

RED WING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

AN EDUCATION SERVICES ANALYSIS

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Respectfully Submitted:

April 2020



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INTRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE PROCESS SUMMARY

The leadership of the Red Wing Public Schools (hereafter, referred to as the District or RWPS) commissioned this review of specific areas that support struggling learners. In conducting this analysis, the review team employed proprietary methodology from a pre-established paradigm (i.e., an Educational Services Analysis), which triangulates information gleaned from qualitative and quantitative information.

More specifically, the qualitative analyses comprised: (1) a series of interviews or surveys with District leadership, administrators from the Goodhue County Education District (the Cooperative), school-based administrators, special education teachers, general education teachers, related service providers, and para-professionals;¹ (2) a review of documents (i.e., IEPs) to ascertain the degree and appropriateness of services; (3) non-evaluative site visits to all the District schools to ascertain the array of services and programs available to SWDs.

Quantitative analyses included: (1) multidimensional analyses of information contained within the IEPs; (2) comparative analyses of staffing and corresponding workloads; (3) student outcome data; and (4) financial data pertaining to programmatic expenditures. Given the number of data points, the results that are reported within this document represent recurring themes from the interviews (outlying comments were not included as part of the primary findings) coupled with quantitative data.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to acknowledge District staff and school personnel and especially Ms. Cherie Johnson, the Executive Director of the Goodhue County Education District (the Cooperative). This project necessitated a great amount of effort in facilitating logistics and in securing documents; the team is grateful for the efforts of all central office and school-based staff. Throughout the entire process, the cooperative relationship between Futures and the District has enabled the team to work with District leadership in a collegial and transparent manner to maximize the benefits of this analysis for the District.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSDs:	<i>County School Districts</i>
FAPE:	<i>Free Appropriate Public Education</i>
FTE:	<i>Full-time equivalent</i>
GCED:	<i>Goodhue County Education District</i>
IEP:	<i>Individualized Education Program</i>
LRE:	<i>Least Restrictive Environment</i>
MDE:	<i>Minnesota Department of Public Education</i>

¹ The complete breakdown of interviewees is presented in **Appendix A**

OT:	<i>Occupational Therapist or occupational therapy services</i>
PD:	<i>Professional development</i>
PT:	<i>Physical Therapist or physical therapy services</i>
MTSS:	<i>Multi-Tiered System of Supports</i>
SDI:	<i>Specially Designed Instruction</i>
SEL:	<i>Social-Emotional Learning</i>
S-LP:	<i>Speech-Language Pathologist or speech-language pathology services</i>
SWDs:	<i>Students with Disabilities</i>

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Achievement

Gap: Any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between students with disabilities and students without disabilities (for the purpose of this report).

Continuum

Of Supports: The range of programs, personnel, and resources to support all students.

Co-Teaching: A model whereby a special education teacher and a general education teacher jointly plan and deliver instruction to students with and without disabilities.

Effectiveness: The degree to which the services under review promote optimal educational outcomes and student access to the curriculum.

Efficiency: The degree to which the special education services and personnel under review are responsibly, uniformly, and optimally utilized to ensure District resources are being expended in a fiscally sound manner.

Horizontal

Alignment: Practices that correlate special education instruction to grade-level expectations.

Ownership: The philosophy whereby general and special education staff view all students as their responsibility.

Vertical

Alignment: The degree to which the transition of SWDs, as they progress from one grade, school, or program to another, is seamless.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

The staff of Futures is pleased to provide this report of the comprehensive analysis of the programs and services that was conducted from November 2019 through January 2020. The primary purposes of this analysis are to describe, and to provide suggestions to improve, specific areas within its education delivery system that included:

- (1) A Review of Programs and Services to Support Students with Disabilities
- (2) Related Services
- (3) Para-Professional Supports
- (4) Organizational Structure and District Coordination of Programs and Services
- (5) MTSS and Early Intervention Practices
- (6) Professional Development

Because these six areas are presumed to overlap, the report considers these with respect to Organizational Considerations and Continuum of Services. In turn, each area is divided into Overview, Findings (comprising Driving Questions), and Areas of Opportunity.

METHODOLOGY

- Fifty-six (56) confidential interviews with central office leadership, school-based administration, certified teachers, non-certified instructional staff, and related service providers (please see **Appendix A** for interviewee roster)
- Non-evaluative on-site visits to all District school locations (including the Tower View Alternative Program and the Colvill Family Center, which houses the District’s pre-school program)
- Documents provided to the Futures staff (e.g., Staff Rosters, Organizational Charts, etc.)
- Data retrieved from the District’s IEP system to conduct a stratified, random review of IEPs across the variables of age, grade, attending school, and educational disabilities (N=100)
- Student data from the Minnesota Department of Education (<https://public.education.mn.gov/>)

CLIMATE, CULTURE, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

OVERVIEW

The authors intentionally begin this document with a consideration of the cultural capacities of, and within, the special education delivery system. The reason for this is that without the requisite capacities, the forthcoming recommendations concerning the programmatic and fiscal enhancements will have less potential for successful implementation.

With respect to personnel as addressed in Driving Question #5, it is not possible to consider the efficacy of the District’s continuum of services and the concomitant horizontal and vertical alignment without an understanding of the current staffing models. To this end, the personnel under review available to support SWDs was gauged by benchmarking the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members to this overall District special education population of 515 Pre-K-12 SWDs (as per the most recent data). In essence, this statistic is an “availability ratio index (ARI)” and allows an equivalent comparison to other districts with respect to staffing from a “macro” perspective.

FINDINGS

Driving Question #1: Is there a healthy culture of student “ownership” within the District?

- As described by interviewees, ownership, or responsibility for SWDs, in the District has not been fully embraced. It was repeatedly noted that the degree of shared responsibility, or ownership, varies considerably, with perceptions of evident ownership ranging from 30% to 85% among staff.

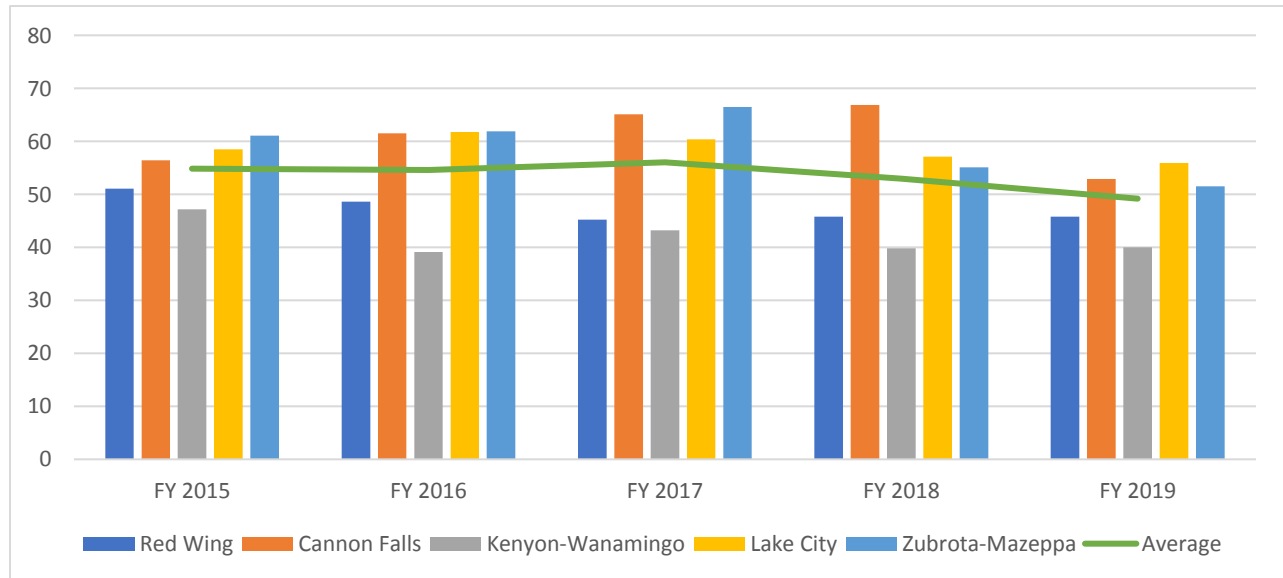
This lack of universal ownership may impact the extent to which SWDs are fully integrated to the general education experience in the least restrictive environment. It also may adversely impact the extent to which some general educators accept personal responsibility for the total educational experience of those SWDs assigned to them.

