middle and high school level, inclusion is happening in such a way that students receive ELA and Math instruction in co-taught classroom. An Instructional paraprofessional supports the students in Social Studies and Science. There are also Language Skills classes, Study Skills classes, and the Alt, MAPS, and Compass programs. Some students also receive Social Skills.

Parents Perspective

Parents in the focus groups were generally satisfied in the academic services provided to students with disabilities. Parents commented that their children were accessing the curriculum with supports in place. One parent noted seeing a higher level of independence in her child. The largest concern in terms of academics was whether general education teachers have an awareness of students with disabilities and how curriculum should be delivered. Parents felt there is a disconnect between general education and special education and that general education teachers do not always want to honor the accommodations included in a student's IEP. Another parent feeling seemed to be that although academics are very good, it often feels like a fight to get what you need for your child.

B. Social-Emotional-Behavioral

Elementary

Penn Brook is in the second year of implementation for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). There are school wide incentives as well as classroom-based incentives. Staff generally feel that PBIS has been a good addition to the elementary school. Having a consistent language and incentive system has been positive in that everyone knows and has the same expectations. There is a high level of buy in with PBIS in grades K-3 but less so at the upper elementary grades. In addition to PBIS, the elementary school recently adopted the Second Step program as a school wide Tier 1 intervention. Elementary classroom teachers are delivering the Second Step SEL curriculum and were provided with the materials and participated in a webinar to get started. The Adjustment Counselor also uses Second Step with small groups to teach skills as a tier 2 intervention. Staff are generally positive about Second Step but it is new so it appeared that staff were still adjusting.

Other positive things happening at the elementary level with regard to SEL include a strong Student Assistance Team (SAT) and the Social Emotional Behavioral Student Assistance Team (SEBSAT), which meets weekly and uses the adjustment counselors to observe students and provide support to those students who need it. Other SEL interventions include friendship groups, alliance quests, social thinking groups. Given the needs of students are increasing, the District is feeling the need to respond. Staff feel that the addition of a full time BCBA has been excellent and provides additional support to teachers in the area of behavior management. Staff at the elementary school feel that Adjustment Counselors are overloaded and cannot always do the check-ins they want to do. A few staff suggested hiring another school psychologist to take some of the load of of school adjustment counselors.

Another point that raised a lot of conversation at the Elementary level was the removal of morning meeting at the upper elementary grades (3-6). This was felt by the teachers to be a huge loss. Teachers suggested that not having morning meeting is especially a loss for students with disabilities who may not spend a lot of time in the general education setting but with morning meeting were able to start their day with their peers and have a smooth transition into the day. One teacher commented that it is harder to create a community of learners without the morning meeting.

At the Elementary level, Parents cited behavior management as a major concern. Parents are not confident that elementary staff know how to manage behaviors and suggested that things are defined as behaviors when they may not be. A few parents suggested that anxiety is being defined as behavior problems.


Middle/High School

At the Middle/High School there is an SEL Squad. This is fairly new but the goal of the Team is to conduct research and work in the area of SEL and determine where the school wants to go in terms of an SEL curriculum. The Team is in the process of defining the mission and purpose of the group, researching SEL and then will develop professional development to share their findings with staff at the middle and high schools. The middle/high school is using CASEL for its social emotional curriculum.

