



**Norwalk
Special Education Review**

Summary

November 21, 2008

Purpose of the Review

This quantitative and qualitative review studied the Norwalk school district special education programs and services, in order to provide the Board of Education and Norwalk school personnel with information for planning now and in the future. Evaluative questions from the Norwalk request for proposal (RFP) were categorized into six areas for review:

1. Organizational Structure
2. Processes
3. Communication
4. Compliance
5. Impact on Student learning
6. Cost Effectiveness/Efficiency

Review Process

This study answers six evaluative questions through an analysis of multiple data sources. Data was gathered over a 5 month period from student files; focus interviews with staff, parents, and outside agencies; state, district, and DRG information; classroom and school observations and visitations; and a parent survey. Data collection and review began in July 2008 and the final report was submitted to the Board of Education on November 21, 2008. The in-depth student review, focus group interviews, and observation/visitation schedules are detailed in Appendix A through C. Appendix D provides special education student CMT and CAPT data. Appendix E provides samples of the surveys sent to parents and Appendix F provides additional reference materials. Appendix G provides the most current Norwalk Annual Performance Report 2006-7 from the state and Appendix H provides 2008 Special Education Staffing by Building.

The superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of pupil personnel, assistant director of pupil personnel, technology director, business director and human resources director, assisted with this review and we would like to thank them for their time and support throughout the process. The cooperation from pupil services secretarial staff was particularly helpful in gathering the large amount of data required for a thorough review. Thank you to the Norwalk staff and parents at Norwalk schools who provided their time and valuable feedback. We would also like to thank the outside agencies and programs that provided us with useful information. Genuine concern and caring was apparent throughout the review.

Evaluative Methodology

This qualitative and quantitative study collected and analyzed a variety of data in order to answer the evaluative questions. To ensure accuracy of results evaluative questions were answered by comparing data from the four data categories below.

1. Documents and Reports
 - Relevant information from the State Department of Education and Norwalk BOE, including monitoring reports and the district's Annual Performance Report (APR)
 - Current results and trend data for students with disabilities on statewide and district-wide assessments, including efforts to increase performance outcomes
 - Pupil services staff caseloads and schedules, staffing patterns
 - Early intervention and identification process guidelines and referrals
 - Professional development activities for staff
 - Examination of funding sources, expenditures, and other resources to determine if such allocation can be done more effectively and efficiently
 - Other data as needed

2. Student Review
 - A random sample of 63 of the special education student records representing a variety of disability categories, placement, and service options were reviewed utilizing a protocol that evaluates adherence to legal requirements adapted from the Connecticut protocol and the extent to which students derive educational benefit from the IEP services adapted from the California protocol (Appendix C).
 - Twenty students from the student review sample were selected and the CREC evaluation team conducted an in-depth review of their programs and services through observations of the students in their educational programs and through focus interviews with staff and parents (Appendix C).
3. CREC project team members observed special education students in a variety of educational settings in each of the 19 district schools and utilized an adapted observation protocol developed by the state to assess the positive learning environment (Appendix B).
4. Individual and Group Focus Interviews and Parent Survey
 - A total of 339 staff, parents and other agency staff were interviewed during the course of this review. Some staff and parents were interviewed more than once if they had a student who also was chosen for an in-depth review or if there was additional information the project team required. The following groups were solicited for individual and group interviews.
 - Administration: 36 (26 building and 10 central office)
 - The Board of Education: 8
 - Teachers and other instructional staff: 135 (77 special education teachers and 58 general education teachers)
 - Related service staff: 36
 - Paraprofessionals: 3
 - Special education office staff: 5
 - Outside agencies, early childhood, youth services, and SDE:16
 - All parents of special education students were sent a survey and invited to parent group interview sessions: 100 parents attended the interview sessions and 160 completed and returned surveys (Appendix E).

Evaluative Questions and Data Matrix

Table 1

Evaluative Questions	Data Source			
	Student Review	Focus Interview	Documents Reports	Observations Visitations
To what extent are the organizational structures effective and efficient in meeting special education student needs?	X	X	X	X
To what extent are the Norwalk special education processes effective and efficient?	X	X	X	X
To what extent is the communication with stakeholders effective in meeting special education student needs?	X	X	X	X
To what extent is Norwalk meeting and/or exceeding state federal and local guidelines for educating special education students?	X	X	X	X
To what extent does Norwalk positively impact the learning of special education students?	X	X	X	X
To what extent are resources allocated effectively to meet the needs of Norwalk students requiring special education services?	X	X	X	X

Instruments and Sample

The following table of instruments and sample sizes describes the nature and extent of each data collection activity

