



29 Winthrop Road
Brookline MA 02445

March 3, 2026

Dr. David Clendening
Superintendent
Franklin Community Schools
998 Grizzly Cub Drive
Franklin, IN 46131

Dr. Clendening,

New Solutions K12 is pleased to share this proposal to help create a best-practice-based, realistic plan to address students' problematic behavior and mental health needs, despite tight budgets. The review will also look deeply at special education services, supports, and staffing.

Before the pandemic, too many students struggled to manage and self-regulate their behavior. The disruptions and trauma of the pandemic have only increased these challenges by creating expanded behavior and mental health needs. This, in turn, has raised teacher stress and burnout to unprecedented levels and undermined their ability to teach and students' ability to learn.

This plan will help expand mental health services and best-practice support for challenging behaviors, as well as more impactful, cost-effective special education services, despite limited teacher bandwidth, tight budgets, and a teacher shortage.

The New Solutions K12 team has first-hand experience of leading school systems that have implemented these best practices and deep expertise in the science of implementation, especially in the K-12 world.

Recognizing that school and district leaders already have a full plate, we have designed the process to minimize demands on staff time while ensuring a high level of input. Additionally, this process will intentionally seek to build off of any existing priorities or efforts.

We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Nate Levenson
President

Implementing Best Practice Supports and Strategies for Challenging Behaviors and Special Education, Despite Limited Teacher Bandwidth and Tight Budgets

Proposal for Franklin Community Schools

March 2026



New Solutions K12

Best Practices for Preventing and Addressing Problematic Behavior are Possible and Practical, but Differ from Many Traditional Approaches

Nearly every district in the country has experienced an increase in challenging behaviors and students' need for mental health services. Most districts have increased their efforts, staffing, and funding in these areas, especially with ESSER funds post-pandemic. As the funds go away and the needs remain, districts are struggling to chart a path forward. Worse yet, many districts experienced only small improvements despite large investments.

Teacher frustration, burnout, and turnover are being driven, in large part, by problematic student behavior and the impact of increased student trauma. Fortunately, best practices exist to meet these needs. Some schools have seen an 80% reduction in problematic behavior, and others have expanded mental health services fourfold while reducing the cost of providing this needed support.

Best practices are drawn from:

- The What Works Clearing House
- *Lost at School* by Ross Greene
- *The Behavior Code* by Jessica Minahan
- *Six Shifts to Improve Special Education and Other Interventions* by Nate Levenson
- The experience of schools that dramatically reduced challenging behavior

Equally importantly, these best practices can be implemented cost-effectively without overloading classroom teachers or building administrators. Unfortunately, these best practices will require a new approach, systems, and structures to an old problem.

There Are Four Challenges, Not One

While all districts across the country are striving to address students' needs, few feel they have found an effective and cost-effective approach. The most successful districts have realized that there are actually four challenges to address, not one, and have crafted targeted plans for each:

1. **Tier 1:** universal behavior supports centered on student/teacher relationships and consistent classroom norms and routines
2. **Tier 2:** Interventions, consequences, and discipline policies for more typical and minor behavior infractions
3. **Tier 3:** behavior supports for highly disruptive and violent outbursts, typically impacting 2 - 5% of students
4. **Mental health:** mental health counseling services for anxiety, depression, school phobia, and general life trauma

Apply the Right Solution for the Right Situation

Central to effective behavior management is matching the right strategy to the right challenge. Just as a screwdriver is ineffective for putting a nail into wood, but is great for screws. Often, schools will adopt an approach like restorative circles, which is a good tool for minor recess misbehavior, but would not be an appropriate response to a student physically injuring a teacher, for example.

In the same vein, treating verbal or passive disrespect with the same response as engaging in a fight would be applying tier 3 responses to tier 2 behaviors. Staff in many districts share that they feel tier 2 incidents are often either treated the same as more severe actions or that the lack of de-escalation strategies morphs tier 2 actions into tier 3 situations.