- It was noted that there is minimal integrated co-teaching (ICT) at the elementary level and, where it does exist, it is often not being implemented in with fidelity to best practice and/or consistent with programmatic design. A review of IEPs for students in grades (K- 4; N=28) corroborated this report. In a related topic, there was a general perception that the District needs to get the curriculum better organized.
- Although it was noted that there are professional learning communities (PLCs) to promote collaboration and planning, they are not consistently working well. More specifically, it was reported that there is frustration with the recent Math adoption, including the large amount of money spent evaluating alternative curricula and then almost no allocation to help teachers for implementation.
- Where there was particular tension between general and special education staff, it was reported to be related to students with behavior issues. Although in their first year of PBIS, the focus has been on the “adult behaviors” and working on strategies to minimize behavioral issues in students.
- To the degree that inclusionary models are correlated with Culture and Climate (among other factors), it is interesting to compare the District’s data on Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to the State trends and geography (i.e., those districts within Goodhue County²).

More specifically, consistent with staff reports, only 46% percent of Students with Disabilities (SWDs) are spending at least 80% of their school day in the general education environment, which compares to a County average of 49%, which is the second lowest in the CSD cohort. As indicated in **Figure 1**, the District has consistently been lower than the average across the last 5 reported school years.

² Comprising the following districts: Cannon Falls Area Schools, Kenyon-Wanamingo School District, Lake City Public Schools, and Zumbrota-Mazeppa Schools; given its size, the Goodhue Public Schools were not included.

Figure 1. The Percentage of SWDs Spending At Least 80% in the General Education Environment



Driving Question #2: Are IEP Meetings and Processes Conducted in a Manner that is Efficient?

- Administration and staff were working to have students with disabilities receive their education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The District does have a document specifying the broad continuum of support services across the schools.
- It was reported that the climate at IEP meetings involving reductions or discontinuations in service (e.g. declassifications), for reasons of student progress, was most often celebratory. This was attributed to the solid communication and relationship building with parents and the inherent trust that parents have with the District.

Driving Question #3: Do Staff Perceive That They Have Sufficient Resources, Materials and Professional Development?

- Respondents were consistent in their perceptions that there was a need for enhancement of professional development opportunities on current and emerging best practices. Although they were appreciative of the District’s efforts in support of professional development, they voiced significant desire and need for an integrated, focused and sustained professional development initiative.
- Special education teachers reported frustration at being denied access to workshops/conferences that are targeted at helping teachers work with specific disabilities. There is minimal monitoring of progress and the less experienced teachers are struggling.
- Paraprofessionals expressed some dissatisfaction about unexplained transfers to different schools and programs. In several cases the para-professionals had new caseloads for which they received no training.

Driving Question #4: As Currently Constituted, Is Central Office Staffed to Meet the District’s Needs?

- The administrator of special education (i.e. Executive Director) is not actually a District employee, but rather, an employee of the Regional Cooperative. As such, the Executive Director has administrative responsibility to all six of the component districts of the Cooperative, of which the District is the largest (comprising approximately 48% of all of the special education students). In an effort to ameliorate what would appear to be an overwhelming array of responsibilities, the District also employs a Director.
- Because the Cooperative and the District each have responsibilities for different parts of the special education services, staff were often not clear regarding who is in charge of specific functions. For example, staff was unsure of who to go to for professional development approvals. The constant turnover of the District Special Education Coordinator/Director, on a nearly annual basis, has added to this confusion.

In a related matter, it was also reported that staff have perceived a schism between the District Superintendent and the Executive Director. This tension, whether real or imagined, has led to the perception that leadership is not on the same page and providing an important unified message to school-based and community stakeholders.

- From a quantitative perspective, the administrative structure which comprises 1.64 FTEs (the .5 Executive Director, the 1 FTE Director, and the .14 FTE Early Childhood Coordinator) to oversee 515 SWDs, equates to a ratio of one administrator for every 315 SWDs, and compares to an expected range of 1:150-1:250 from the authors’ work nationally and is leanly staffed compared to other CSDs that average approximately 1:200.

Driving Question #5: At the Instructional Level, Is the District Staffed to Expectations?

Figure 2. The Availability Ratio Index (ARI) for the Special Education Staff

Discipline	FTE	Ratio	Interpretation	Source
Certified Teachers	31	16	Staffed to Expectations	State
Para-professionals	61	8.4	See Commentary Below	---
S-LP	5.6	92	Leanly Staffed	ASHA National Data
OT Staff	2.7	191	Staffed to Expectations	National Data
PT	1.3	396	Staffed to Expectations	National Data
Psychology	3	953	Staffed to Expectations	NASP/National Data

Additional Commentary

Instructional Staff: A review of the certified teachers’ workloads reveals that the majority are within MDE’s policy with respect to caseload range. Nine are over the policy range, and 9 are under. When the number of certified and non-certified staff the 92 FTEs equates to a ratio of 179 for every 1,000 SWDs; this equates to State average of 163 for every 1,000 SWDs as reported by comparing to a State ratio of 167 staff for every 1,000 SWDs as reported by Winkler, et. Al (2011).

Speech-Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapy Staff, and Physical Therapists: An analysis of the service providers’ schedules and the IEPs suggest that they are being efficient with their time and providing services in accordance with an educational model.

School Psychology: The psychology ARI of 953 compares to the *National Association of School Psychologists* (NASP) recommended ratio range of 1:500 to 1:700 students (general and special education); however, in the authors’ experience districts typically range between 1:700-1:1,000. Additionally, if one considers psychologists as part of a behavioral health department, there are 16 FTEs (the 3 psychologists, 5 school social workers, and 3 mental health counselors, the ARI for SWDs to behavioral health staff is 39.6:1; this is within expectations.

Driving Question #6: Are the District’s Expenditures Devoted to Special Education Within Expectations?

- As indicated below, the expenditures as a proportion of the operating budget (**Figure 3**) and per pupil spending is significantly higher than the CSDs. In a corollary finding, the District’s per (special education) pupil expenditures has also been historically higher than the CSDs (**Figure 4**).