Table 2

Instrument for Data Collection	Sample Size
Focus Group Interviews	A total of 339 people were interviewed. This number includes 100 parents, 26 building administrators, 10 central office administrators, 58 general education teachers, and 77 special education teacher interviews and 36 related services staff, 3 paraprofessionals, and 16 staff from outside agencies and businesses, 8 board of education members (Appendix A).
Observations	All 19 schools were visited and observations of services and programs for special education students were conducted (Appendix B).
File review and In-depth Student Review	63 files representing different disability categories and different service options and locations were reviewed. 20 students were selected for an in-depth review which included parent and staff interview and student observation in their educational program. In-depth reviews were conducted in each of the district's 19 schools (Appendix C).
District, State, and ERG Data	District and special education profiles 2002-2007, comparative data from DRG and neighboring districts, suspension and expulsion rate 2005-7, Norwalk enrollment 9/07 from IEP Direct, 2004-2007 students placed out of district, CMT and CAPT scores for 2006-8 (Appendix D) , budget and IDEA grant expenditures, survey 2008 conducted with DRG re staffing patterns
Parent Survey	1,800 surveys were sent to parents of special education students. 160 were completed and returned in the self addressed stamped envelop (Appendix E).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ON EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

To what extent are the organizational structures effective and efficient in meeting special education student needs?

There have been numerous administrative changes in general and special education that, combined with a long and cumbersome hiring practice for administrators, has resulted in inconsistent leadership. The job descriptions for all pupil personnel administrators and for building principals are “outdated” and do not accurately reflect the current special education job responsibilities. There is not a strong philosophical statement with accompanying procedures that reinforces that the importance that students with disabilities receive quality programs and services. Therefore, implementation of quality special education programs and services appears to be defined and implemented differently in each school. Historically, Norwalk operates in a decentralized organizational structure in both general and special education. Schools primarily operate independently of the central office and the lines of authority between and among schools, central office, and board of education are unclear. Data indicate that the decentralized structure is causing inconsistencies in compliance, programs, services, resource distribution, processes, and possibly inequities for special education students. The director of pupil personnel and the administrative staff do not consistently have direct authority over what they are responsible for, e.g. budget, compliance, legal issues. Data from interviews, file reviews, and district documents indicate that historically, Norwalk’s special education central office activities have primarily fallen into the coordination and support function areas. Limited time has been spent on strategic, supervisory, and quality assurance functions. Special education administrator assignments to schools and programs do not promote consistency across levels and efficient use of time and expertise. Special education teacher responsibilities for confidential file maintenance are not an effective or efficient use of their time.

PROCESSES

To what extent are the Norwalk special education processes effective and efficient?

The special education procedures manual is out-of-date and not used regularly throughout the district. The Norwalk special education administrator, with consultant support, has begun the process of revising the manual. There are inconsistencies in processes across the schools for early intervention, identification, procurement and reallocation of resources, IEP development and implementation, and staff hiring, evaluation, and supervision. The process for identification for eligibility is inconsistent across the district, resulting in students with similar profiles being identified in one school and not in another. A variety of staff indicate that schools do not have most recent testing instruments and staff have not had necessary training to conduct some of the newer assessments. There is little time for the evaluation team to meet to discuss results, therefore evaluations for eligibility are not always done by a team. The union contract and budget constraints are barriers to holding staff meetings and providing sufficient professional development. Service delivery models vary across schools with some schools doing co-teaching and others not. Evaluation of related services staff is unclear. There is not a district plan to implement a Response to Intervention model (a general education initiative) for struggling students. This will be necessary if the district is to implement new regulations for the identification of students with learning disabilities required by the state as of July 1, 2009. The inability to find speech and language therapists has negative impact upon the services provided by the speech and language pathologists who have to “fill in” for the vacant position.

COMMUNICATION

To what extent is the communication with stakeholders effective in meeting special education student needs?

Communication problems are a pervasive issue across the district. Several concerns that this review found aligned with the Cambridge report conducted September 2007. Our findings concur with the Cambridge report that the district needs to “*improve communication with schools, parents and the wider community*” and “*improve the district culture and climate which is regarded by many people in schools, central office, and the community (including parents) as lacking in openness and authenticity*” (Cambridge, 9/17/07). It is particularly disturbing that we observed the same problems in the district that Cambridge staff observed a year ago. The problems in the special education area are symptomatic of a significant systemic communication problem. Inappropriate lines of authority, administrative turnover and use of interim staff, unclear or inconsistently implemented processes and procedures all contribute to problems in communication. The outside agencies (early childhood network and youth services) find the process to get assistance frustrating and prolonged. The way the central offices are configured and the “setup” of the space does not encourage visitors or collaboration between staff. The director of pupil personnel needs to be more visible and demonstrate clear, consistent, and supportive leadership. Poor communication between schools causes problems in smooth transition of students from school to school. The relationship between parents and central office is strained. There is no parent manual aligned with Norwalk processes. Training or informational sessions are limited, and the atmosphere is not conducive to good customer service. There are differences in perceptions between parents of special education students and school personnel in terms of the quality of communication, with parents less satisfied than the schools perceived them to be. There are no standard expectations for communication with parents of special education students. Formal feedback from parents on their satisfaction with programs, services and communication is very limited at the building and central office levels.

