

Recommendation 1:

Specialized Reading Programs and Certified Staff: Specialized reading programs were an area that precipitated the special education review of the District. Since issues were first identified the District has taken significant action in ensuring sufficient trained and/or certified personnel in one or more specialized reading programs. In addition to current efforts, the District should review the IEP of all students identified as SLD/dyslexia to ensure that an appropriate reading program is in place for the student. Such a review should also take place for each newly identified student with SLD/dyslexia within this school year to ensure a system is in place to appropriately identify students and ensure an appropriate and timely implementation of a specialized reading program by appropriately trained and/or certified staff. The District appears to be engaged in ensuring training, professional development and certification opportunities for staff for the implementation of specialized reading programs such that programmatic concerns with regard to this issue are being addressed. The District should continue the focus on ensuring a sufficient number of trained and/or certified personnel. Monitoring and supervision of staff in delivering a specialized reading program with fidelity should occur by the District special education administration. Attention to staff concerns regarding time for collaboration and professional development should be addressed.

Action Steps:

- Under the supervision of the district leadership team, consisting of SPED and regular education teachers and administrators, a review of the IEPs of students identified with SLD/dyslexia will be conducted to ensure the appropriate and consistent implementation of reading support programs in place and delivered by trained/qualified NPS.
- Review early screening assessments for children of dyslexia or other language related deficiencies, such as the use of Dibels, running records, etc.
- Continue to offer comprehensive professional development in phonemic and phonological awareness to support instruction of identified dyslexic students (e.g., Wilson, Orton, Lindamood Bell), including the addition of a phonics program that will support all students.
- Facilitate collaborative conversations between SPED teachers and Language Arts Consultants to determine appropriate programming for students and professional development needs for both general and special education teachers.
- Ensure consistent and ongoing communication of students' language needs and instructional strategies with appropriate regular education teachers and staff.

- Monitor programs in place and district assessments, as well as student progress monitoring systems, to determine success of students.
- Continue to ensure appropriate programs are in place, as needed, including learning opportunities for those students transitioning to the secondary level.
- Report to C & I regarding programming and services, as well as future needs, including the restructuring of support services.

Timeline:

The leadership team, along with the Special Education Department, will conduct an in-depth analysis of the IEPs to determine appropriate services are being provided by May 1st. **A report to the Superintendent and Board of Education will take place at the 2nd BOE meeting in June.**

Professional development for staff is ongoing and will continue to be provided.

Recommendation 2:

Confidentiality: There is a perception by parents that breaches of student confidentiality are somewhat frequent and happening throughout the district. The district should review their current practices and the system in place for the distribution of information to parents about their child. A review of the District policies and procedures, analysis of the system currently in place that utilizes the school psychologist, and the administrative monitoring by administration might identify targeted areas for improvement. Targeted training/professional development for all school staff, including paraprofessionals, on confidentiality and the protection of student information should be considered and incorporated into the trainings/professional development opportunities offered to staff, particularly those working with students receiving special education or by experts in the area of reading.

Under the direction of the Director of Pupil Services, the following practices will be implemented:

- Review expectations and mandates regarding confidential information and records.
- Mandate annual training by all certified and non-certified staff and supervisors regarding handling of confidential student information (beginning of the year faculty meetings and central office), including identifying and handling breaches of confidential information and reporting such breaches of special education records to supervisors in a timely manner.
- Require staff signatures to confirm their attendance at training.

- Continue a “checks and balances” system for FERPA requests so these are checked and reviewed by two or more staff members as outlined in the communication to all SPED parents on October 2017.

Timeline

Beginning February 1st, all special education staff will be receiving their yearly refresher training in confidentiality and handling information related to FERPA.

Beginning in the 2019-20 school year, all staff including non-certified and certified employees will receive training in confidentiality and handling information related to FERPA. This will become a mandated training that requires a sign-off.

Recommendation 3:

Professional Development/Training: The District should review the needs of general and special education staff, to include but not be limited to academic content and the behavior/social emotional needs of students. The District should: (a) ensure that training and professional development needs are identified annually for general and special education staff; (b) continue to redefine and align paraprofessional hours with the school day and to incorporate and/or compensate, to the extent appropriate, paraprofessionals for participation in training; and (c) work with the newly formed SEPTO to identify needs and resources to provide training to families. Providing information, training and support to parents on federal and state special education requirements including identification, evaluation (including IEEs), eligibility, development and implementation of an IEP, and dispute resolution would be helpful in fostering communication and collaboration between parents and District staff and administration.

Under the supervision of the Superintendent’s Office, the following actions will be put into place:

- Work with the District Safe School Climate Committee to organize and oversee training and professional workshops in social/emotional/behavioral needs for all staff.
- In alignment with the CASEL model, ensure consistent social/emotional practices are implemented in all classrooms K-12.
- Offer paraprofessionals training in working with students with special needs and require training for paras who are dealing with students with highly specialized needs.
- Evaluate and expand informational opportunities for parents through evening events and forums. Work with existing PTA and SEPTO organizations to solicit needs and feedback.
- In collaboration with SEPTO, develop a parent mentor program that helps support parents of special education students (e.g., information, resources, tips, process) at elementary, intermediate, middle and secondary levels.

