Special Education Leadership Considerations and Next Steps

Presented to Board of Education

November 18, 2026

Considerations and Decision Making

- Current District Enrollment
- Current District Special Education Population
- Comparison with LADSE Districts
- General Overview of roles, responsibilities and unique District 96 considerations

D96: Special education with one administrator

1,700

students enrolled

3rd largest of 12 LADSE elementary districts

~221

students with IEPs

13% of total enrollment

1

special education administrator

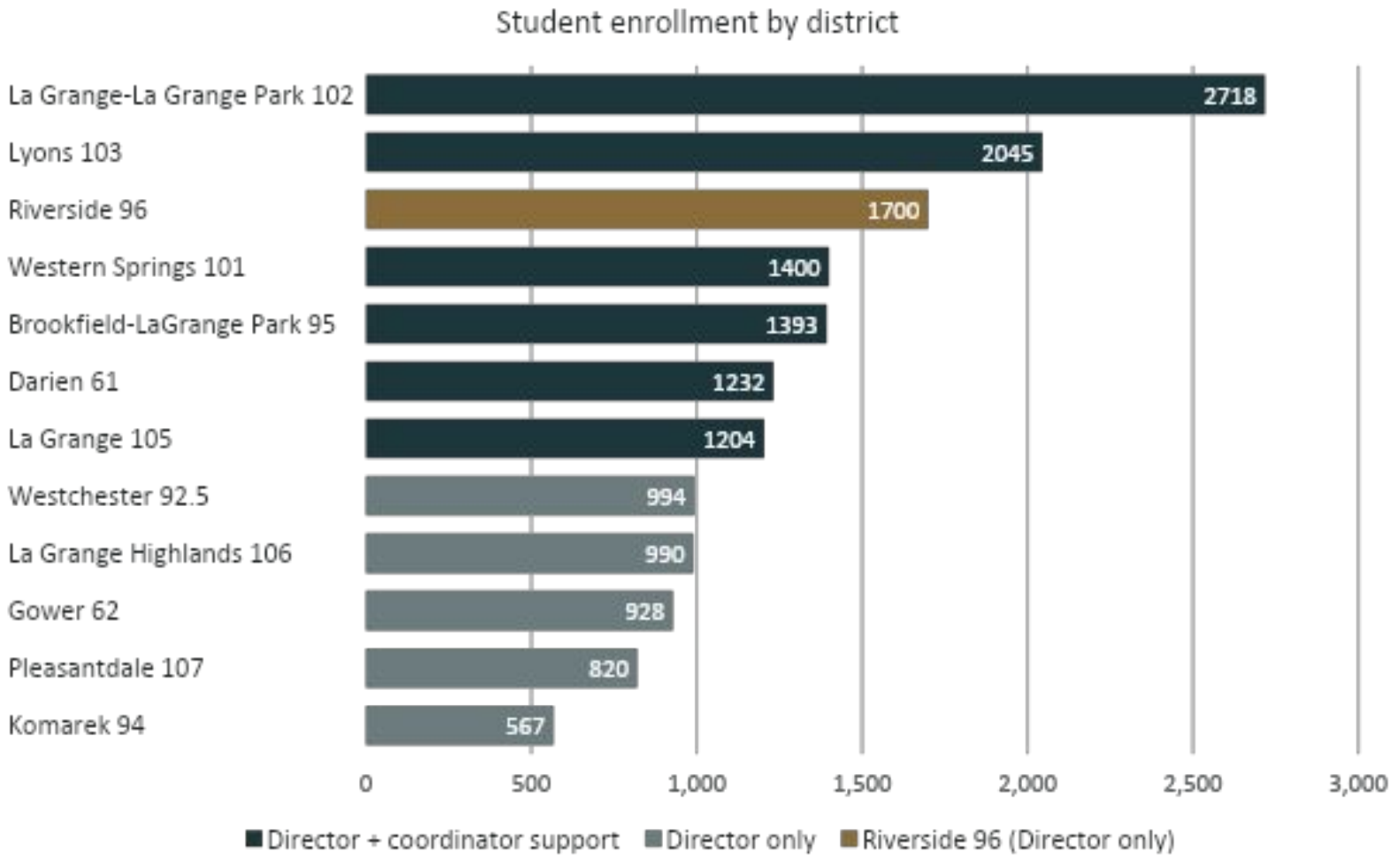
Recommendation: Add one full-time Assistant Director of Special Education beginning in the 2027-28 school year, so that the district has two special education administrators, as most LADSE Districts do.