COMPLIANCE

To what extent is Norwalk meeting and/or exceeding state, federal, and local guidelines for educating special education students?

According to the most recent state accountability report 2006-7 (Appendix F), Norwalk met the state target in the following areas: increase graduation rate, participation rate on CMT and CAPT, placement and time with non-disabled peers, eliminate disproportionate representation of black males as emotionally disturbed, determine eligibility timelines, transition IEPs by age 3, goals and transition services, and general supervision. The area that the state found to be “making progress” include CAPT math performance proficiency rate on CMT for reading and math. The CAPT for reading did not meet target. Also not met were targets to decrease the rate of 10+ days out of school suspension and expulsion and to eliminate disproportionate representation by disability. Specifically, the state has cited Norwalk for the over-identification of black males as emotionally disturbed. Our data concurs with this concern regarding disproportionate over-identification. This is significant given that the district has been targeting funds and staff to address this concern since 2005-06. Our review found additional areas of compliance concern include (1) suspensions, (2) IEP planning and implementation, (3) identification procedures, and (4) confidential file maintenance.

The district does not have an effective monitoring process for IEPs. IEPDirect software is a good system for IEP development, but it is not being used to effectively for improved compliance and monitoring. Maintenance of student confidential files in the classroom creates problem of access and confidentiality that violate confidentiality laws.

IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

To what extent does Norwalk positively impact the learning of special education students?

The district has as its improvement plan, student achievement through data driven decision making. At this time the emphasis is on the whole school, not subgroups such as special education.

CMT scores indicate that Norwalk special education students are below the state average in math, reading and writing in all grades. The biggest gaps are in grade 5 for math, grades 3, 4 and 5 for reading and grade 3 for writing. The gap closes somewhat in middle school. Students are demonstrating growth from year to year as evidenced in the vertical scale analysis and in many cases are achieving faster growth than the state rate. Scores on the Skills Checklist were within the range of the state with the exception of reading in grades 3-6 where the scores were an average of 7 points lower than the state.

Educational benefit (impact on student learning) is not documented well in the record/IEP. Observations of students with disabilities in learning environments across the district scored slightly to moderately effective. The IEP records did not adequately represent the educational benefit that the CREC team observed in the in-depth review.

Eleven data sources, such as CMT growth points, parent survey results, file review and in-depth reviews, were analyzed to provide trend data on educational benefit for each district school. School scores in each of the 11 data sources were compared to average for the level (elementary, middle, and high school). Rowayton was at or above the district elementary level average across all data sources. Tracey, Naramake, Roton, Nathan Hale, Marvin, and Fox Run had fewer than 3 areas that were at or above the average score. The remaining schools were below the average score for their level in 3 or more of the data sources with Ponus Ridge and Silvermine the highest at 7 each.

Parent survey results indicate that 80% of the responses were in the “agree” category, indicating that they were satisfied with their child’s educational program and 71% of the responses were in the “agree” category indicating satisfaction with their child’s transition from preschool, and 78% of the responses were in the “agree” category that their child was learning the skills necessary for life after high school.

Some special education self-contained classrooms in the high schools are not effective learning environments due to insufficient technology (computers, printers, and software) and inadequate space (classrooms with windows instead of walls).

Use of assistive technology in the district is very limited. In the file review there were numerous IEPs where assistive technology should have been indicated, but it was not. This is in violation of the IDEA regulations and impacts the educational benefit these students could be receiving from the program.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

To what extent are resources allocated effectively to meet the needs of Norwalk students requiring special education services?

Overall, the district does not have readily available good documentation on resources, and expenditures, especially the required documentation for their federal IDEA grant. The budget development process and record keeping is not well done. It is unclear who has responsibility for the development, management and accountability for the special education budget. Decision-making authority for budget expenses does not always lie with the director who has programmatic responsibility.

The percent of total Norwalk budget for special education expenditures is currently and has historically been lower than the DRG and state averages. In 2007-8 the actual percent of the budget for special education was lower than the previous year.

The district does not receive any additional grant funding for special education aside from IDEA funds.

The district has a comparable ratio of special education administrators to students as the DRG towns, but has fewer non-administrative instructional leaders, such as department heads and team leaders. The district has lower staffing levels for special education teachers than the DRG and state.

Norwalk's paraprofessional ratio this year is the same as the DRG average, but there seems to be variability school to school on *numbers* and *how* paraprofessionals are used. All other positions are comparable to DRG and state averages.

Out of district placements by Norwalk are comparable to other DRG towns. Placements by other agencies or parents are significantly lower than DRG and state averages. In 2007-8 the district placed 6 students out of district for transition services at a cost of \$76,121 for tuition when perhaps with additional transition services they could provide for these students in district.