Figure 3. Special Education Expenditures as a Percentage of the Operating Budget

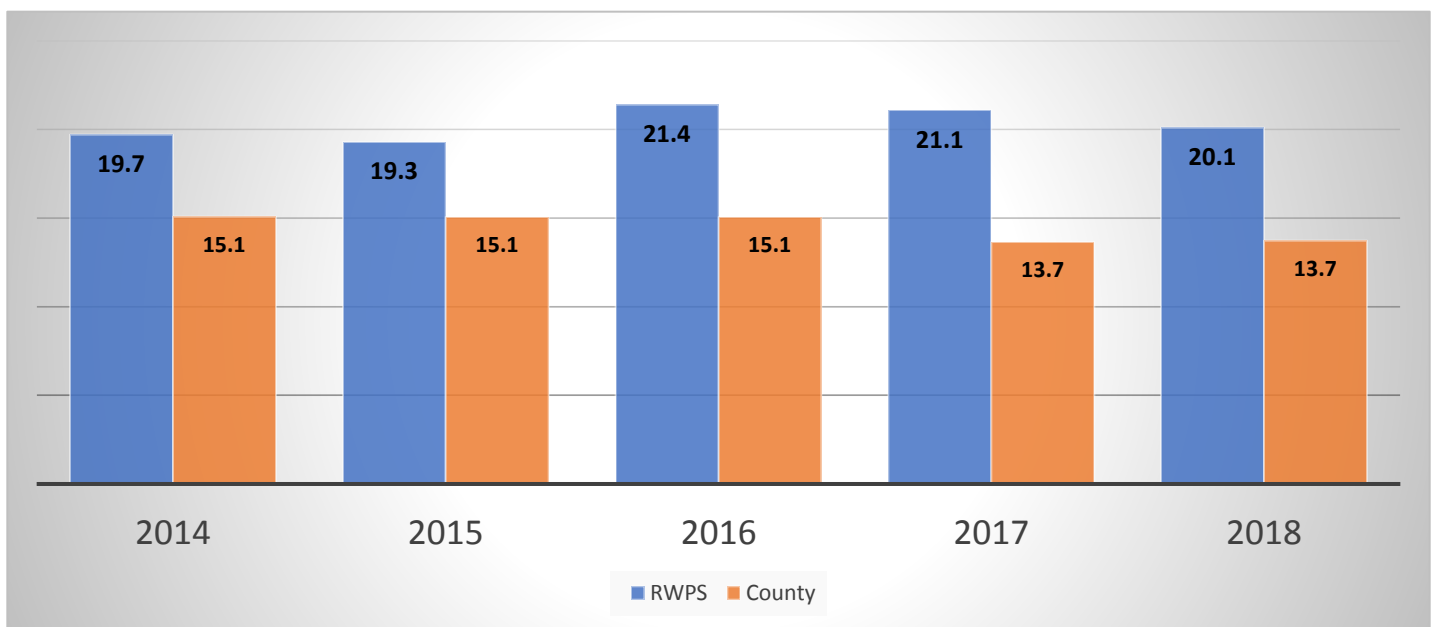
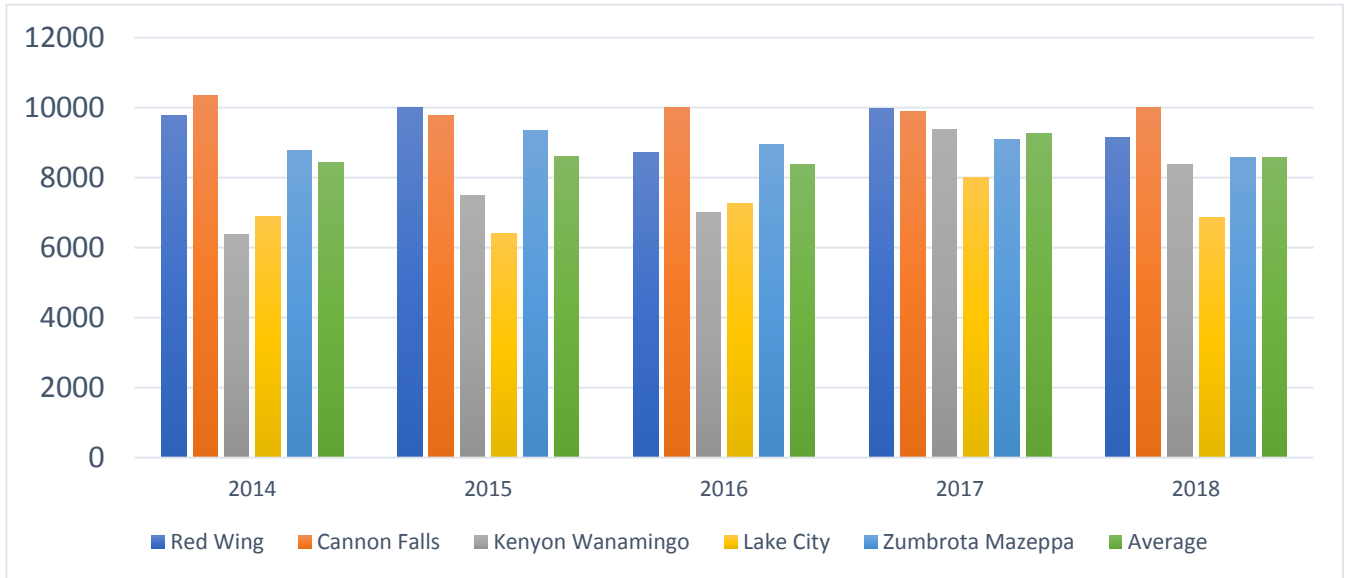
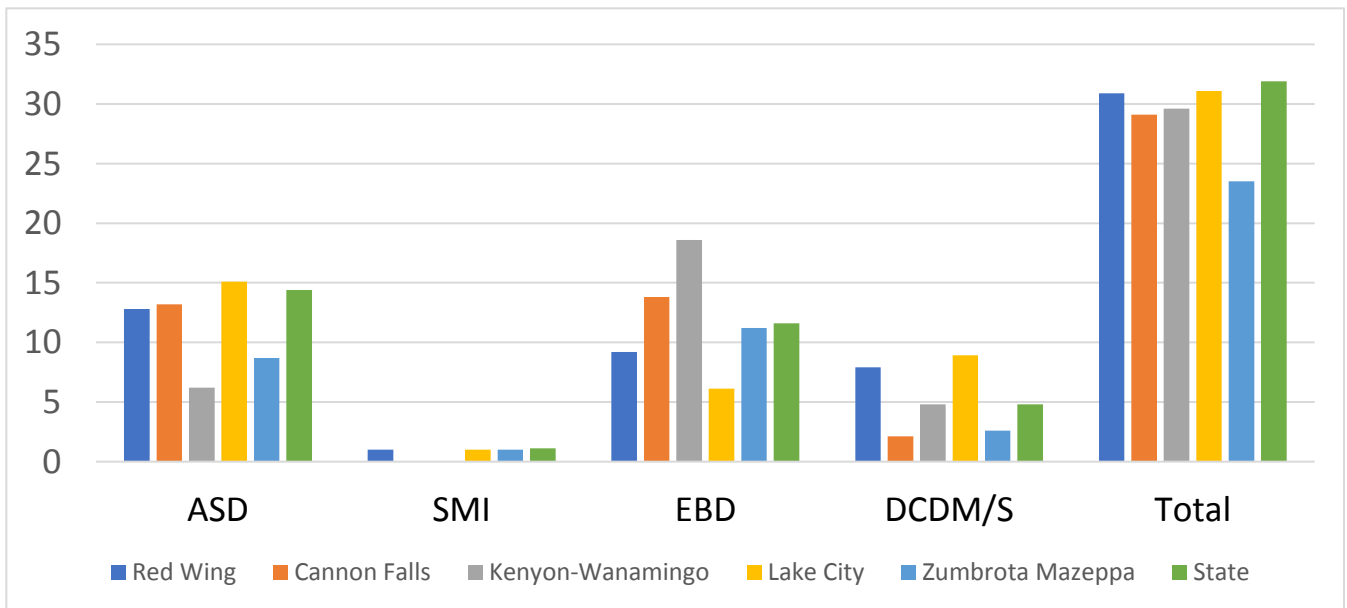


Figure 4. Per Pupil Special Education Expenditures (Expressed in Dollars)



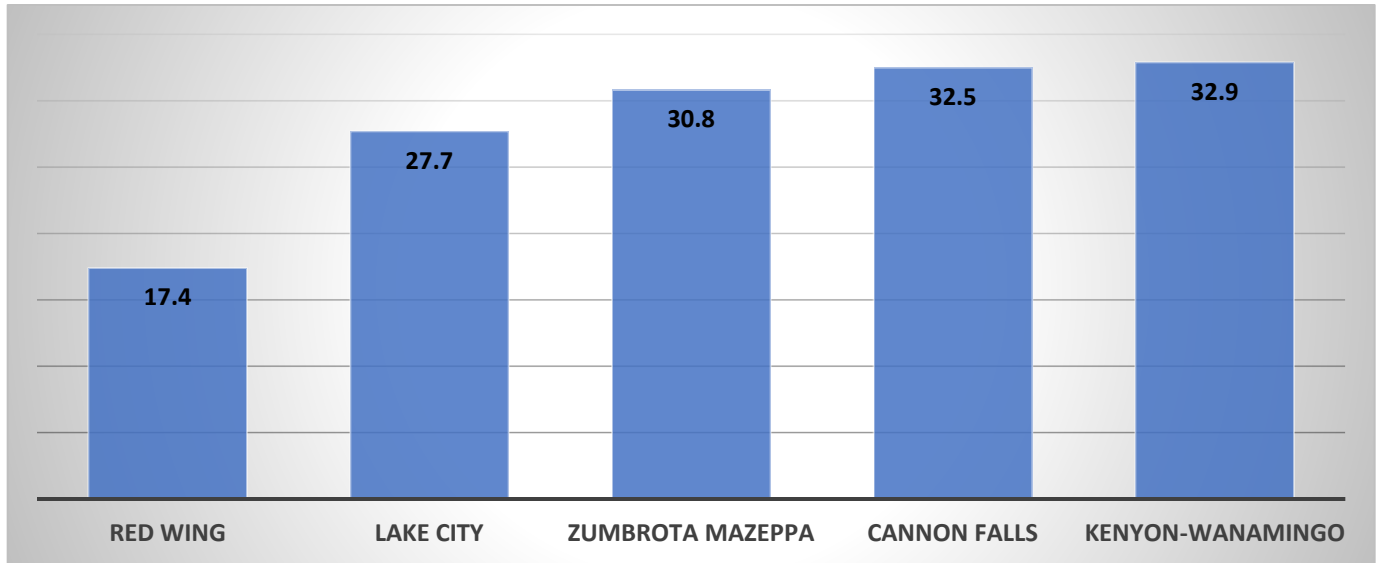
- One of the major factors in considering a per student cost is the constellation of the high-needs disabilities. As indicated in **Figure 5**, the District’s high needs students, which constitute 30.9% of the total SWD population, is the second highest in the CSD.

Figure 5. The Percentage of the Autism, Severe Multiple Impairment (SMI), Emotional or Behavioral Disorder (EBD), and Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (DCDM/S) Among All SWDs.