LADSE district survey data (conducted Fall 2026)

District	Enrollment	IEP rate	Est. IEPs	Leadership	Support roles
La Grange-La Grange Park 102	2,718	18.0%	489	Director + 3	Asst. Supt.; self-contained coordinator; early childhood coordinator
Lyons 103	2,045	16.0%	327	Director + 4	4 coordinators
Riverside 96	**1,700**	**13.0%**	**221**	**Director only**	**None**
RB 208 (high school)	1,663	13.3%	221	Director + 1	Special education division head
Western Springs 101	1,400	10.0%	140	Director + 1.0 FTE	Associate directors
Brookfield-LaGrange Park 95	1,393	15.0%	209	Director + 1	Coordinator of special education
Darien 61	1,232	15.7%	193	Director + 1	Coordinator (teacher contract)
La Grange 105	1,204	21.0%	253	Director + 1	Student services coordinator
Westchester 92.5	994	25.0%	249	Director only	None
La Grange Highlands 106	990	10.3%	102	Director only	None
Gower 62	928	10.0%	93	Director only	None
Pleasantdale 107	820	14.0%	115	Director only	None
Komarek 94	567	22.0%	125	Director only	None

Source: Special Education Director Staffing Survey of neighboring districts. Students with IEPs estimated as enrollment x reported IEP rate.