- Utilize the new district webpage to highlight family and parent resources (e.g., articles of interests, webinars, workshops, etc.) in special education topics.

Timeline

Training and professional development for staff and paraprofessionals is ongoing and will be evaluated each year in alignment with District SEL and educational goals, State mandates, and initiatives.

A yearly report regarding progress of SEL training, consistent practices, and parent informational opportunities will be provided to C & I beginning June of 2019 (first year only summary and baseline information).

Enhanced parent resources will be made available beginning January 22, 2019 and will continue with the new District website.

Recommendation 4:

Staffing: As previously stated, the crucial issue in a review of special education staffing is whether students' IEPs are being implemented with fidelity. Newtown clearly has a dedicated staff that works to ensure that all IEPs are implemented with fidelity although there is a perception that this may not *always* be the case, or, that appropriate implementation requires staff to give up essential planning and collaboration time and work longer hours than they should. The District should undertake a review of staffing patterns in the District to determine: (a) whether the District employs the appropriate number of staff including instructional, related service and non-certified personnel; (b) whether staff is being appropriately utilized and deployed throughout the district to ensure that IEPs are being implemented with fidelity; and (c) whether job responsibilities are appropriate to staff skills and time (including, for example, a review of caseloads and how school psychologists are utilized in the PPT process).

Under the supervision of the Director of Human Resources in collaboration with staff and administration, a qualitative and quantitative comprehensive review of the following will occur:

- Special education staffing needs across the district
- School psychologists' responsibilities and their roles
- Schedules and opportunities to maximize service delivery
- Use paraprofessionals and other support personnel to ensure efficiency and appropriateness in supporting students, including a thoughtful review of district plans to support staff absences.

Timeline

The Special Education Supervisors, Director and Building Administrators will work with the Director of Human Resources to assess certified and non-certified special education staffing needs and responsibilities across the district by May/June to determine appropriate changes.

Prior to the scheduling of student classroom placement for the 2019-20 school year, which takes place in May/June, the Director of Human Resources will collaborate with building administrators and special education supervisors to review schedules, evaluate placement of students within the general and special education classrooms, and in alignment with IEP services.

Recommendation 5:

The Planning and Placement Team (PPT) and Individualized Education Program (IEP): The district should consider providing parent information, resources and educational opportunities to families regarding PPT meetings and the development of IEPs. In addition, the development of district-wide policies, procedures and practices around planning, leading and participating in PPT meetings, to be implemented consistently throughout the district, will be helpful to both staff and parents. These could include how and when school staff and parents will be informed when a special education administrator will be at a PPT and the role and responsibility of that person in the PPT. Policies and practices to be considered could also include the use of meeting agendas that provide time for parents to have their concerns addressed and considered. It is also important to address mechanisms for communication to ensure all staff has the ability to participate and provide information and their professional opinion to the team through various means.

Under the collective supervision of district and school leaders, consistent practices in the planning and scheduling of PPTs will include the following actions:

- Develop a practice for using a PPT agenda, including timeline and meeting norms or expectations.
- Better orient parents in the PPT process (timelines, information that will be shared, opportunities to voice concerns, etc.) and their role and responsibilities as a member.
- Provide information on the SPED website for parents regarding the PPT process and resources.
- At the building level, ensure that all participants understand their role and responsibility as a member of the team.
- Present information and pertinent data at PPTs, including SRBI (Strategic Research-Based Interventions) and progress monitoring, in order to support the referral process.

Timeline

By April 1st, the practice for using an agenda at PPTs will be established and reviewed with PPS staff and administrators. Implementation of this practice will begin by May 1st.

Parent resources, including a flow chart of the PPT process will be uploaded to the District's SPED website by January 31st. The presentation of pertinent data is an ongoing part of the PPT process

Leadership and Accountability

Under the collective oversight of district administrators, the following practices and accountability measures will be implemented:

- Offer relevant and deliberate professional development for SPED and Regular Education staff related to students with disabilities (e.g. Orton training for both SPED and regular education, social/emotional, QPR training for all staff), and Hope Squad).
- Include SPED supervisors in relevant administrative team meetings and professional learning community time to stay connected to building and district goals, as well as to share pertinent updates.
- When unique and sensitive situations arise involving students with an IEP and/or their families, every effort will be made by building-level administration to solicit, as appropriate, the input, collaboration, and relevant guidance from the SPED department.
- Self-Study action team, composed of the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Pupil Services, Director of Human Resources, and Principal representative(s) will convene by June 30th to review the collective status and progress toward identified action steps in the Self-Study.

Timeline

June 30th – first year review of the progress of all action steps and determine revisions and future timelines as necessary.