COMMENDATIONS

Positive attributes of the Norwalk district were identified through review of state and local data, observations and school visits, educational benefit review, and staff interviews.

- Some of the schools are moving toward a Response to Intervention model that provides more responsive general education interventions to struggling students.
- Briggs school has developed some collaborative partnerships with Norwalk Community College and Silvermine Art Studio to provide additional educational opportunities to their students.
- Norwalk's electronic IEP system, IEPDirect is cost effective and provides a more efficient way to write and monitor IEPs.
- We commend Norwalk on its initiative to train all staff in CALI data driven decision making and effective teaching strategies. The CALI practices will benefit all Norwalk students.
- Most students eligible for special education participate in the standard CMT/CAPT assessment.
- The use of an intervention/inclusion specialist to coach and support high school staff in developing programs and services for students with disabilities who are in least restrictive settings is a positive practice and provides needed training and support in the classroom.
- The district actively seeks reimbursement for eligible school-based children's health services (Medicaid). This is voluntary for districts in Connecticut and the district's efforts result in annual revenue of approximately \$350,000 according to district reports.
- The relationship that Norwalk has developed with the Bureau of Rehabilitation in transitioning students from school to work and post secondary opportunities is commendable.
- Review of a variety of data sources show that Rowayton performs at or above the elementary average in all data area of the educational benefit review (positive impact on special education student learning). Tracey performs in all areas but one.
- Scores from the Skills Checklist are generally within state average range in math, communication and access skills.
- In some grades and subjects the district CMT growth points for matched cohorts are at or exceed the state growth points.
- The director of pupil services and assistant superintendent are working well as a team. We see this as a positive sign to the success of the recommendations in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations within this report represent changes in organizational structure, program quality, processes, and use of resources for Norwalk. It will require **sustained, collaborative, and consistent** effort over a three to five year period if these changes are to occur, and be maintained, and outcomes realized. A long-range plan will assist the district to improve and expand its special education by providing:

- A direction that all can see, contribute towards and invest in
- A framework for monitoring and evaluation of specific goals
- More efficient and effective use of resources
- A vehicle for discussions and increased collaboration among Board of Education members, Central Office staff, building staff, and parents
- Parameters from which to determine future directions and new initiatives
- A tool for the director of pupil personnel and staff that will serve as a baseline of present services and a compass for future goals and activities

In order to promote use of the results in this study, goals and activities have been proposed for incorporation into the district improvement plan. We strongly suggest that senior leadership meet within 2 weeks with representatives from SDE to determine how this report should be incorporated into the district improvement plan and how all can work together for its success. For this action plan to be successful, there will need to be

- 1) Improved collaboration between and among the Board of Education, district administrators, staff, parents, and the union**
- 2) Shared responsibility and accountability for the plan**
- 3) An atmosphere and culture of support rather than control and intimidation**
- 4) Proper funding for action plan implementation, and**
- 5) A sense of urgency, a need to go “above and beyond”**

IMPROVED COLLABORATION BETWEEN AND AMONG BOARD OF EDUCATION, DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS, AND THE UNION

The Cambridge report that was completed in September 2007 referred to the need for improved district culture and climate. Indicating that, “ *the culture and climate is regarded by many people in schools, central office, and the community (including parents) as lacking in openness and authenticity. Many staff and parents feel undervalued, disempowered, and isolated. District senior leaders need to take action to improve the district’s culture, in part by improving communications*”. After interviewing 379 parents, staff, and outside agencies, our findings concur with the Cambridge report. Moreover, we see the responsibility for change lying not only with the senior leadership, but with the board, the union, and the building administrators. Given the difficulties with collaboration on a number of levels within the organization, we believe that the detailed action plan we provide in this report will be doomed to fail unless the Board of Education, Central Office, union, and building administrators begin to work better together. We are recommending that use of an independent facilitator to work with the administrative group and Board of Education is absolutely necessary for the success of the proposed action plan.

AN ATMOSPHERE AND CULTURE OF SUPPORT RATHER THAN CONTROL AND INTIMIDATION

Throughout numerous sources of information collected, too often there was a common theme of mistrust, blame assigned to others, and defensiveness of one's own position or actions. The examples above were evident within and between all groups- board of education, administration, teachers, and related services staff and parents. Based on comments made to the review team, this appears to represent the long-standing "culture" of the district. Obviously, to move forward in a productive manner and for the benefit of all students, significant and meaningful work needs to be done. This likely will require work with an outside consultant(s) who can be neutral and objective.

PROPER FUNDING FOR ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The district will require additional resources to implement a plan of action that will improve services and programs to special education students. We are aware of the state of the economy, but believe that the resources that we recommend are reasonable and necessary for successful implementation of the action plan over the next 3 years. Quite simply, the problems are significant enough to merit additional funding. We have indicated needed resources at the end of each goal.