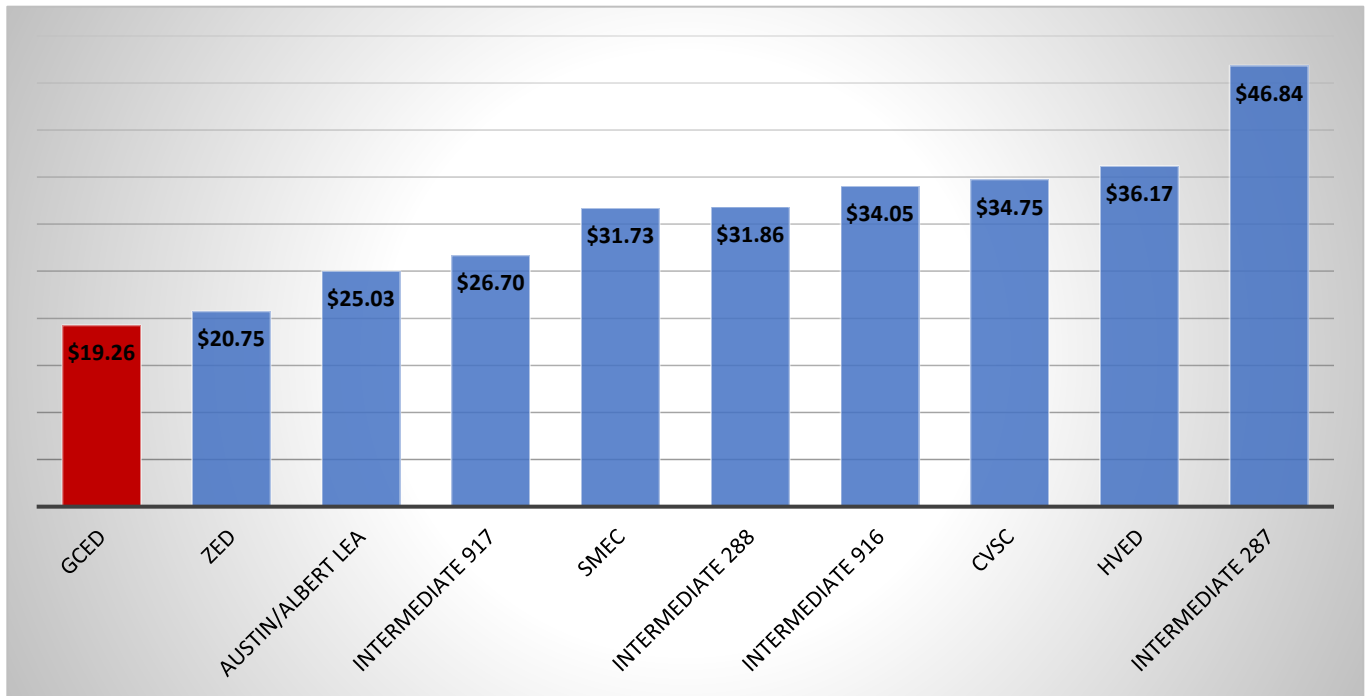
- With respect to the District’s allocations to GECD, as indicated in **Figure 6**, the District’s contribution as a percentage of its special education budget is the lowest among all the CSDs.

Figure 6. *The Percentage of the Special Education Budget Devoted to GCED³*



In a related finding, GCED’s tuition rates compare very favorably to other Cooperatives; in fact they are lowest in the comparison to all other reported cooperatives.

Figure 7. *A Comparison of Tuition Billing Rates by Service Hour*



³ Data taken from 2019-20 Sedra Expenditure Data and 19-20 Preliminary Bills

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

- Maximize District PD resources, via a unified PD curriculum for administrators, certified teachers, para-professionals, and related service providers (whether District or GECD staff) to work collaboratively to meet the needs of all students (i.e., with or without disabilities). It is expected that the priority areas might include those of immediate relevance that might include co-teaching, behavior management, and early intervening practices.

To ensure the content validity of these unified offerings the Director might directly survey faculty across the District and collaborate with the District PD Committee to identify and promote meaningful PD opportunities to promote the competencies of staff in meeting the needs of all students with disabilities. To enhance their connectivity to schools and “empowerment,” perhaps ask a paraprofessional from each school to sit on PD committees.

- To promote harmony, develop a unified vision, and enhance the working environment among general and special education departments across the District, leadership may consider the following:
 - ✓ Create a mission statement explicitly containing elements of general and special education and make this visible to personnel at all schools;
 - ✓ If contractual parameters allow, expand the teacher evaluation process to include the ownership issue, to recognize those teachers who take ownership of all students, and to provide specific Professional Improvement Plans to those who do not; and
 - ✓ As new teachers are hired in the District, provide all principals with an operational hiring guide, thus ensuring all teachers understand the ownership standard of their jobs.
- As part of leadership’s continued plan to update processes and procedures, it may also be beneficial to re-visit the establishment of descriptions that further define the in-District continuum of programs so that students have access to consistent frameworks and curriculum as they progress from grade to grade and from school to school. This would span the forthcoming discussion of ensuring co-teaching models are included to programs supporting students with intensive needs.

With respect to “rolling” out the information, develop user-friendly formats that could be placed at each school and on the District’s website.

- To improve the understanding among staff regarding whom to go to and in which circumstances, it is suggested that the Executive Director and the Director formulate a user-friendly flow chart-algorithm for administrators and school-based staff that will better define rolls and whom should be contacted in certain situations.
- Based on the analysis presented in the previous section, the District is expending a significant amount of its financial resources to GCED. However, the District is getting a return on its investment (ROI) with respect to the administrative and programmatic supports. That is, although there are improvements that can improve the ROI, these are considered to be more qualitative in nature and no wholesale changes (e.g., complete divestiture) are recommended.

One of the immediate recommendations, which has a direct bearing on the perception stakeholders’ perceptions of GCED and its value is to improve the common messaging from the Superintendent

and the Director. It will be important for these leaders to co-present to various stakeholders (e.g., the School Board) that there is mutual benefit from the District’s relationship with GCED and to simultaneously display a unified purpose. In conjunction, there should be a forum for open, honest communication between the Superintendent and the Executive Director outside of forums that may include other administrators (e.g., Cabinet Meetings).

- Given the myriad of duties within the purview of the Director of Special Education, consider “off-loading” some duties to other building-based personnel. This will help ensure long-term success of the current Director and create school-based capacity. Although there are many models that may be considered, the one described below is one that we believe may lead to a more streamlined process to promote better vertical articulation, improve “real-time” staff support to principals and school-based staff, and also aligns with the District’s short- and long-term strategic planning.

This model (see **Figure 8**) creates two coordinator positions, one serving elementary-level and the other secondary-level. These coordinators would have a direct report to the Director of Special Education while simultaneously having a “dotted line” reporting structure to school principals.

Figure 8: *Proposed Organizational Model*



CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS

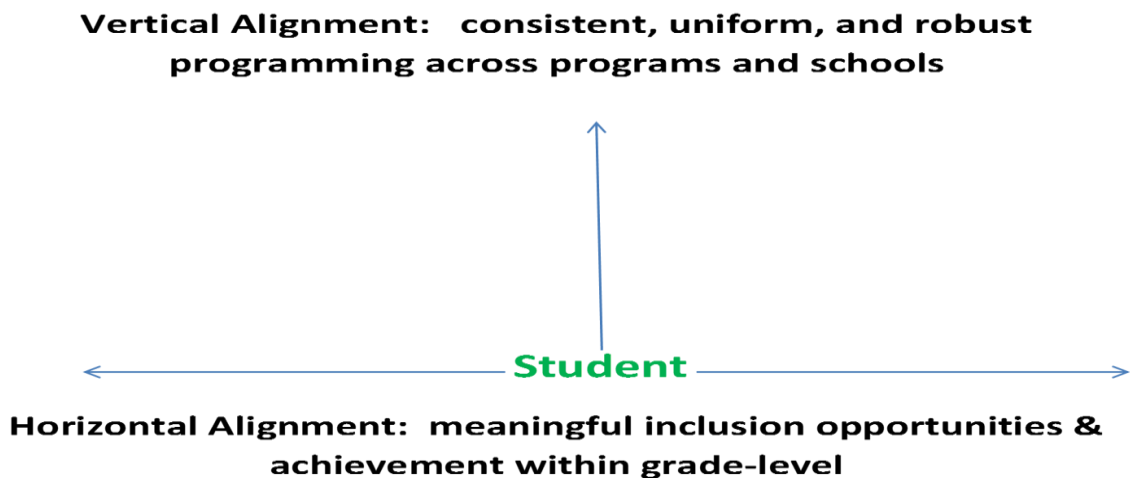
OVERVIEW

Although the term “continuum of services” is associated with special education, it is useful to broaden this definition to “continuum of supports” because it can be used to conceptualize a system of instructional and programmatic provisions for all students (i.e., students with and without disabilities). Ideally, this continuum provides programming, personnel, and resources to appropriately address the educational needs of students in the general education classrooms; or, if needed, in special education programs designed to be closely integrated with the general education environment.

The other framework that is inherent in a programmatic discussion encompasses the student-centric constructs of *horizontal alignment* and *vertical alignment*. Horizontal Alignment refers to practices that correlate special education instruction and supports to grade-level expectations; it can be measured academically by student achievement and more broadly by the quantity and quality of opportunities that

SWDs have with their typical peers. Vertical Alignment is the degree to which the transition of SWDs as they progress from one grade, school, or program, is seamless; vertical alignment requires consistent, uniform, and robust programming that ensures the needs of SWDs are consistently met until they graduate or are deemed ineligible to receive special education services. **Figure 9** illustrates these two dimensions of alignment.