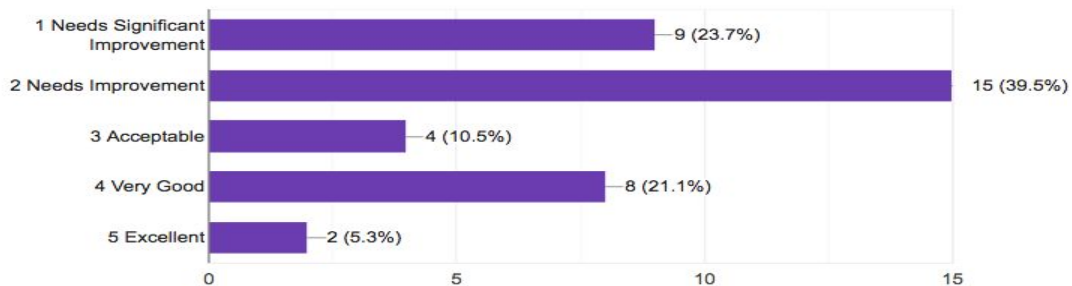
Parents of middle and high school students seemed happier with what is happening with social/emotional and behavioral supports. The areas for improvement cited by parents in were to have more guidance and coaching for students on how to access school clubs and be more involved in the school community. Parents mentioned that there used to be intramurals which provided a nice way for students to participate a social/extracurricular activity. The second suggestion for improvement was to add an additional therapist to the MS/HS level. Parents felt that from the social/emotional perspective students would benefit from additional therapy support. The sentiment was expressed that because of staffing, not all students who need access to a therapist are able to have it. Parents also praised the work of the guidance counselors at the high school.

Parent Survey Results on Focus Area 5:

Academic Services

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the academic services provided to students with disabilities? 

38 responses



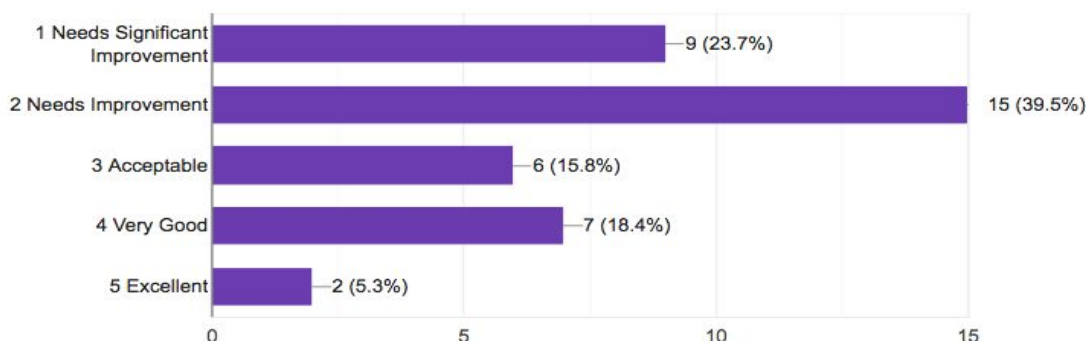
More than one third of parents (36.9%) rated the academic services for students with disabilities as excellent, very good, or acceptable. The remaining two thirds (63.1%) rated them as needing improvement or significant improvement. Please note, the survey results suggest a higher level of dissatisfaction with academics than was expressed during the parent focus groups.

Social/Emotional/Behavioral Services

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the social/emotional/behavioral supports available to students with disabilities?



38 responses



More than one third of parents (39.1%) rated the social/emotional/behavioral services for students with disabilities as excellent, very good, or acceptable. The remaining almost two thirds (60.9%) rated them as needing improvement or significant improvement.

Consultants' Perspectives

Academic services in Georgetown are solid and comparable to other similarly situated districts. Parent feedback suggested that general education teachers at every level require more specialized training in working with students with disabilities and professional development in understanding disability.

There are many positive developments in Georgetown in the area of social emotional learning (SEL) and there has been considerable professional development in this area. The increased focus on SEL has been happening in Georgetown for a few years now and the momentum is in full swing currently. This is important as staff indicated that students have more social emotional needs. The greatest needs in this area are for anxiety and attentional issues. More students than in previous years are noted to have a lack of social skills and social awareness. District administration would like to take a district-wide inventory on what is being done for SEL and develop a common philosophy and understanding of what is currently happening across the District. There are things happening at all of the schools but there is no clear alignment.

Recommendations for Improvement in Academic, Social/Emotional and Behavioral (SEB) Supports

Conduct a district-wide inventory of what is currently being done in the area of social emotional learning to develop a common understanding of what is happening across the District and to support alignment across the District.