Match Staff Skills to Each of the Four Challenges

The blurring of the lines between the four different types of support needed is most evident when it comes to who is asked to provide the support. Too often, staff without the requisite skills are asked to provide a support they aren't trained or comfortable providing, and conversely, some with the training, skills, and aptitude are assigned other tasks instead.

Classroom teachers are not mental health professionals nor experts in addressing the most challenging student behaviors - nor should they be. That said, they play a key role in creating a welcoming classroom, setting clear and consistent behavioral expectations, and addressing minor infractions.

Additionally, not all school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists have the same level of training, interests, or skills in addressing severe tier 3 behavioral issues. Some do, some do not. Their title is not a good indicator of their specific training and skills.

Revise the Organizational Chart to Reflect the Expanded Importance and Specialization of Behavior and Mental Health Services

Creating a management and leadership team that prioritizes expertise doesn't fit neatly into the historic K-12 organizational chart. Often, mental health and behavior support falls under the special education leader, who may not have expertise in the area, and day-to-day supervision of key staff may fall to building leaders who also lack expertise in the area. Meanwhile, the myriad of staff involved might be part of multiple departments, such as special education and guidance. Moreover, many students with behavioral or mental health needs don't have disabilities, while others do. In short, historic organizational charts don't reflect today's realities.

Mesh "Let Teachers Teach" With More Prevention-Based Strategies

Across the country, a debate is taking place on how best to address the increased number of students demonstrating problematic behavior. On the one hand, some have embraced a "Let teachers teach" approach, which tends to lead to more students being removed from general education classrooms, allowing classroom teachers to focus on teaching students without challenging behaviors. This ensures the other, non-disruptive students can continue to learn, even if the disruptive student will likely fall behind academically. While unfortunate, this approach

embraces the idea that there are consequences to problematic behavior and the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one student.

On the other hand, there is also support for significantly reducing the removal of students from the classroom under most circumstances.

Often, the debate seems to be focused on *which* of these approaches is best. Best practices mesh the two. Students who are regularly disruptive often need to be removed from the classroom so that teachers can teach. That said, if removal is required, it should be as short as practical and should reduce the likelihood of future removal. This time can and should be productive, helpful, and ensure learning continues.

Strategies that help prevent disruptive behavior from happening in the first place include:

- Setting clear and consistent behavior expectations in every room
- Effectively de-escalating small behavior challenges before they become large behavior challenges
- Identifying what triggers a student's outbursts and eliminating such triggers in the classroom. Research is clear that often a particular set of actions by others (teachers, administrators, or students) unintentionally sets some students to act out. These triggers are often not obvious and would not upset most other students.
- Teaching students coping mechanisms and self-regulation skills. Often, students act out because they do not know how to control or manage their feelings.
- Collectively, these best practices create a realistic approach to addressing challenging behaviors.

Scope of Work

1. Assemble a Planning and Implementation Team

Since it is a district-wide effort to address the behavior, mental health, and special education needs of students, it will take a cross-functional team to create a realistic and effective plan. It will take a team of general education and special education leaders, of school leaders and central office administrators, and of staff with a variety of skills and experience.

The work begins by communicating a message of teamwork and cross-functional collaboration. These words are backed up by creating a cross-functional planning team to oversee this important work. District leadership will help determine membership in the planning team.

This important group will ensure that the values and priorities of the district are at the core of the path forward. The team will also regularly answer the question, “Is the plan realistic?” No plan for rethinking and revising supports for students with behavior or mental health services is likely to be implemented well without broad support from the central office, principals, and teachers.

2. Share Best Practices

The last decade has seen great advancement in turning interesting ideas about behavior management into practical strategies for effectively minimizing challenging student behavior. While the underlying concepts have been long established, the means to implement them at scale in K-12 are more recent developments.

Unfortunately, the research on best practice ideas and best practice implementation is not well known in many districts. Despite much effort and expense, the approach of many districts is at odds with the best practices. For this reason, an early step in the work is to share with the planning team (and other leaders, if desired) best practices in providing behavior support and mental health services.