Figure 9. *The Two-dimensions of Alignment*



Source: *Futures Education, 2020*

FINDINGS

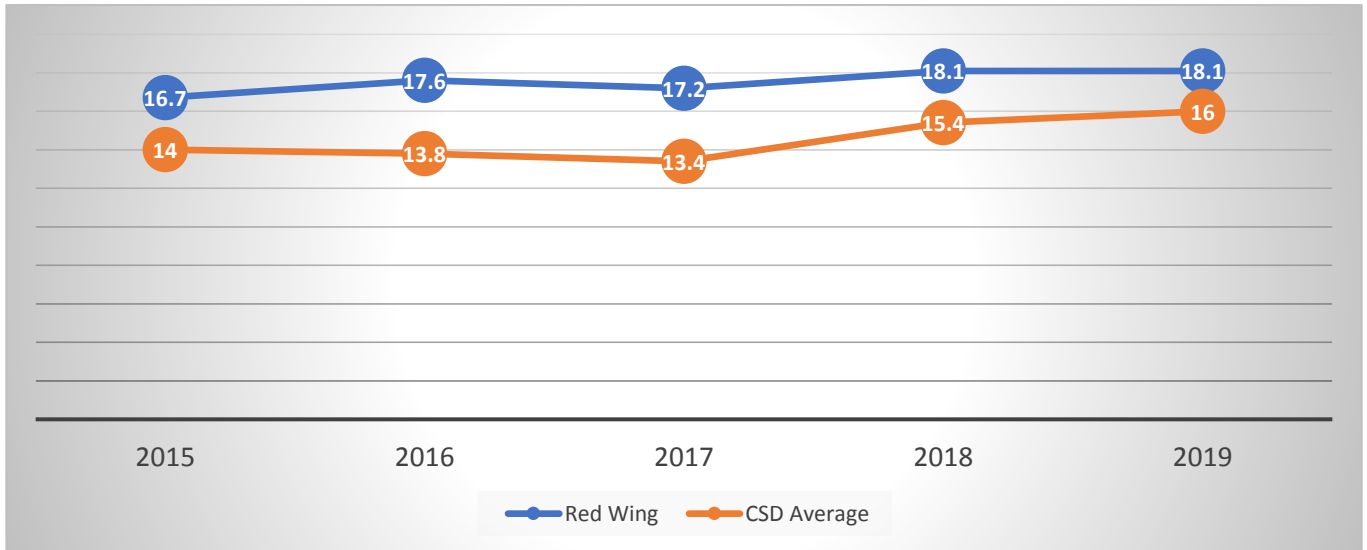
Driving Question #7: As Currently Constituted, Is the District’s Early Intervening Process Working Well?

- Interviewees indicated that the District had been working on MTSS and that the initiative appears to still be a work in progress. MTSS was within the administrative areas of responsibility of the Cooperative Executive Director, who also had responsibility for Special Education. This may have been a contributing factor to reports that general educators in the District did not own MTSS as a general education initiative. Perhaps the best descriptor offered by a respondent was that, “MTSS is very unclear.”
- Despite a myriad of MTSS forms and documents that were provided to the authors, interviewees stated that there is not an awareness of a clearly articulated District plan for MTSS, and there was a voiced need for professional development on an overarching plan, as well as, specific topics essential to effective implementation (e.g. intervention strategies for classroom teachers at Tier 1).
- Although this practice varies from school to school, some being more consistent than others, MTSS staff meetings were not held regularly across the District. Similarly, the extent to which MTSS is being implemented varies from school to school.
- The focus of MTSS has been on literacy and math. Staff would like to see more help for struggling students, especially in the area of behavior; particularly in view that PBIS is in its early stages of

implementation.

- With respect to the relatively high number of identified students (i.e., 18%, as compare to the County averages below) respondents stated that although a more robust MTSS process may ameliorate this, the nature of the student demographics is also a significant factor in understanding this “outlying” data point.

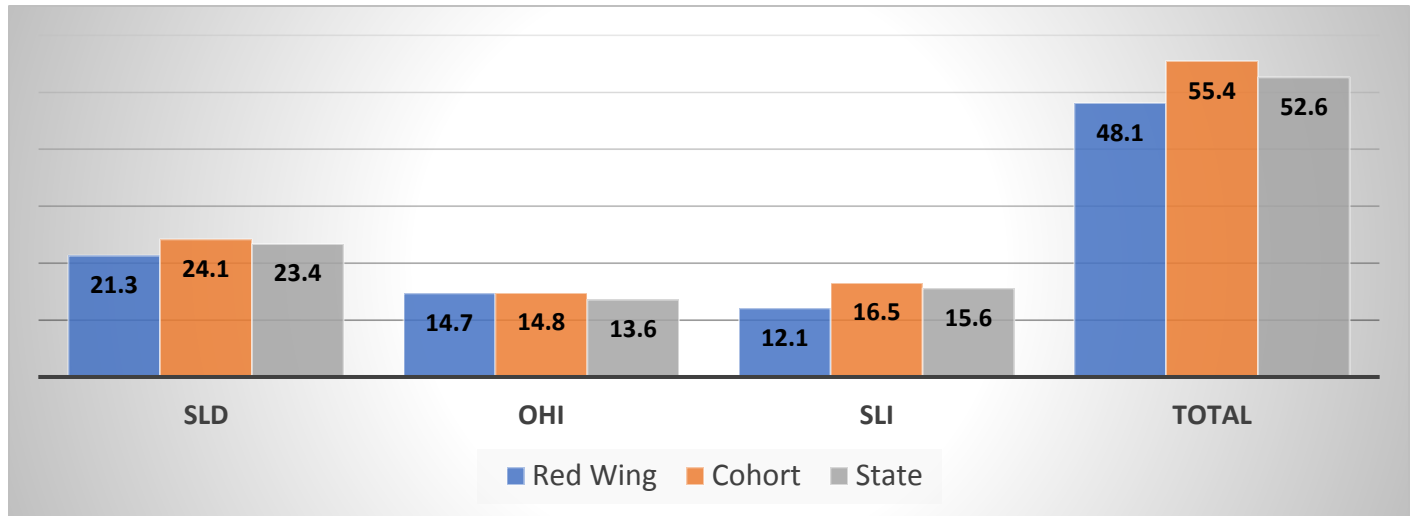
Figure 10. Special Education Trend Data



- Another indicator of an effective early intervening process is the degree to which high frequency-lower needs disability categories may be over-represented in that these students may not be receiving supports in general education that are meeting their instructional needs.

As indicated in **Figure 11**, there was not a disproportionate number of SWDs classified with the three primary areas of high-incidence, low needs disabilities (i.e., specific learning disabilities, other health impairment, or speech-language impairment) in comparison with the CSDs. In fact, the District is lower in its aggregate percentage of these disability groups, suggesting that MTSS may be more effective than the staff’s overall perceptions.

Figure 11. The Percentage of the Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Speech-Language Impairment (SLI) and Other Health Impairment (OHI) Disability Category Among All SWDs



- In a related matter regarding possible over-identification, the District is to be commended for its consistent record of not having disproportionate representation for sub-groups or for specific disabilities.⁴

Driving Question #8: Once Identified Is the In-District Continuum of Services Meeting Student Needs?

- In meeting its responsibility to provide all students with a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, the District has developed an appropriate range of special education programs and services in accordance with federal and state regulations (classroom, resource room support, sub-separate classrooms within District schools, and off-campus programs (e.g., the Alternative Program and those programs housed in the Cooperative).

However, as mentioned previously, it should be noted that co-teaching is poorly developed, and is only sporadically employed across the District.

One of the reported challenges is that of vertical articulation. Students move relatively rapidly through three (3) different buildings and thus there is a loss of knowledge about SWDs and those requiring MTSS services as the students transfer from building to building.

- To the degree that special education is meant to “level the playing field,” performance has been mixed with respect to the performance of SWDs. The percentage of SWDs graduating (**Figure 12**) is lower across 5 years in comparison to the CSD average. However, as indicated in **Figure 13**, the achievement gap is narrowing across the last 3 years in comparison to County averages and the combined proficiency rate for SWDs (**Figure 14**) is the highest in the Cohort Group.⁵

⁴ Disproportionality is over-representation of minority students identified with a learning disability or other type of disability under the IDEA. When a minority group's numbers in special education are statistically higher than they should be, they are considered disproportionate.

⁵ Pre-school outcome data is presented in **Appendix B**.