A SENSE OF URGENCY, A NEED TO GO "ABOVE AND BEYOND"

Many of the issues that we found in this review have been longstanding with little to no actions taken to remediate. These problems have now become so complex that people have become frustrated. It will take immediate and effective actions to convince all involved that change is possible. We recognize that the implementation plans will take a lot of administrative time in the beginning and therefore, we recommend the use of consultants with a variety of different skills to help with some of the workload and to assist in the logistics of "making it happen".

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE PLAN

We have detailed five priority goals for the district to work on over the next 3 years. These goals are meant to benefit the students in Norwalk and can only be accomplished by everyone working together. The goals, although specific to special education, are the responsibility of all and implementation of the plan should not fall only on the shoulders of the special education department or it will fail. We recognize that this is a very large undertaking and for it to be successful persons contributing to the plan should be rewarded and recognized and persons who interfere with the process should be held accountable. Quite simply, Norwalk and the special education students who are relying on Norwalk public schools, do not have any time to waste on personal agendas or infighting. To assist Norwalk in successfully completing a 3 year action plan, we have grouped the activities by year and also provided a timeframe for the most of urgent activities. We recommend that the director of pupil personnel report progress to the assistant superintendent monthly. This will allow immediate assistance if there is a road block. The Assistant superintendent will update the superintendent and the curriculum committee of the board monthly and the superintendent will report quarterly to the Board as a whole.

The goals include:

1. Improve organizational structures for greater efficiency and effectiveness
2. Improve consistency across the district in the following special education processes
3. Improve communication within district on all levels, with parents and with outside agencies
4. Increase educational benefit to students with disabilities
5. Review and revise, as needed, budget processes, management and authority for both the federal IDEA funds and for the local district special education budget

Norwalk

Special Education Review

Recommended Goals and Activities

There are a number of activities under each goal, some of which are more urgent than others. In order to assist the district in prioritizing activities into a plan that is doable, we have indicated the year in which the activity should take place. There are some activities that we have identified as urgent and necessary for the success of other activities, for example, the district will need to develop the new procedures manual before the parent handbook can be developed. We have provided the district with a date when the urgent activities should be underway or completed.

1. IMPROVE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES FOR GREATER EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

Meet with state department representatives from the Bureaus of School and District Improvement, Accountability, Compliance and Monitoring, and Special Education to incorporate review recommendations into district improvement plan and determine how SDE and Norwalk can work together for successful implementation. **December 2008**

Utilize a consultant to work with the district's senior and building administrators, Board of Education, and union to improve the culture and communication within the district and clarify roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority. **December 2008**

Superintendent update the organizational chart and provide it to staff and the community **December 2008**

Superintendent schedule and hold regular Cabinet meetings. The director of pupil services and/or designee should be a member of the principal meetings at each level. **December 2008**

Superintendent reorganize lines of authority and communicate clearly to central office and administrative staff that the director of pupil personnel has the direct authority over those areas for which the position is held responsible, e.g., budget, compliance, legal issues, staffing assignments and resource allocation, etc. **January 2009**

Superintendent and human resource director in collaboration with director of pupil personnel services develop job descriptions for special educators and building administrators that reflect current job special education/pupil personnel responsibilities. The job descriptions need to clearly articulate which are shared responsibilities and that the director has final approval on any issues that involve compliance, legal issues, staffing assignments and resource allocation, etc. **January 2009**

Director of pupil personnel or designee convene special education personnel from across the district to address district-wide special education issues:

Analysis of CMT/CAPT special education data **January 2009**

Professional Development **January 2009**

Disproportionate Identification (December 2008, presently committee is underway), Some of these committees will be long standing (special education data team), while others can be disbanded once their task is completed (disproportionate identification). Committees will need to inform each other as issues are inter-related.

Director of finance, director of pupil personnel or designee, director of HR, and assistant superintendent establish record-keeping processes used for budgeting, staff hiring and tracking, 504 monitoring, and special education compliance. Efficient database systems and procedures need to be put in place and all appropriate staff will need training on the new procedures.

February 2009

Assistant superintendent assigns one building administrator in each school to be the primary contact for special education. These administrators will be provided training on the new procedures manual and be responsible for monitoring adherence to special education procedures in their respective schools. **January 2009**

March- June 2009

Develop an inclusive, more efficient hiring process where an appropriately constituted committee selects the best candidate and recommends that person to the Superintendent to present to the Board. The Board then can accept or reject the superintendent's recommendation.

Reorganize and reassign certain duties currently assigned to teachers. Compared to other DRG towns, Norwalk's number of special education teachers is low. It is inefficient to use them to do the filing and maintenance of confidential files. This duty needs to be turned over to the school secretaries and the files should be kept in a secure manner in the school office. Secretaries will require training on the handling of confidential files.