Overview LADSE Districts



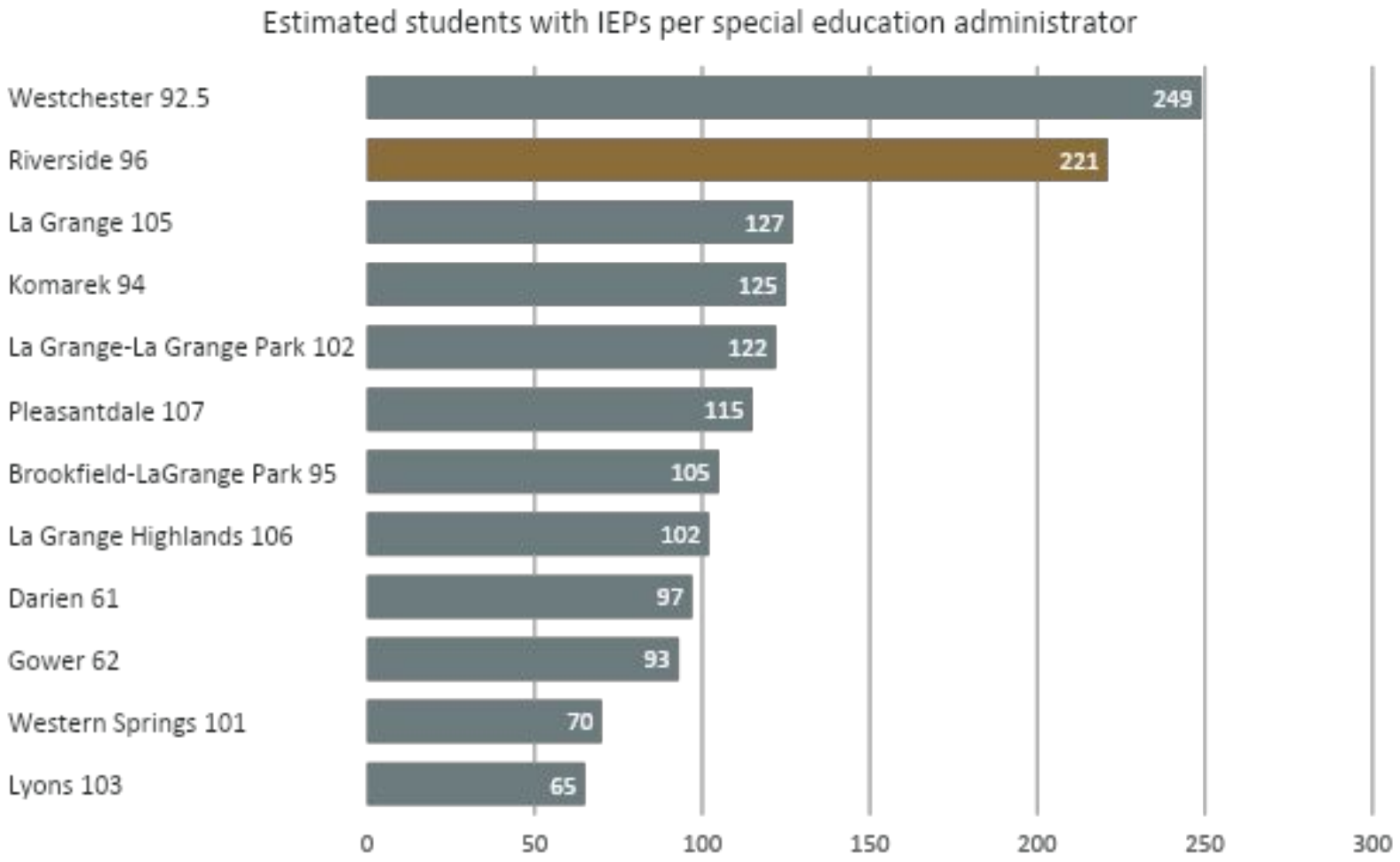
1,000+

students: the point where every LADSE district adds a coordinator or associate director.

Five districts smaller than D96 already have that support.

Source: Special Education Director Staffing Survey of neighboring districts. Students with IEPs estimated as enrollment x reported IEP rate. Excludes RB 208 (high school district); see appendix.

D96's caseload per administrator is about double the peer median



221 vs. 105

students with IEPs per administrator: D96 vs. the median of our LADSE Districts.

The one district higher than D96, Westchester 92.5, has about 1,000 students, and its director does not oversee nursing or serve as McKinney-Vento liaison.

Source: Special Education Director Staffing Survey of neighboring districts. Students with IEPs estimated as enrollment x reported IEP rate. Administrators include the director plus coordinators, associate directors and assistant superintendents.

Quick overview of key roles and responsibilities

Responsibility	Delegated to a coordinator in	Who does it in D96
Representing the district (LEA) at IEP meetings	All 6 districts with support: La Grange 105, Darien 61, District 95, Lyons 103, Western Springs 101, District 102	**Director at 100+ meetings a year; principals and certified staff fill in when she can't**
Outplaced students (LADSE and private placements)	District 95, Lyons 103, Western Springs 101, District 102	**Director is case manager for about 50 students**
Move-in IEPs	Darien 61, District 95, Lyons 103, Western Springs 101	**Director**

Source: Special Education Director Staffing Survey; D96 figures from the Director of Special Education and Student Services.

One administrator carries D96's Special Education Responsibilities

100+

IEP meetings a year

attended by the Director as the district's representative

~50

outplaced students

with the Director as case manager

All

complex or contentious meetings

across every district building

What gets squeezed out: program improvement and oversight, the work that raises the quality of special education across the district rather than keeping up with meetings.

Our Director also leads work most LADSE Districts assign elsewhere

Nursing and health services

Only 3 of 13 surveyed directors oversee nursing

504 complaints and disputes

Escalated cases from every building

Behavior and SEL support system (MTSS)

Only 4 of 13 hold this; D96 is building its system this year, with its first universal SAEBRS screening this fall

Strategic Plan-Goal 2 Leadership

Escalated cases from every building

McKinney-Vento homeless liaison

Time-sensitive enrollment, transportation and agency coordination

Solo directors elsewhere carry broad portfolios, but at roughly half our size. D96 asks one person to carry both the size and the breadth.

The current structure shifts the cost elsewhere



Principals share the responsibility

Principals cover IEP meetings when the Director can't, taking time from instructional leadership and building operations.



Teachers serving as LEA representative

When no administrator is available, certified staff represent the district. Federal rules expect that person to be qualified to supervise special education and to know the district's resources.