Beyond PBIS, the District should adopt system-wide frameworks for academic and SEB services. Examples of these overarching frameworks are:

- Universal Design for Learning
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
- Trauma-Sensitive Schools and Trauma-Informed Practices
- Collaborative Team-Based Planning, Implementation, and Problem-Solving

The District should establish a Social-Emotional-Behavioral (SEB) Task Force:

- Include parents, students, administrators and staff
- Focus of policies and procedures, structures and processes
- Define the tiered infrastructure for SEB services, interventions, and supports
- Develop guidebooks to support implementation
- Establish ongoing formative evaluation

Issues for Further Investigation

In the process of collecting and analyzing data for this report, the Consultants have identified a few issues that exceed the scope of this evaluation, but are closely related to the areas of focus and the recommendations for improvement.

Issue: Acceptance by larger community (including parents) of students with disabilities

An area of need for further examination is on the topic of acceptance of students with disabilities by the Georgetown school community at large, including parents. It was expressed that there could be more teaching about inclusion, acceptance of differences, and understanding disability.

Issue: Foreign language and college prep classes for students with disabilities

These topics only came up in a very limited nature but suggests that there may be concerns about the access that students with disabilities have to foreign language and college prep classes.

Compilation of Recommendations

Recommendations for Improvement in Access to Grade Level Curriculum by Students with Disabilities

The District should provide professional development, supervision, and support for all instructional staff regarding:

- Approaches to differentiation of instruction at the various developmental levels and grade levels
- Universal Design for Learning
- Approaches to individualization, strategic grouping of students, managing learning experiences for diverse groups of learners
- Co-teaching strategies and inclusion collaboration
- Curriculum development in writing

The District should arrange and support consultation between with Elementary teachers and administrators and their counterparts at the secondary level on how data collection, monitoring, analysis, and utilization is working in the elementary schools and the development of similar approaches in the middle and high schools.

Recommendations for Improvement in Effectiveness and Efficiency of Staffing

The District should engage in an analysis of the level of turnover among professional and paraprofessional staff, the reasons for this turn-over, and identify the interventions that would most likely have a positive effect on reducing the turn-over.

The District should arrange for common planning time and specific transformational professional development for the staff - general education, special education, and related and support services - who are providing services to students with disabilities.

The District should develop and provide transformational professional development and support in co-teaching and other inclusive instructional practices. The focus of the professional development program should be on developing common research-based practices to foster common skills among staff and consistent implementation across staff and settings.

The District should explore opportunities to develop

- Interdisciplinary teams as a central feature of staff organization
- Multiple levels of organizational support for the teams - direct service, school leadership, and District policy
- Regular expert consultation to the teams in both the academic and social-emotional-behavioral domains

The District should pursue increasing the allocation of resources to staff providing social-emotional-behavioral interventions, supports, and services.

Recommendations for Improvement in K-12 Program Alignment

The District should organize ad hoc working groups of administrators, staff, and parents to develop for each program:

- Program descriptions, including the program purposes, the program goals and objectives, the critical program features, the adopted approaches and the tiered services available in both the academic and the social-emotional behavioral domains
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The District should review home-school communication forms to see if they provide an opportunity for parents to share information back with the school. If not, create forms that have space designated for more back and forth communication to increase collaboration. This may include a parent section to include such information as what the child had for breakfast, amount of sleep the night before, toileting issues, behaviors observed, outside activities such as extracurricular, private therapies or medical appointments, etc.

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APPENDICES

Other Data

Prevalence

Students With Disabilities (%)	14.4 District	17.7 State
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PK-6 IEPs reviewed

Total - 25 IEPs

Placements

Full inclusion - 11

Early Childhood Inclusion - 3

Partial inclusion - 6

Substantially separate - 5

Primary Disability Categories

Autism - 14

Emotional - 4

Intellectual - 2

Communication - 2

Neurological - 1

Developmental Delay - 1

Health - 1

This consultants review of IEPs suggests that Georgetown writes detailed and comprehensive IEPs with measurable goals and objectives.

2018 MCAS Results

http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/achievement_level.aspx?linkid=32&orgcode=01050000&orgtypecode=5&