Key topics include:

- Why four plans, not one, are needed
- The critical role of expertise
- The right balance between prevention, discipline, and support
- What are high-quality options for removing students from the general education setting
- How to increase the cost-effectiveness of behavior and mental health services
- Why so many districts struggle to address these needs
- Lessons learned from districts and schools that have dramatically reduced problematic behavior

- These will be interactive sessions with time for reflection, discussion, and questions.
- We will also provide professional development on best practices in special education. This includes:
 - What actually raises achievement for students who struggle
 - How to ensure students with disabilities receive high-quality core instruction
 - Why extra time to learn will be critical
 - How to find time in the schedule for extra help
 - Who is the most appropriate staff member to provide extra help in reading, writing, and math
 - Ways to reduce general education and special education staff stress and burnout

3. Understand Current Practices

We will conduct a review of current practices in the district. To gain a comprehensive understanding of current practices, **New Solutions K12 will:**

- Host small group, in-person and remote interviews with approximately 100 people representing a wide range of roles and responsibilities.
- Collect data on student discipline.
- Electronic spreadsheets are provided to assist the district in collecting the needed data. Detailed staffing and program information, but never personally identifiable student data, is collected and analyzed.
- The research covers a wide range of topics. Major focus areas include:
 - Strategies and theories of action for supporting students with challenging behaviors
 - Programs and services for students with challenging behaviors
 - Disproportionality of discipline
 - Attendance and discipline trends
 - Staffing levels, by type of staff
 - Staff perspectives on program effectiveness, organizational structure, professional development, and district support
 - Role of paraprofessionals
 - Academic performance of students with and without special needs

- Academic programming and teaching practices for students who struggle, both general education and special education offerings
- Number of students identified for special education services, by disability
- The prevalence and effectiveness of serving students with disabilities in the general education setting

Understand How Staff Use Their Time

We can, if desired, also review how key staff members use their time. This is helpful in understanding the many demands on special educators and others. The data can help lead to ways to make the work more manageable, rewarding, and sustainable.

The use of time analysis will provide insights into:

- How much time is spent directly with students each week
- How much time is spent on activities such as paperwork or meetings
- If time can be utilized differently or more efficiently and effectively, such that staff spend more of their time providing services to students.
- How much service is one-on-one, small group, or whole class
- If social, emotional, and behavioral supports can be expanded

This portion of the study is achieved by utilizing a simple-to-use tool that allows selected roles to share their schedule for a week. Staff such as interventionists, reading teachers, special educators, related service providers, school psychologists, social workers, counselors, instructional coaches, and paraprofessionals upload how they spent their time in a typical week. No personally identifiable data is collected. The district leadership will decide which, if any, roles will participate.

Sample Use of Time Charts

Table 1: Time Spent with Students

Role	% Of Work Week Spent with Students
Special Education Staff	
Special Education Resource Room Teacher	57%
School Psychologist	6%
Speech Language Pathologist	52%
Occupational Therapist	47%
Special Education Teacher Consultant	35%
General Education Staff	
Literacy Specialist	44%
Interventionist	56%
Math Specialist	40%
Counseling Staff	
Social Worker	36%
School Counselor	41%
Other Certified Staff	
ELD Specialist	54%
Non-Certified Staff	
Student Support Aide	83%
Special Education Paraprofessional	84%
1:1 Paraprofessional	74%

Table 2: Time Spent With Students by Group Size

Role	% Of Time Spent With Students			
	1:1	2-4	5-8	9+
Special Education Staff				
Special Education Resource Room Teacher	21%	31%	25%	23%
School Psychologist*	83%	17%	0%	0%
Speech Language Pathologist	30%	54%	12%	5%
Occupational Therapist*	34%	31%	35%	0%
Special Education Teacher Consultant	49%	45%	3%	3%
General Education Staff				
Literacy Specialist	75%	12%	8%	5%
Interventionist	2%	6%	65%	26%
Math Specialist	44%	22%	2%	32%
Counseling Staff				
Social Worker	47%	31%	15%	7%
School Counselor*	25%	24%	4%	47%
Other Certified Staff				
ELD Specialist	9%	55%	21%	15%
Non-Certified Staff				
Student Support Aide	60%	31%	9%	0%
Special Education Paraprofessional	19%	28%	41%	12%
1:1 Paraprofessional*	27%	59%	13%	2%

The work will also consider a number of staffing issues, including:

- How to make the work more rewarding and sustainable for staff
- How to navigate special education staffing shortages
- How to thoughtfully set staffing levels
- This research will help answer key questions, such as:
 - What service delivery models are used, and are they consistent across the district?
 - How do current service delivery models compare to best practices?
 - What role do paraprofessionals play in each school?

