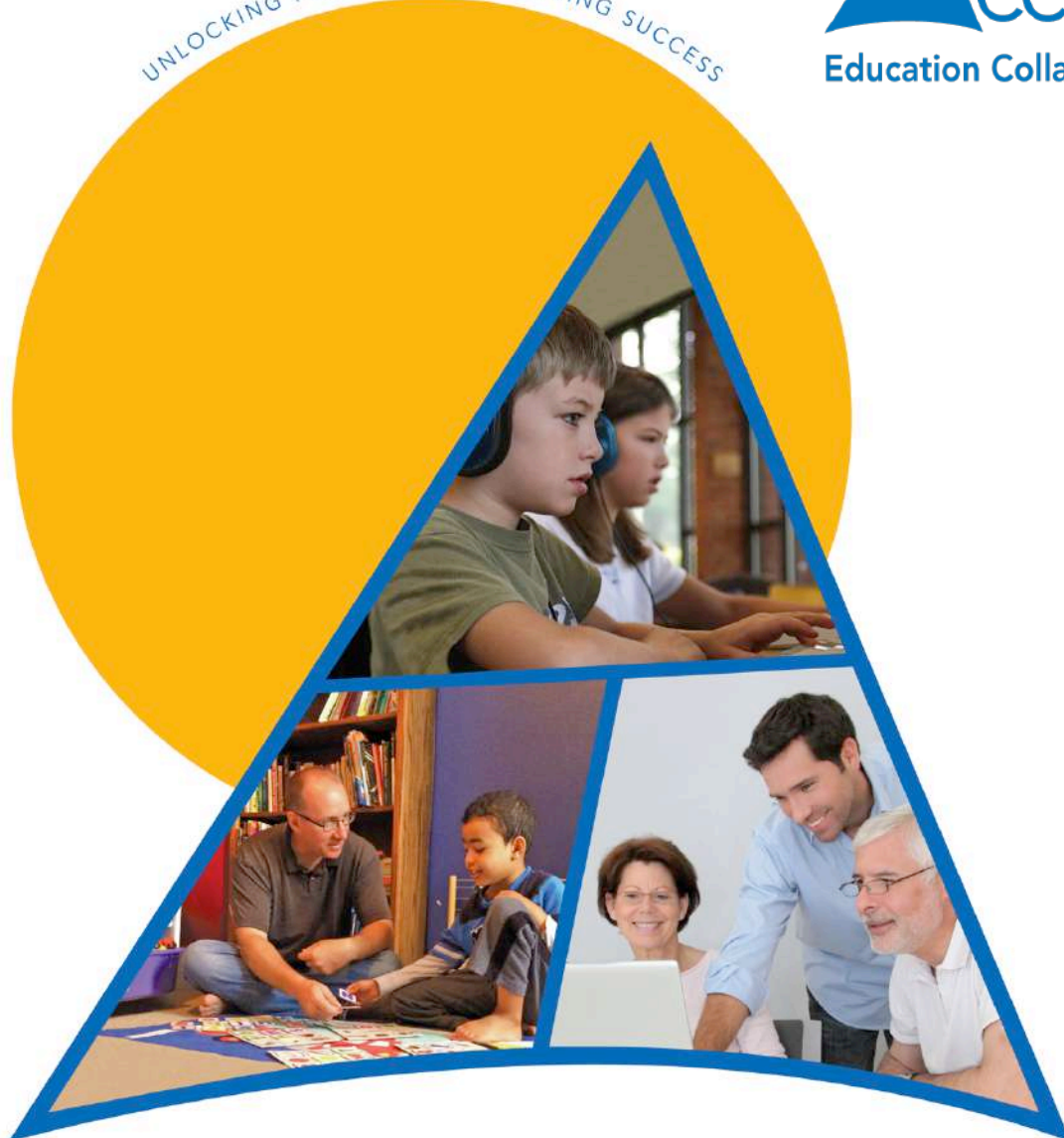
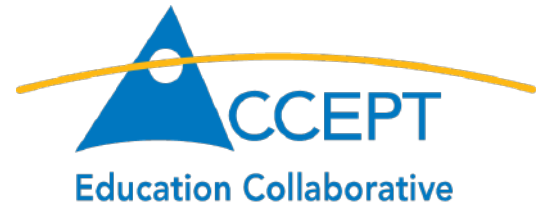


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**Randolph Public Schools:
Elizabeth G. Lyons Elementary School
Special Education Inclusion Services Program Evaluation
Executive Summary**

**Prepared by Anne Donovan,
Director of School Consultation Services
October – December, 2021**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Program Evaluation was conducted for the Randolph Public Schools at the request of the District's Director of Special Education and Student Services in order to examine special education inclusion services provided within the Elizabeth G. Lyons Elementary School. The overall purpose of the evaluation was to determine program effectiveness in supporting positive outcomes for students with disabilities that receive special education services within a full inclusion model and to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement for the District to consider. Several guiding questions were developed by this evaluator based on conversations with District administrators to help frame the scope of this evaluation. These guiding questions included:

- 1) What are the recent data trends in special education at the Lyons Elementary School?
- 2) How is the Lyons Elementary School performing with regards to providing inclusive educational services for students with disabilities?
- 3) Are student referrals to out-of-district placements or to in-district specialized programs disproportionate among the district's elementary schools, and, if so, what factors may be contributing to inequitable special education services across buildings?