Figure 12. Graduation Rates of the SWD Cohort

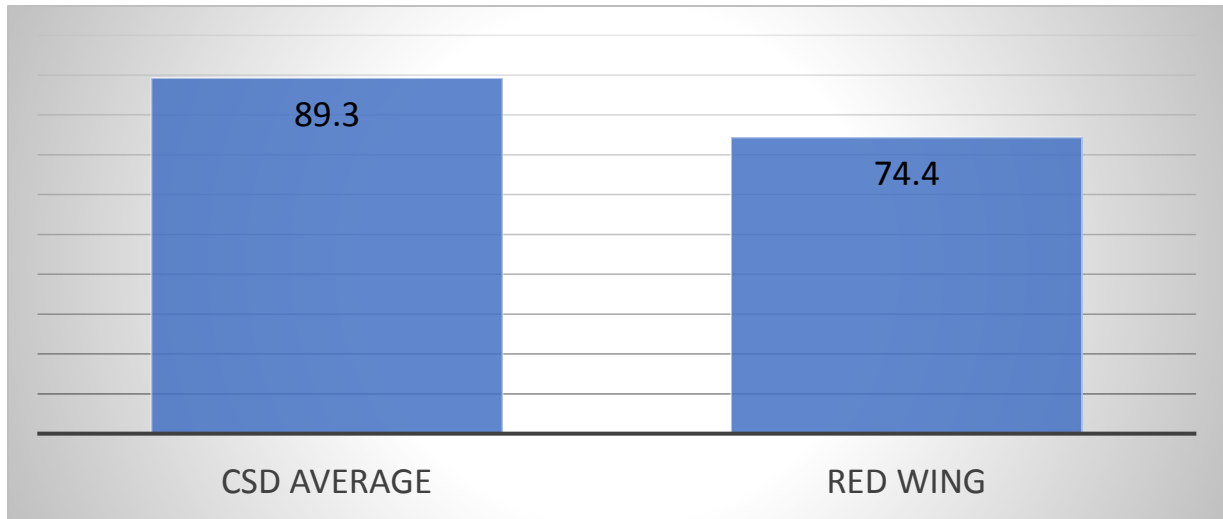


Figure 13. Achievement Gap Data for ELA and Math

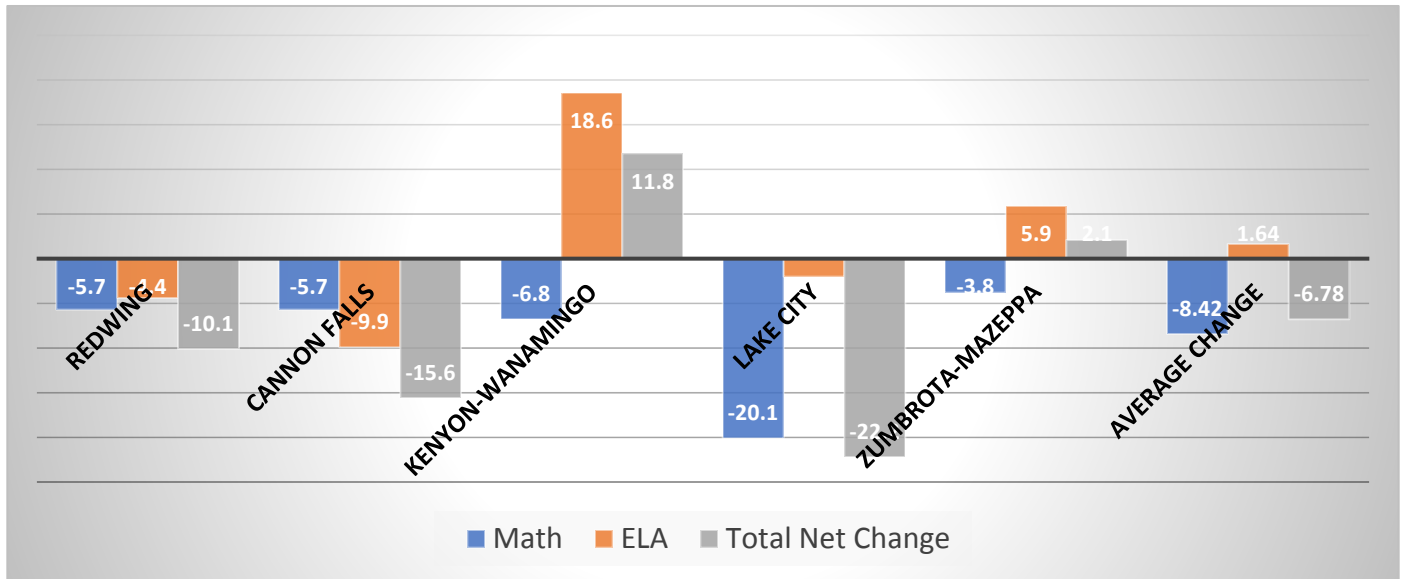
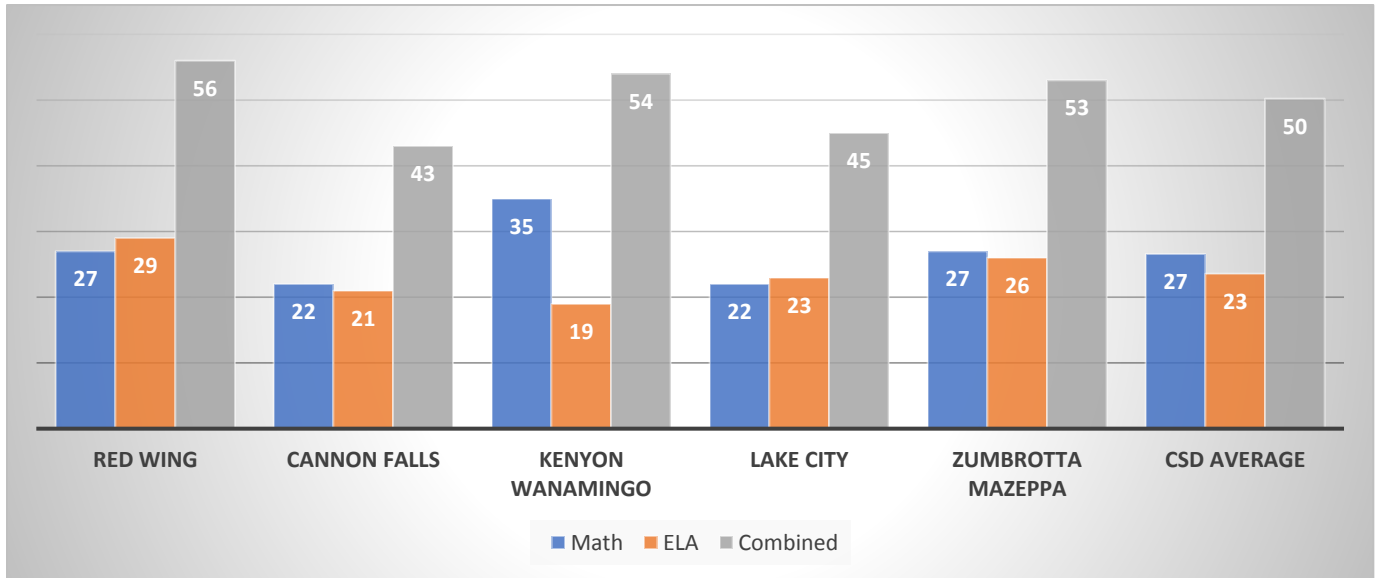


Figure 14. Proficiency Rate for SWDs Across ELA and Math Averaged Across the Last Three Reported Years



- In a related finding, a stratified, random review of IEPs (N=100) revealed that the IEPs were marked by:
 - ✓ Present levels of achievement that consistently described the students’ needs
 - ✓ Goals that were clear, measurable, and linked to Grade Level Expectations standards.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

MTSS

Ownership and Capacity

- Leadership at both the central office and school-based level will continue to emphasize the importance that general education teachers see MTSS as a general education initiative and responsibility, and not as a “pass-through” for IEP referral or solely for the provision of intervention by an interventionist. Moving in this direction will support the District’s All Students/Our Students mindset.
- Expectations for MTSS should be reviewed annually and supported through easily accessible and understood protocols.
- In conjunction with expansion of PD as mentioned previously, content-specific trainings in literacy, numeracy, and social emotional-learning should continue to be a priority.

Data Considerations

- To supplement the qualitative approach to MTSS, it will be helpful to quantitatively “roll up” this data across the District to ensure that school-based administrators can reflect on students who went to

evaluation and those who did, or did not, qualify. This data, both in “real time” and longitudinally, will provide valuable data with respect to the efficacy of MTSS within, and across, schools and across content areas (i.e., ELA, math, and behavior). The utility of being able to report referrals for assessments and those students who qualified is reflected below in **Figures 15** and **16** from another public-school district.