The review also looks at systems and procedures, including:

- IEP referral process and IEP determination methodology
- Integration of special education with RTI (Response to Intervention)/MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports)

- Special education organizational structure, reporting lines, and clarity of roles, responsibilities, and decision-making
- Communication strategy and effectiveness of district communications

Stakeholder Focus Groups and Interviews

We balance data-driven analysis with extensive in-person and remote interviews. The hard data tells only half the story.

Small group interviews with a wide range of stakeholders – both general education and special education, both school and district-based, both certified and classified, representing a wide range of roles and responsibilities – will be conducted to gain a deep understanding of the district. Each district is staffed and structured differently, so we partner with the district in crafting the stakeholder engagement to provide a full picture.

During this research phase, the district leadership is an active thought partner. The district will help determine which roles should be interviewed, help create the lists of questions to be answered, and manage when staff share their thoughts.

Interviews and focus groups will be a mix of in-person and remote.

- Most focus groups and interviews are done in small groups of similar roles.
- Groups typically do not exceed six to eight people; smaller groups, when appropriate, are fine as well.

Sample List of Stakeholders Engaged

- Superintendent
- Senior teaching and learning district leader
- Senior financial district leader
- Senior special education district leader
- Other district-wide special education leaders
- Elementary school principals
- Middle school principals
- High school principals
- Building-based special education leaders
- Elementary special education teachers
- Secondary special education teachers
- Leaders of IEP team meetings and IEP referral testers
- Occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, and physical therapists
- School psychologists
- Behavior support staff
- School counselors

- Social workers
- Special education paraprofessionals
- Elementary teachers
- Secondary classroom teachers
- ELL teachers
- Interventionists, reading teachers, and Title 1 teachers
- Parents of students with disabilities
- Members of Parent Advisory Committee (or equivalent)
- School board (optional; must be less than quorum)
- Others, as appropriate

The final stakeholder engagement plan will be developed in partnership with district leaders. Many of these conversations are, in fact, preferred by staff and districts to be conducted by Zoom!

Classroom Observations

The New Solutions K12 team will also get a feel for the special programs and supports in place for children with disabilities and other students who struggle. Classroom visits help us create a full and rich picture of the school district's special education program and general education supports. This includes a sampling of programs across the district in elementary, middle, and high levels, such as:

- General education classrooms
- Inclusion classrooms
- Co-taught classrooms
- Resource classrooms
- Intervention classes
- Substantially separate classrooms
- Classes for students with emotional/behavioral needs
- Any other classes the district feels are important in demonstrating how the district serves students

The goal is not to visit every school and every program but rather to sample the types of programs available. Our classroom visits are modeled after a principal's walk-through. We will only ask a few questions of the staff if the situation allows, and we will be very respectful not to interrupt teaching and learning.

4. Create a Short List of Commendations and Opportunities and a Practical Path Forward

Too often, districts dedicated to doing better for their students wind up with lengthy plans that prove too unwieldy to put into action. We believe that great power lies in having a plan tightly focused on a very small set of the most important steps for improving outcomes. A short list is better than a long one.

Our report includes:

- Summaries of best practice research
- Commendations
- A short list of the highest impact opportunities that can address challenging behavior
- Extensive analysis of the district's current approach, services, and staffing
- Benchmarking of the district's current approach to best practices and best practice districts
- The report is a practical roadmap for a better future.

5. Begin Planning For Implementation

After sharing our findings, we helped the district begin its planning process. Our goal is not to simply produce a report but to help the district begin the process of producing real improvements for students.