2009-10 ACTIVITIES

Change the assignments of the special education administrators to allow for greater consistency among levels and more efficient use of time. Special education administrators should share supervision responsibilities with the building administrator for all special education staff in the schools for which they are responsible. Special education administrators, in collaboration with the school social worker would be responsible for students placed out of districts who would normally be attending the school. The director of pupil personnel should take responsibility for development, monitoring, and reporting of strategic action plan, oversight of budget, litigation issues, and facilitation of the special education district-wide committees mentioned earlier in this report. We believe that the sooner the reorganization can be accomplished, the better, so if the department and district believes that this can be done this year without creating more problems, we would agree that it should be done earlier.

- One special education administrator support and monitor the three high schools and coordinate the transition program
- One special education administrator support and monitor the middle schools
- One special education administrator support and monitor five of the elementary schools that have preschool programs and coordinate the district preschool program
- One special education administrator support and monitor 7 elementary schools

Review of effectiveness of preschool structure and process, given concerns from outside agencies and parents

RESOURCE NEEDS FOR GOAL 1: IMPROVED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- Purchase databases for HR and other departments that meets district needs
- Consultant to work with the Board of education and all administrators
- Independent experienced special education administrative consultant to work regularly with special education department on strategic plan. It is anticipated that 1-3 times per week from December, 2008 through February, 2009 will be necessary. Depending on progress, the amount of time should decrease in spring 2009.

2. IMPROVE CONSISTENCY ACROSS THE DISTRICT IN THE FOLLOWING SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESSES:

- a. identification of students for special education eligibility
- b. allocation and reallocation of resources, budget development process
- c. services, service hours, and service delivery model
- d. IEP development and monitoring, and confidential file maintenance

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

The special education department administrators should work with an experienced special education administrator consultant to develop updated procedures manual. Special education administrators provide training to staff on the information in the manual. Processes a through d will be included as one part of the manual. The manual will detail who is responsible for monitoring the different procedures in the buildings and in central office. **December 2008**

a) Identification process

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

Director of pupil personnel/or designee through a district-wide committee, establish a plan for necessary professional development, taking into account the goals and activities recommended in this plan. **January 2009**

Central office and building administrators need to open the dialogue and work out an agreement with the union about meetings and professional development. Compensation for summer or after school meetings should be addressed. **January 2009**

Director of pupil personnel review with principals the need for them to schedule special education teachers/case manager to administer the achievement test portions of the evaluation, do classroom observations, and meet with the assessment team to discuss results. There should be time available for the assessors to review testing result and consider recommendations to present to the PPT. Special education department monitor adherence through review of staff schedules and other data. **January 2009**

Convene a committee of special and general educators to develop a plan for implementation of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model to be used instead of discrepancy formula in 2009-10. Director of pupil services and assistant superintendent should assume responsibility for this action. There should be professional development for all staff in the implementation of RTI. **February 2009**

March- June 2009

Develop a plan to procure hard to find staff such as speech and language pathologists. The human resources and special education directors need to develop this plan as well as procedures to expedite the process for hiring.

2009-10 ACTIVITIES

Establish the position of coordinator of evaluation services who would review evaluations to ensure consistency in identification assessment and ensure timeliness of assessments, develop test protocols, assist with professional development needs, monitor timeliness of evaluations, review evaluations for consistency and support staff. This could be an existing position with additional time to perform these functions and differential salary increase. Hire consultants with expertise in areas such as neurology, psychiatry, etc. to provide clinical supervision and work with evaluation teams as needed.

Take steps to better manage the evaluation and reevaluation processes. Updated copies of assessment instruments should be readily available in all buildings or assigned to specific staff (i.e., school psychologist - intelligence tests) as appropriate. A staff person in each school should be responsible for coordinating initial and triennial evaluations for the building. IEPDirect provides a tracking system for these due dates. The 'test coordinator' would be responsible for ensuring all the evaluations outlined in the Consent for Testing are completed in advance of the PPT meeting.

Increase district capacity to complete comprehensive evaluations within district by arranging for quarterly meetings with specialized professionals such as a clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and/or neuro-psychologists to consult on difficult cases or to train staff in additional assessment procedures.

Review the feasibility of setting up confidential files in central office while still maintaining the a school file.

b) Allocation and reallocation of resources

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

Develop written procedures and criteria for recommending a paraprofessional or for placing a student out of district or in another district school with a district-wide program. Place the procedure in the procedures manual and train staff on the procedure prior to IEP annual reviews.

February 2009

March-June 2009

Director of pupil personnel and finance director develop a budget procedure for special education and related services staff to request materials from the building or central office, and for collaborative meetings with building administrators to discuss building needs for the next year.

Explore potential cost efficiencies and improvements in service delivery. Review contracts for physical and occupational therapy services to determine if it would be more cost effective to hire staff. Review students placed in out of district transition programs to determine if they can be returned to district and funds can be reallocated to purchase district transition staff.