Program improvement deferred

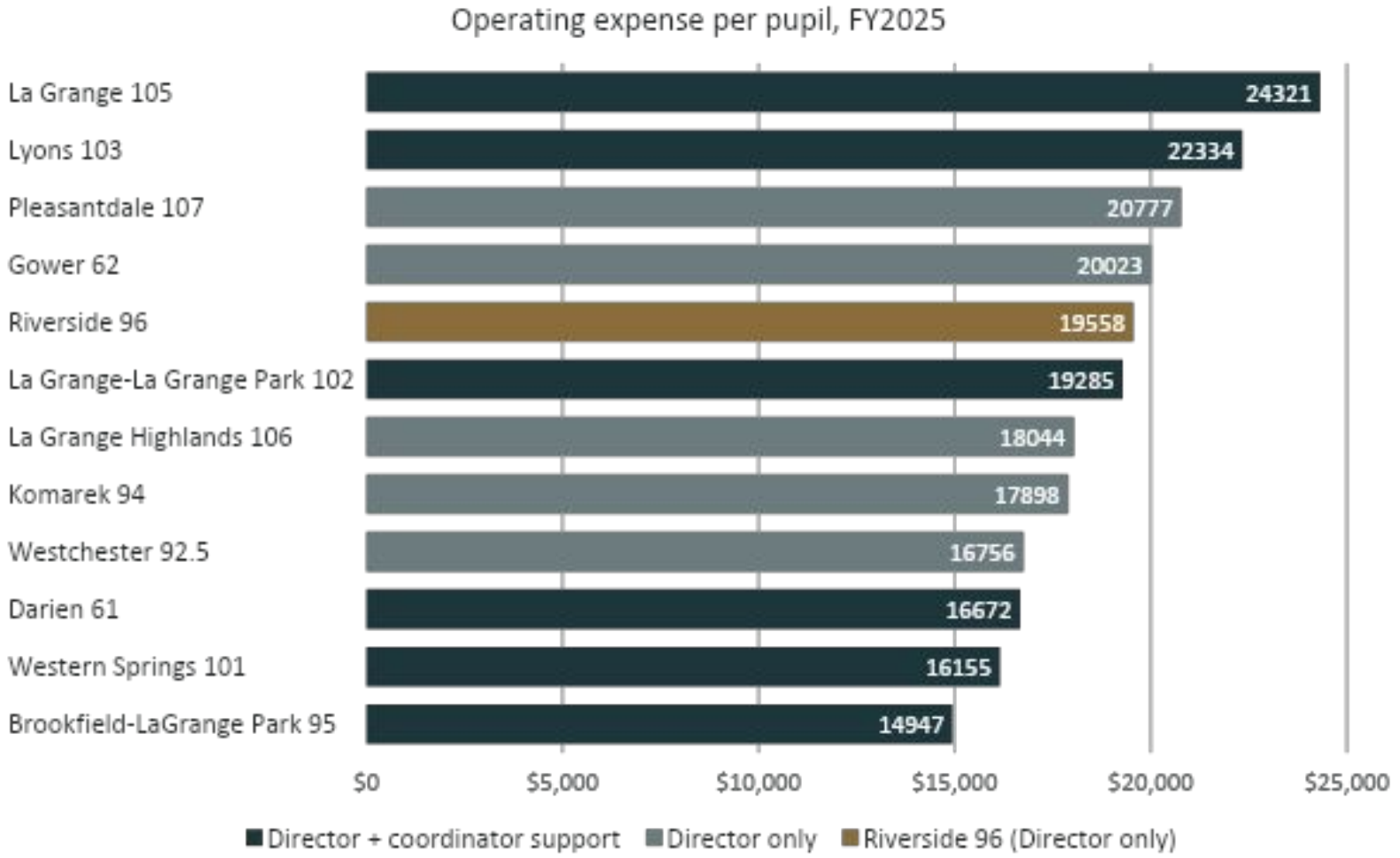
Reviewing program quality, building the MTSS system and supporting staff all wait behind meetings.



System limitations

Any absence or vacancy in one role leaves no one with the authority and knowledge to step in.

LADSE Districts that spend less per pupil already fund a second leader



4 of 6

neighbors with a second special education leader spend less per pupil than D96.

$64

per pupil for every $100,000 in salary and benefits, about 0.3% of D96's current spending.

Source: ISBE Operating Expense Per Pupil, FY2025 Annual Financial Report data (9-month ADA). D96 ADA 1,551.99. Excludes RB 208 (high school district).

Full-time options under consideration

Teacher on Special Assignment

Teacher contract

- Can serve as LEA representative at routine IEP meetings
- Not an administrator; limited authority to commit resources
- Limited authority at contentious meetings
- Lowest cost

Precedent: Darien 61

Coordinator of Special Education

Administrative contract

- Serves as LEA representative and can commit resources
- Manages outplacements and move-in IEPs
- Handles contentious meetings
- Does not act for the Director
- Moderate cost

Precedent: La Grange 105, District 95, Lyons 103, District 102

Assistant Director of Special Education

Administrative contract

- Everything a Coordinator does
- Authority to act for the Director when she is unavailable
- Can take on part of the Director's broader portfolio
- Builds succession and continuity
- Highest cost

Role Considerations

The additional support would potentially

- Have a key role with Early Learners programming
- Assist with off campus placement support and case coordination
- Represent the district at IEP meetings
- Share complex and contentious meetings with the Director
- Act for the Director when she is unavailable
- Shared responsibility for administrative roles in special education district-wide

Request: one additional full-time leader to support Special Education for 2027-28

Estimated annual cost: Competitive salary consistent with assistant principal, Elementary Intervention and Support Coordinator

Brings D96 in line with every neighboring district over 1,000 students