Planning Process

The planning process has three elements:

1. **Structured reflection:** We will facilitate an in-person session to discuss and reflect on the findings and opportunities. This allows leaders to ask questions, probe the implications, and consider how to move forward.
2. **Prioritization:** This planning session is a structured way to prioritize where to focus the district's efforts over the next few years. Creating a short, focused list will lead to more change, more quickly. A short list is better than a long list. This session is conducted virtually.
3. **Action planning:** This final, in-person planning session will craft the initial steps towards implementing the prioritized opportunities. Our goal is real change, not a great report. This session is also a chance for school and district leaders to reflect on how past implementation efforts have fared, what lessons have been learned, and how to ensure a smooth and impactful implementation in the future.

Taken together, these steps create not just a practical road map for improving outcomes in post-pandemic times but also create buy-in and momentum for change. Best of all, the plan is cost-effective and improves the work-life of staff as well.

Timing

The goal is to move at a deliberate pace while balancing staff and leadership bandwidth. We will regularly check in with district leaders to assess the proper pacing. We anticipate beginning this work immediately and completing it by December 2026.

Pricing Proposal

The cost to provide the services outlined above is **\$135,000**. Price includes all expenses, including travel and travel time. This work will be a combination of in-person and virtual support.

This work can be funded by Title 1, Title II, or IDEA funds.

<p>Accepted By: Organization <u>Franklin Community Schools</u> Name <u>Debbie Gill</u> Signature <u><i>Debbie Gill</i></u> Date <u>May 11, 2026</u></p>	<p>Accepted By: New Solutions K12 Name <u>Nathan Levenson</u> Signature <u><i>Nathan Levenson</i></u> Date <u>5/18/26</u></p>
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About The New Solutions K12 Team

Nathan Levenson, President

Nate's experience as a superintendent, school board member, consultant, researcher, and private sector CEO allows him to bring a unique perspective to his passion for improving outcomes for students with disabilities. His life experience as a student with multiple disabilities before the passage of IDEA adds a personal perspective to his work. Nate works closely with superintendents and their leadership teams, Special ed leaders, policy makers, departments of education and state legislators to create practical solutions to pressing challenges of helping students with special needs. He combines bold thinking, practical insights, and an ability to bring diverse stakeholders together to guide sustained efforts that turn opportunities into realities.

K-12 Consulting

- Partnered with more than 300 districts in 30 states to help raise achievement and improve the fairness of both opportunity and outcomes in a cost-effective manner.
- Advised numerous state legislatures and ED on special education reform, weighted funding formulas, and addressing special ed staffing shortages.
- Helped lead pandemic recovery technical support effort for the state of Louisiana.
- Provided extensive training for special education leaders in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Louisiana, and Vermont.

District Superintendent

- Superintendent, Arlington, MA. Oversaw efforts that reduced the high school special education achievement gap by 40 points and reduced the number of struggling readers K-5 by 68%, despite tight budgets.

National Thought Leader

- Author of *Six Shifts to Improve Special Education and Other Interventions*, published by Harvard Education Press, which serves as both a call to action and a critical guide for administrators looking for more effective, affordable ways to close the achievement gap.
- Led a multi-year effort to improve special education across Vermont, which resulted in the passage of sweeping reforms (ACT 173).
- Conducted primary research and authored white papers for Center for American Progress, The American Enterprise Institute and The Fordham Foundation.
- Author of six books and contributor to two anthologies. Wrote roughly 50 articles in nearly all major K-12 publications, countless blogs and webinars, and Op-Eds in the Washington Post and Wall Street Journal.
- Keynote presenter at more than 100 conferences across the country.

Education:

- BA from Dartmouth College
- MBA with distinction from Harvard Business School
- Graduate of the Broad Foundation Urban Superintendents Academy

Boards:

- Former Chair, Boxford, MA School Board
- Former Vice President, Merrimack Valley Habitat for Humanity

Angie Balsley, Ed.D., Consultant

Angie is an accomplished education leader with over 25 years of experience advancing special education systems, leadership development, and dispute resolution practices across the United States. She served a two-year term as the Policy & Legislative Chairperson for the National Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) and a six-year term as the President of Indiana CASE (ICASE). She is a frequent national speaker—delivering keynotes and workshops for organizations such as State Departments of Education, Council for Administrators of Special Education, National School Attorneys Association, and the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs. Angie has been honored with the Distinguished Service Award by ICASE (2024) and the Distinguished Humanitarian Award by Kiwanis. Her recent publications focus on advancing dispute resolution capacity and collaborative leadership in special education.