Hire consultants with expertise in administration of special education and with knowledge of statewide trends in staffing to assist the special education administration to develop a staffing pattern standard. In the **spring of 2009** director meets with building principal to discuss implication of implementation and works with Human Resources for smooth transition of staff.

c) Services, service hours, and service delivery model

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

Special education department develop description of the roles and responsibilities of the case manager as they relate to case coordination, communication with parents and staff, and accountability and compliance. This description should be part of the procedures manual and training should be provided to staff and building administrators. **February 2009**

March-June 2009

Develop guidelines for determining service hours (Appendix E as example) and for determining service delivery model. This should be the responsibility of the special education department with consultant assistance.

d) IEP Development and Monitoring and Confidential file maintenance

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

Develop procedures for use and monitoring functions of *IEPDirect*. Special education supervisors and department heads should also insure that procedures are put into the manual and staff are trained. Training should include the appropriate use of the state forms, such as the eligibility guidelines, on the system - how and when to use them. Clarify with all appropriate staff the process of using the 'validate' function so they can check to be sure all fields on the IEP are filled in. Review which individuals have authorization to 'finalize' IEP documents. If authorization needs to be expanded beyond the supervisor level, those individuals should receive additional training in the use of this function to ensure final documents are complete and accurately reflect the PPT decisions. Clarify the role of each member of the PPT for completing sections of the IEP and PPT Meeting Summary on *IEPDirect*. Outline the process used in each building to send parents the completed IEP and PPT documents to ensure it is within the required five day timeline. **February 2009**

Revise the current system for maintaining confidential student records. The confidential records should be housed in the school office in a locked cabinet. It is the responsibility of the case manager to insure that all documents in the file are complete and in accordance with regulations. The filing of forms and organization of the records should be the secretaries' responsibilities. Secretaries will need training on how the maintenance of confidential records. **February 2009**

RESOURCE NEEDS FOR GOAL 2

- Given the amount of work that is required, funds for special education administrators presently on academic year to work an additional 20 days during the summer are needed
- Additional clerical support in special education central office during peak times
- Consultants for development of processes, handbook, and specialist support for the identification process
- Coordinator of Evaluative Services – stipend position
- Funds for testing materials

3. IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN DISTRICT ON ALL LEVELS AND WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES AND PARENTS

Many of the activities that were recommended in goals 1 and 2 will support the accomplishment of the communication goal. In addition to those already mentioned in previous sections, we recommend additional activities below.

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

Assistant superintendent, in collaboration with director of pupil personnel, redesigns the central office special education department space to be “customer friendly” and more appropriate for the need the staff has to protect confidentiality of students. **January 2009**

Provide forums for regular, consistent communication within & outside (parents, outside agencies, etc.) of the special education department. This should be done by special education administrators, working with a consultant and director of IT. **February 2009**

Establish a central office committee that includes parent representatives to provide feedback to the special education administration. This should be the responsibility of the special education department. **February 2009**

Director or designee work with parent representatives to develop a parent training and information series. **February 2009**

March- June 2009

Director of Pupil Personnel or designee analyze the history of complaints, due process hearing and mediation requests to determine implications for changes in programs, procedures, etc. Special education department should determine preventative strategies that could be employed to reduce the need for formal procedures. Provide training to building administrators and case managers on analysis and strategies for improved results.

Special education department develop and disseminate parent handbook and conduct informational sessions on information in the handbook Special education department with assistance of consultant.

Insure effective communication for special education issues. Supervisors continue to meet with the special education staff and building administrators monthly to review procedures, discuss student and programs, trouble-shoot upcoming issues, and provide training.

Review the process for handling referrals from other agencies. The special education department should conduct this review to improve efficiency and to clarify contact people and their responsibility in responding to outside agencies, so the agencies receive timely information and support. A special education representative needs to attend early childhood meetings regularly and meet regularly with youth services and other agencies.

RESOURCE NEEDS FOR GOAL 3: COMMUNICATION

- Consultant to work with special education administration on newsletter, website, parent handbook, and parent training
- Funds put in 2009 -10 budget for parent training
- Webmaster to set up systems for communication
- Web page development/redesign
- Funds to redesign special education central office

4. INCREASE EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

Strengthen the connection between the instructional specialists and the intervention/inclusion specialist by conducting joint meetings and professional development. Put in the budget for 2009-10 two additional intervention/inclusion specialists, which will provide for one specialist at each level: elementary, middle, and high school. **December 2008**

Special education and building administrators need to assess special education instructional space and technology in the districts' high schools, and take steps to improve space and technology to ensure educational benefit. **January 2009**

Schools that fall below the average for their group in 3 or more areas on Table 13: Brookside, Columbus, Cranbury, Jefferson, Kendall, Silvermine, Wolfpit, Ponus Ridge, West Rocks, Briggs, Norwalk HS, and McMahan HS. Should work with the assigned special education supervisor to develop and implement action plans and frequently monitor progress on the plan to increase educational benefit to their students. The district should support these schools with resources such as professional development, additional special education supervisor time, intervention/inclusion and instructional specialist assistance, and additional training and professional development. Plan should be developed and implementation begun by **January 2009**