Figure 15. Referrals for an Initial Special Education Evaluation-Expressed as a Percentage of the Overall Student Population

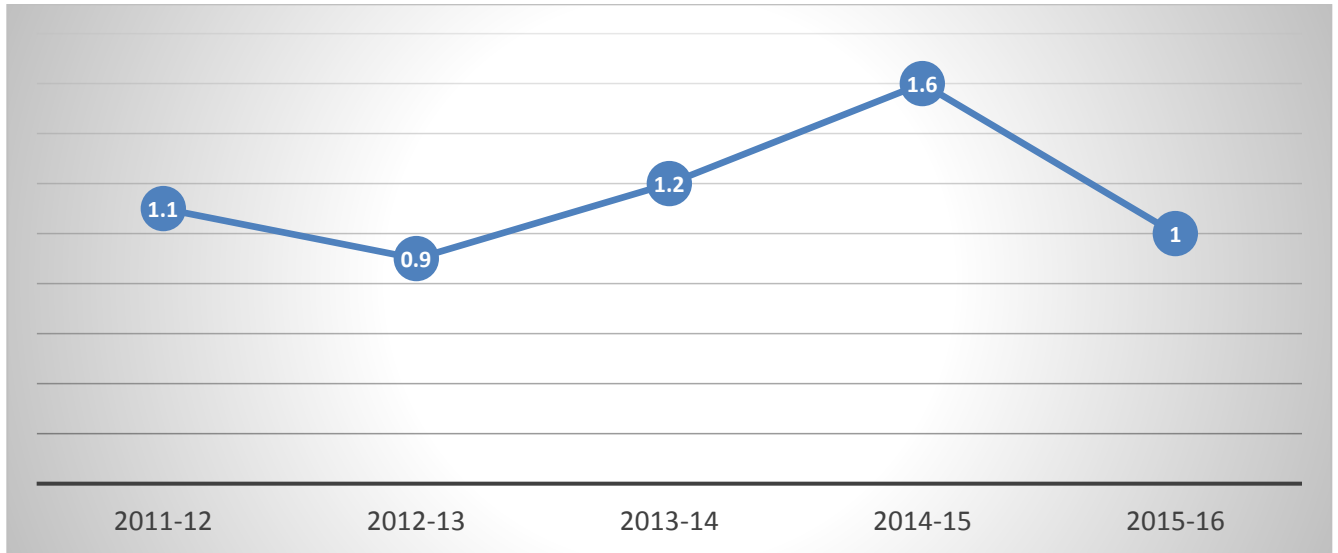
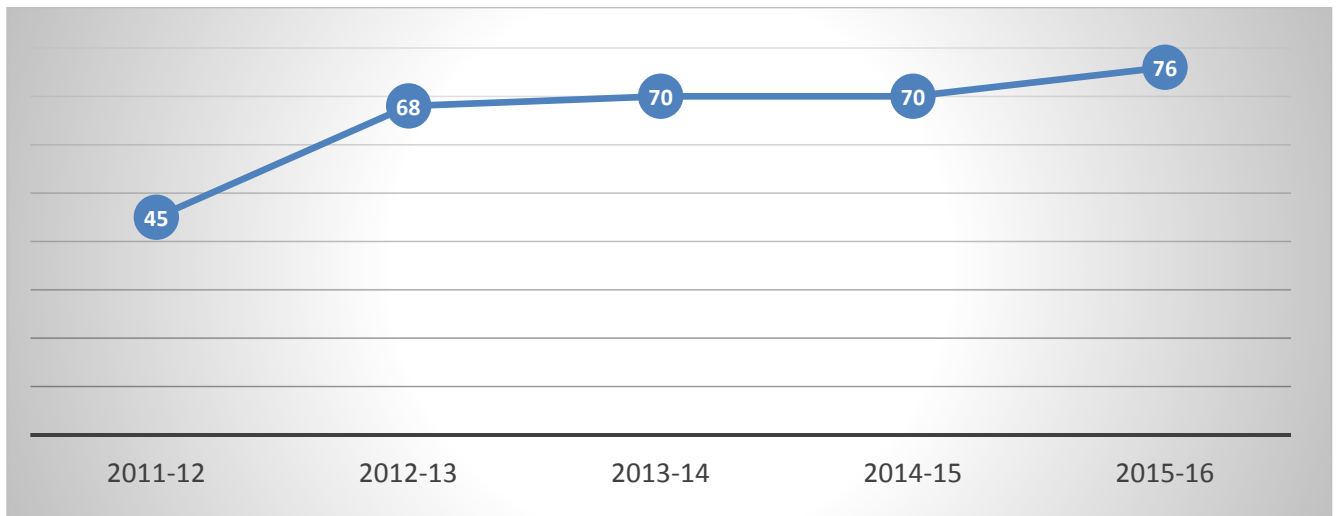


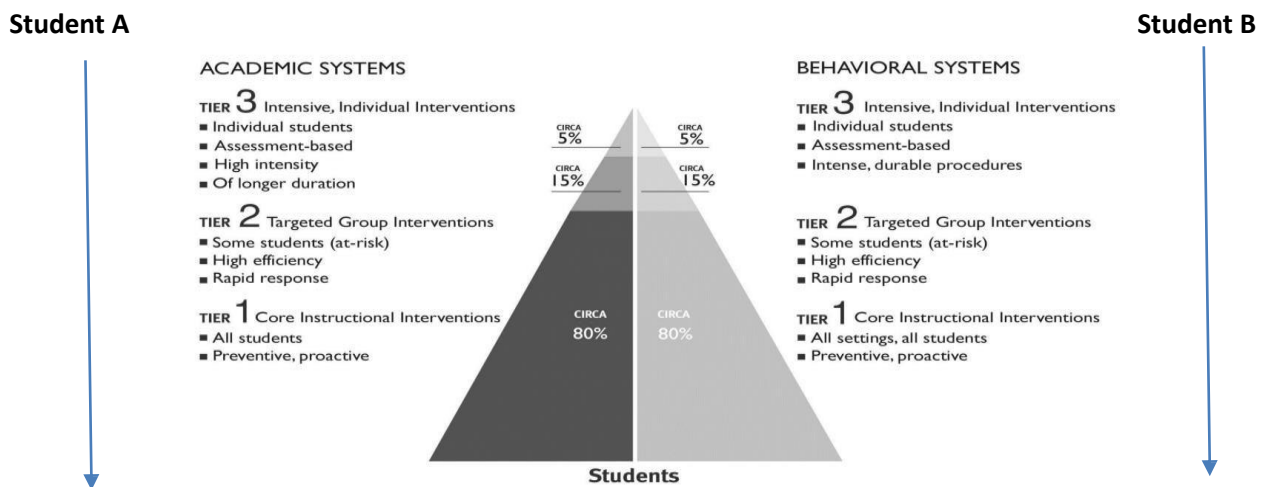
Figure 16. Referrals to IEP who Qualified-Expressed as a Percentage of Students Who Qualified for Special Education Services



MTSS as a Step Down

- Once MTSS is more systematic and operational with respect to processes and procedures (e.g., high quality core instruction, timely/effective interventions, use of data to evaluate/problem-solve issues of student learning) it may be “reversed” (i.e., the MTSS pyramid is in effect inverted) as a systematic step-down for students who are no longer eligible for IEPs.
- This is best illustrated by considering two hypothetical students. In this scenario, assuming the students were deemed eligible for exiting an IEP, the tiers comprising the MTSS model may be used to support the students in academic (Student A) and behavioral (Student B) domains. In this sense, the robust nature of MTSS is illustrated because it provides a platform to address student needs “where they are at,” irrespective of their previous special education status.

Figure 17. Utilization of the “Step Down” from an IEP



Special Education Instructional Services

- Re-visit the co-teaching model to ensure that, where it exists, it integrates specially designed instruction. Referring to the leadership capacity, it will be essential for special education leadership and the principals to collaborate on: (1) requisite professional development for the co-teaching dyads; (2) effective scheduling of students; and (3) on-going problem solving.

In this regard, to the degree that struggling students may have their needs addressed by strategy experts, co-teaching will be an excellent supplement to the aforementioned MTSS recommendations. The reader is referred to **Appendix C** for principles that underlie effective co-teaching.

- To supplement inclusivity currently occurring at the high school with respect to the integration of general and special education students in extra-curricular activities, the District may wish to establish a credit-bearing peer mentorship program at the secondary level. This will ensure that the peer interactions remain systematic, meaningful, and interactive. In addition, this initiative should be included in the students’ IEPs. The authors will provide District leadership with examples.
- Explore and adopt a District academic curriculum. Consideration should be given to organizational

practices and procedures that promote alignment of special education and general education instruction as well as related services and academic and other IEP goals.