The *Essential Best Practices in Inclusive Schools* quality indicators tool by the National Center on Inclusive Education was used as the primary assessment measure. This tool includes several main areas of focus, each of which are broken down into specific indicators that are rated based on evidence from document reviews, interviews, and direct observation. Additionally, portions of the Massachusetts DESE *Educator Effectiveness Guidebook for Inclusive Practice* (2017) were used as supplemental measures to guide direct observations of services and inform programmatic recommendations. These tools were utilized in combination with comprehensive reviews of selected students' IEPs and evaluations, direct observations, and verbal feedback provided by program staff and administrators for the purposes of this evaluation. Findings were significant for several overarching themes that may inform the District's plan of action with regards to programmatic improvements. The report also provides action-oriented recommendations to guide future decision-making based on the evidence acquired through the evaluation process.

Overarching Finding #1: The Lyons Elementary School relies heavily on special education staff to provide general education Tier 2 and Tier 3 academic supports to students.

All Inclusion Teachers reported that upwards of 50% of their caseloads were comprised of students that did not have an identified disability but require Tier 2/3 academic supports. Administrators also noted this concern with regards to district funding formulas and adequate allocation of staff since teachers' actual caseloads of students are significantly higher than what IEPs indicate. While the flexibility of the Inclusion Teachers and willingness to support all students in the general education classroom is commended, it is important that the District consider what staffing models are required to meet the academic needs of all students within a more robust multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework that does not rely primarily on special education staff. Also of particular note, the Lyons Elementary School has the fewest number of teachers per student in the district according to state data on student/teacher ratios. The lack of availability of alternative staff to provide tiered academic supports to general education students impacts the entire special education model due to significant strain on staff resources.

Overarching Finding #2: Curricula and instructional approaches across general education and special education services appear to be disjointed which may result in gaps in student learning.

All staff and administrators noted specific challenges related to the District's adoption of evidence-based general education curricula, most notably in the area of English Language Arts. The Lyons School had reportedly been utilizing *Reading Street* for several years, which was obtained from the Taunton Public Schools when that district discontinued use of the program. Notably, the Lyons School was the only elementary school in Randolph that utilized *Reading Street*; most of the other schools had transitioned to using McGraw Hill's *Wonders* program within the last few years. More recently, the Lyons School staff began using *Letterland* as the primary phonics curriculum, though teachers also reported ongoing challenges with this program as well. This year, it was noted that the District is currently piloting several different reading programs across the four elementary schools. Implementation of a consistent, evidence-based Tier 1 general education reading program is not only needed as part of a robust MTSS framework, but it is also required by Massachusetts under the new Dyslexia regulations (2019). DESE recently released the Massachusetts Dyslexia Guidelines (April, 2021) that state, "Districts are encouraged to evaluate current ELA curricula to determine the extent to which they are aligned with previously described best practices.... District leaders can anticipate that meaningful change at the Tier 1 level will require strategic planning for three to five years of improvement-work, which is often guided by a Literacy Leadership team and a formal strategic plan." Inclusion teachers also reported that they do not have adequate access to academic intervention programs and often modify the general education curriculum by "piecemealing" resources, which can create challenges with continuity and gaps in learning as students transition between grades and service providers. All teachers expressed challenges related to their ability to differentiate instruction in order meet the needs of all students without adequate instructional materials and specifically noted several programs needed in the areas of Math, Reading, and Writing.

Overarching Finding #3: While no significant disproportionately was found in the referrals of students at the Lyons Elementary School to either in-district specialized programs or out-of-district placements, specific patterns in student learning profiles that are referred to more restrictive placements were noted.

The Lyons Elementary School accounts for only approximately 8% of all student referrals for specialized program/OOD placements in the district. The highest percentage of referrals are made by the Randolph Community Middle School (RCMS) and JFK Elementary School, which each account for approximately 29% of referrals, followed by the Randolph High School which accounts for approximately 25% of referrals. Importantly, this data reveals trends in specific student populations that are referred to out-of-district programs that are largely mirrored by state data (Hehir, 2013). Specifically, students with Emotional disabilities tend to be referred to out-of-district programs at significantly higher rates than other student populations, followed by students with Autism. OOD data provided by the District show similar patterns for students with Emotional disabilities which account for 42% of referrals, followed by students with Autism which account for 23% of referrals. State-wide patterns in increased referrals to out-of-district placements for students with Emotional disabilities after the 5th grade are also reflected in this District data. Furthermore, while no significant disproportionality was found in out-of-district referrals overall by student race/ethnicity, it should be noted that referrals for male students accounted for over 66% of all referrals.