Schools with 1 to 2 areas below the average: Naramake, Roton, Nathan Hale, Marvin, and Fox Run, should review those areas below the average and takes steps to further assess and determine if activities for improvement in that area are needed. Commendations to Tracey school for performance at or above the district level average in all areas. Tracey should set their standard at the state and DRG average. **January 2009**

The special education department needs to develop guidelines for use of assistive technology, review IEPs to ensure that they are written according to the guidelines, and budget appropriately for assistive technology equipment. **January 2009**

General education students and special education students in Norwalk are below the state average for their respective groups. The district's efforts to improve curriculum and instruction will benefit all students; however, currently the improvement plans do not include specific goals for subgroups such as special education. Given the poor performance on CMT and CAPT and the low educational benefit percent from file reviews, we recommend that the district include the special education student subgroup in its improvement plan. A district special education data team led by the Director of Pupil Personnel or designee, comprised of special education administrators, pupil services staff, and content specialists should be formed by the special

education department to review the test data to determine which disabilities are being impacted, where the gaps are in learning across all grades, and what professional development should be provided to help staff teach to the problem areas. The information gathered by this team should inform the district-wide data team and the school data teams. We recommend that a consultant experienced in data driven decision making facilitate this committee during the first year.

February 2009

March-June 2009

All central office and building administrators as well as special education staff should be provided with training on how to write an IEP that ensures educational benefit, how to promote specialized instruction, and standards based IEP goals and assessment. IEPs and classroom instruction should be reviewed regularly by administrators to promote increased educational benefit. It will be important that time be found for all special and related services staff to attend. Special education department and building administrators need to review the services delivered by special education providers at the high school to ensure that specialized instruction lesson plans that promote independence are written and implemented, and that tutoring is provided by other than the special education and pupil personnel staff, perhaps through a tutoring center. Training for special and general education teachers on how to provide specialized instruction in the general education setting should be provided.

ACTIVITIES FOR 2009-10

To promote time with non-disabled peers, conduct further analysis of the out of district placements: where are the students? what are their disabilities? and what capacities are needed to be developed within the district in order to bring those students back or prevent others from being placed?

RESOURCE NEEDS FOR GOAL 4: EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultant to facilitate district special education data team meetings• Professional development funds for training on educational benefit, etc.• Develop 2009-10 budget to include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Funding for assistive technology training and equipmentTransition specialist and job coach3 full time substitute teachers to release staff for training and collaboration2 intervention specialists |
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5. REVIEW AND REVISE, AS NEEDED, BUDGET PROCESSES, MANAGEMENT AND AUTHORITY FOR BOTH THE FEDERAL IDEA FUNDS AND FOR THE LOCAL DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION BUDGET

The recommendations below imply collaboration between the Director of Pupil Personnel, the business manager, and the building principals.

2008-9 ACTIVITIES

The district needs to establish clear areas and lines of responsibility and authority within central office for the budgeting and use of federal IDEA funds and for the local budget. In the experiences of the reviewers, it is generally more efficient and effective to place responsibility and authority for special education expenditures in the hands of the director who should also have responsibility and authority for special education program decisions. Accounting functions

may appropriately rest with financial staff in the district.

Ensure that use of federal funds and the appropriate documentation for their use is consistent with federal and state requirements. Review current staff funded in whole or in part by IDEA funds to ensure that the number and type of staff are consistent with the approved budget. Identify necessary documentation to support IDEA expenditures; seek consultation from individuals or agencies with expertise to insure full compliance. Develop and maintain a system of grant expenditure documentation, readily accessible and organized by grant and grant period.

Ensure that all expenditures assigned to the special education budget are appropriate.

Review the possibility of a return to the district six students placed out by Norwalk for transition services; reallocate total tuition cost \$76,121 to hiring additional transition staff.

The director of pupil services or designee, in collaboration with the grants coordinator, investigate alternative funding such as grants and donations (computers, etc.). Work with local agencies and organizations to procure additional special education funding.

2009-10 ACTIVITIES

The Director of Pupil Personnel Services and building principals should work closely to develop the special education budgets for the schools. This can be done prior to budget preparation by meeting together and reviewing present and future students and the needed resources to meet those students' needs.

We are hopeful that the activities we have suggested such as eliminating clerical record responsibilities, instituting Response to Intervention thereby possibly reducing the special education population, employing a staff to student guideline, reallocation of services, additional intervention/inclusion specialists and transition staff will help to lower the caseload for special education teachers. However, we recommend that the special education and building administrators review caseloads again during budget time in 2009 to see if additional special education teachers are needed.

RESOURCE NEEDS FOR GOAL 5: BUDGET
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For 2008-9, costs associated with securing outside consultation regarding specific documentation training on educational benefit, etc.