K–12 Consulting

- Advises districts and state agencies on leadership strategy, legal risk assessment, and program analysis for students with disabilities and other learners.
- Facilitates professional learning, dispute resolution processes, and systemic improvement initiatives across multiple states.
- Conducts keynote presentations and workshops on topics including leadership, dispute resolution, legal compliance, and collaborative communication.
- Contributing author on national publications advancing dispute resolution practices and leadership in special education.

Professional Experience

- CEO, Unified Leadership, leads a national consulting practice specializing in special education leadership coaching, legal risk assessment, and systemic improvement.
- Senior Consultant, CADRE, provides national expertise in dispute resolution, systems change, and professional development.
- Executive Director, Earlywood Educational Services, led special education programming, financial stewardship, policy development, and workforce leadership for a regional cooperative.
- Director of Special Services, Bremen Public Schools, administered special education, Title III, Title IX, and 504 programs; ensured compliance and led instructional services.
- Special Education Teacher, Elkhart County Special Education Cooperative, taught students with significant disabilities.

Education

- Ed.D., Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Indiana University
- M.S., Strategic Management, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University
- M.S., School Administration, Indiana University
- B.S., Special Education, Ball State University

Sarah Levenson, Senior Consultant

Sarah brings years of professional experience to New Solutions K12 in the areas of consulting, financial analysis, project management, and client support. Sarah leverages these skills for New Solutions K12 to help improve student outcomes across the country.

K-12 Consulting Experience:

- Partner with dozens of districts in over 15 states to review special education services, systems, and practices to identify ways to improve opportunities and outcomes for students of all ability levels and needs.
- Co-wrote Special Education Best Practices Playbook for the state department of education.
- Developed and launched staffing and scheduling online learning courses to help school and district leaders implement staffing and scheduling best practices.
- Supported strategic review of elementary and secondary school schedules, staffing, and programming in an 8,000-student district in Georgia and identified ~\$2.5M in potential savings.
- Supported the creation of a 5-year strategic plan for a school district with 16,000 students.

Other Professional Experience:

- Senior Strategic Consultant, FactSet. Led large-scale implementations of financial technology software for clients across the financial services industry.
- Consultant, FactSet. Supported financial services clients with market research, data analysis, and financial modeling projects.
- Middle school tutor. Served as both a writing and math tutor in the Easton Area School District.

Education:

- BA with honors from Lafayette College (PA)

Volunteering

- Elementary reading tutor with the AmeriCorps Reading Partners program

Liza Fryman, Consultant

Liza Fryman brings years of professional experience to New Solutions K12 in the areas of project management, financial analysis, and budgeting. Liza leverages these skills for New Solutions K12 to help improve student outcomes in districts across the country.

K-12 Consulting Experience:

- Partnered with the Vermont Agency of Education to help promote and support SUs across the state embrace strategic budgeting practices.
- Assisted with the creation of the Vermont Education Funding Memo to be distributed throughout the entire state.
- Supported multiple analyses and strategic reviews of both elementary and secondary schools across multiple school districts.

Other Professional Experience:

- Post Production Assistant Accountant, Netflix - Over 5 years of experience in helping maintain large film budgets across multiple departments, financial analysis of payments and contracts, and project management across three films simultaneously.
- Post Production Accounting Clerk, Netflix - Coordinated with vendors to ensure accurate payments, extensively researched and pulled payments for frequent tax and insurance audits, and organized paperwork across upwards of 30 projects.
- Accounting Clerk, "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood" (Sony) - Organized all vendor information and set up of new accounts in accounting software system along with basic input of purchase orders and invoices

Education:

- BA with honors from Lafayette College (PA)