- Institute “Vertical Articulation” teams for the upper grade of the sending schools and the lowest grade of the receiving schools with an overall agenda to ensure the continuum of services continues to meet the needs of all students. In this manner, it is speculated that the “gap” in vertical articulation between the schools will be addressed and the staff at all schools can be part of ongoing solutions.
- As it pertains to engaging SWDs at the secondary level, and thus increasing the graduation rate, continue to provide the following:
 - ✓ It is recommended that leadership build a cohesive communication plan, and then clearly communicate this plan to all stakeholders. Ensure that all programs are aligned to the District Strategic Plan and implement the Core Curriculum established by the District. It is notable that the District’s focus on strengthening Core Instruction is a key variable to consider.
 - ✓ Provide elective options focused on specific areas of interest, career and vocational preparation, etc. should be monitored to ensure these traditional and non-traditional options offer students a meaningful pathway to educational success culminating with high school graduation.
 - ✓ Create and implement a regular review process that identifies barriers to student success. This process should be completed on a three-year cycle. The results of this analysis shall inform the high school regarding their ability to meet student needs as well as drive the addition, elimination, or targeted improvement of specific programs to maximize student outcomes.
 - ✓ Develop a process to ensure that SWDs receive the necessary supports that are outlined within their IEPs (e.g., ensure that the program is fitting the needs of the student and not fitting the student to the program) and that guidance counselors ensure all students can engage in CTE experiences.

SUMMARY AND FINAL COMMENTARY

The overall results suggest that there is a high-level of dedication and commitment of administrators, teachers, specialists, and support personnel who are working diligently to meet the needs of students. Although there are many recommendations contained throughout this report, the following are priority areas for District leadership to consider as part of its strategic planning, and to enhance the programs.

Organizational Considerations

1. Provide more professional development training for teacher assistants, teachers and administrators in specific topics of immediate relevance. (ICT, Behavior, Autism, Early Interventions, etc.).
2. Given the myriad of duties within the purview of the Director, consider “off-loading” some duties to other building-based personnel. This will help ensure long-term success of the current Director and create school-based capacity.

3. Promote enhanced communication between, and from, the Superintendent and the Executive Director.
4. Develop and disseminate written program descriptions for greater staff and community access.
5. Ensure that the expectation of student ownership is understood by all current and future hires as part of an operational hiring guide.

Continuum of Supports

1. Promote consistent access to evidence-based practices within the MTSS structure across the tiers of intervention, consistent implementation of data collection over time, enhanced staff training in scientific research-based interventions for literacy, mathematics and social-emotional learning.
2. Explore and adopt a District-wide academic curriculum. Consideration should be given to organizational practices and procedures that promote alignment of special education and general education instruction as well as related services and academic and other IEP goals.
3. Consider establishing “Vertical Articulation Teams” for the highest grade of the sending schools and the lowest grade of the receiving schools to minimize any gap in services.
4. Re-visit enhancing co-teaching as part of the District’s continuum of services with an emphasis on maintaining co-teaching dyads, principal training (e.g., the 5-minute walk through), and creative scheduling.
5. Strengthen the CTE and other avenues to optimize graduation rates.

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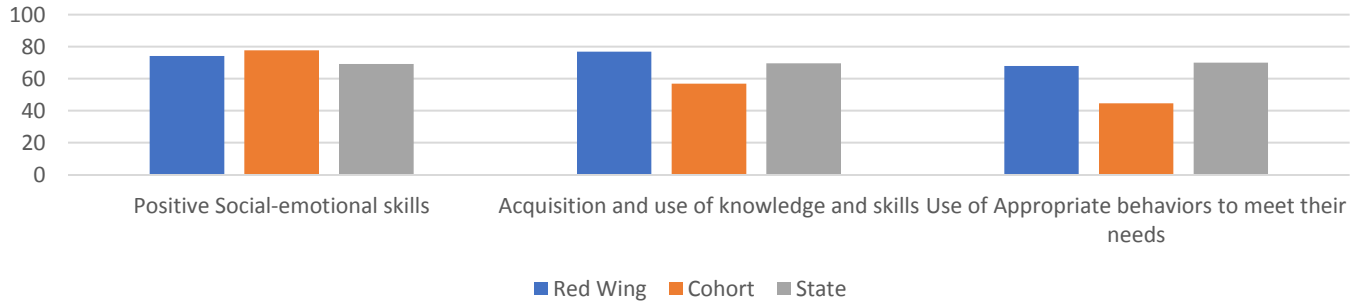
APPENDIX A: RESPONDENT ROSTER (N=56)

Discipline	Interviewer 1	Interviewer 2	Interviewer 3
Central Office Administrators	3	4	4
Principals/ECC Director	2	2	1
Coordinators			1
Special Education Teachers	4	4	2
General Education Teachers	4	2	1
Para-Professionals	3	4	2
Social Worker			1
Speech-Language Pathologists			2
Psychologists	2	1	2
Occupational Therapist			1
Physical Therapist			1
Adaptive Physical Education			1
Instructional Coaches/ Support Coordinators		2	
Total	18	19	19

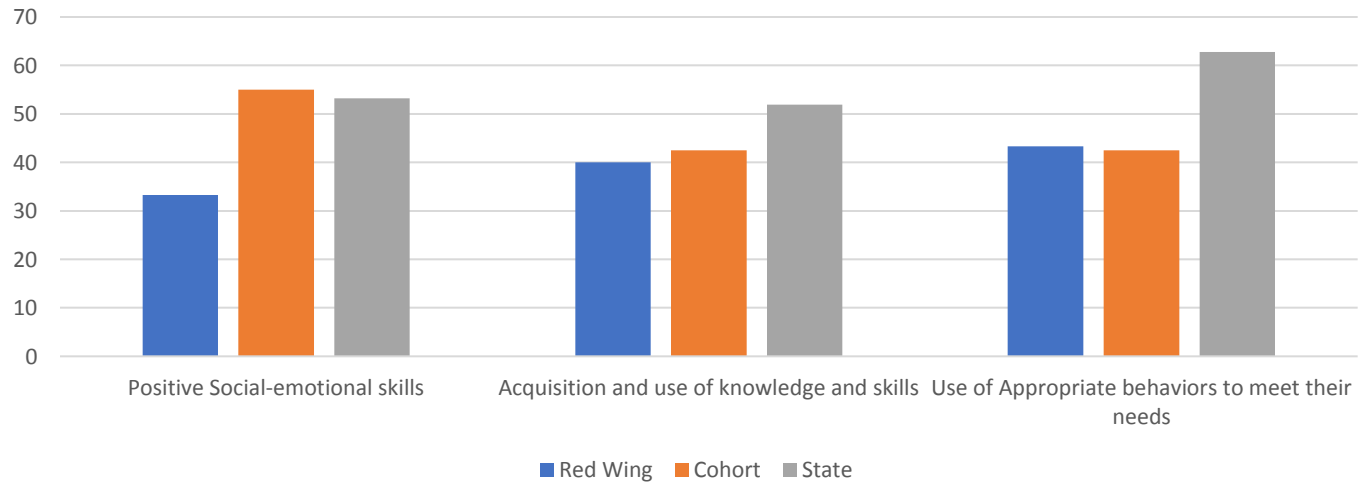
***several staff were interviewed by at least one interviewer

APPENDIX B: PRE-SCHOOL OUTCOME DATA

Of Those Children who Entered or Exited the Preschool Program Below Age Expectation, the Percent who Substantially Increased Their Rate of Growth by the Time They Turned 6 years of Age or Exited the Program



The Percent of Children who were Functioning within Age Expectations by the Time They Turned 6 years of Age or Exited the Program



APPENDIX C: PRINCIPLES OF CO-TEACHING

- Co-Teaching can be misunderstood to mean one general education teacher and one special education teacher in a classroom all day long. That may not always be the case. Co-teaching, like every other model on the continuum, can vary each day and for every class period. It does mean that based on Co-Planning, Co-Teaching, and Co-Reflection, teachers (general and special) make day to day and class to class decisions based on: (1) the needs of the special education student(s); (2) the IEP requirements; (3) the core content; and (4) the instructional requirements of these class periods.
- When new concepts are introduced, it is often important that the special education teacher conduct some pre-introduction for younger SWDs. This preview of material could be accomplished in many ways (resource room, alternative co-teaching model for a short period of time, etc.).
- During the actual direct instruction time, the co-teaching model (team teaching, station teaching, parallel teaching or alternative teaching) is most useful when it includes specially designed instruction. However, it should be noted that when students are practicing, the general education teacher in consultation with the special education teacher, should develop the classroom practices such that the special needs student(s) can participate without the special education teacher having to be present the entire time.
- The key to good co-teaching is the effective and efficient use of teacher time. That does not necessarily mean being in the general classroom every minute. Co-planning is critical to ensure that special education teacher is utilized in the most effective and efficient manner; being in the classroom and “helping, assisting, or tutoring” is not an efficient use of a special education teacher’s time if a paraprofessional or peer can assist the student.
- To the extent that continuity of team partnerships typically supports student achievement via mutual respect, collegiality, competence, and the acceptance of total ownership for all students, District leadership may consider maintaining the continuity of these teams when possible and to provide the teams with as much common planning as is possible and practicable.