

# Special Education Review

## Chappaqua Central School District

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

December 2021

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### *Acknowledgements*

The PCG team thanks the many individuals who contributed to this review of CCSD's services for students with disabilities. Their efforts were critical to our ability to obtain a broad and detailed understanding of the system so that we could present the best possible recommendations for improving special education services for CCSD's students.

Public Consulting Group

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of the Study

In January 2021 Chappaqua Central School District (CCSD) selected Public Consulting Group (PCG) to conduct an independent review of its special education services. This report describes PCG's impressions as to the current state of the special education program in CCSD and is designed to consider in its continuous improvement efforts.

**This document is the executive summary of a final report submitted to CCSD.** The study examined the following questions posed by CCSD within its Request for Proposals (RFP):

1. Does CCSD's special education program foster effective teacher pedagogy, support, and professional development to support students with IEPs?
2. Are the district's continuum of services effectively organized to support a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for students with IEPs?
3. Does special education programming at CCSD effectively support the academic, functional, and transition outcomes of students with IEPs, thus preparing students with IEPs for college, career, and/or other post-graduation plans?
4. Does the CCSD effectively leverage Response to Intervention (RtI) for support all learners, including students who may later be identified as having a disability?
5. Does CCSD leverage its financial resources to effectively and efficiently support FAPE and LRE for students with IEPs?
6. Does CCSD effectively organize and utilize its human capital resources to effectively provide FAPE and LRE for students with IEPs?
7. Does CCSD effectively maintain an efficient and effective record-keeping system for its special education department that promotes compliance, student outcomes, accuracy, and confidentiality?
8. Do CCSD administrators and teachers effectively foster supportive, transparent, and accessible relationships with parents and other key stakeholders?

The recommendations in this report focus on priority areas that emerged from the data collection and include action steps to bolster overall planning in support of special education program improvement.

## Methodology



The provision of special education services resulting from a comprehensive program review requires a design that triangulates data from three sources to arrive at integrated findings and recommendations related to programs, policies, and practices and the implications for student outcomes. This program review incorporate a variety of data collecting and reporting methods as described below in detail. The first component involves the longitudinal analysis of student outcomes, achievement trends, and growth patterns at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (**Outcome Analysis**).

The second component focuses on the systemic organizational and program factors that have an impact on program effectiveness and special education student outcomes (**Organizational and Program Analysis**).

This includes a document review of district policies and procedures, program placement, staffing, and financial information.

The analyses conducted for these two components draw from the third component (**Research and Practice Literature**) which identifies the organizational factors, the program elements and practices, and the implementation conditions associated with program effectiveness and positive student outcomes.

This review approach is multidimensional, emphasizes the participation of multiple and diverse stakeholders, and includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

During the summer of 2021 and the fall of the 2021-22 school year, PCG conducted a mixed-methods study of the special education program in CCSD. The findings and recommendations related to programs, policies, and practices resulted from a comprehensive analysis of several data sources. Sources included **(1) Data and Document Analysis, (2) Focus Groups and Interviews, (3) Student File Review Focus Groups, (4) Classroom Visits, and (5) Staff and Parent Surveys.** These components drew from **Research and Practice Literature** to inform the findings and recommendations. PCG used publicly available achievement and financial information to compare key CCSD statistics against local district, state, and national data. The method and sources of data are triangulated to increase the validity of the conclusions, in this case, regarding program implementation, identification of gaps, and recommendations for the continued improvement of CCSD's special education programs and services.

## Data and Document Analysis

### Population Trends, Programs, and Achievement and Outcomes Analysis

As part of this review, PCG analyzed special education population trends, programs, and achievement outcomes. Through analysis of assessment data, educational setting data, and other indicators, the team compared student identification rates and outcomes by disability, ethnicity, gender, and other demographic variables.

### Staffing Analysis

PCG team members have compiled special education staffing ratios from approximately 70 school districts (very large to very small) nationwide. The District's staffing ratios were incorporated into these data to consider CCSD staffing information in a broader context. Staffing comparison data have been used to evaluate the extent to which staff roles, responsibilities, and training are aligned to CCSD's expectations.

### Document Review

PCG reviewed more than 140 documents provided by CCSD through our document request for information related to district and school structures, programs, policies, and practices.

## Focus Groups

From August 2021 to November 2021, PCG conducted two sets of focus groups: (1) organizational focus groups/interviews and (2) student file review focus groups. Within this report, no focus group or interview participants are personally referred to, although position titles are referenced in some cases when necessary for contextual reasons.

### Focus Groups and Interviews

To gain an understanding of how special education programs operate broadly within the District, organizational focus groups and interviews were designed to include a range of stakeholders. These focus groups occurred in August 2021 to November 2021 and included a variety of central office staff, school-based staff, and family participants. PCG worked closely with the District to determine the best outreach and communication methods for focus group and interview participation.

Focus groups generally consisted of 5 to 10 participants; parent focus groups consisted of 7 to 20 participants; while interviews were typically 2:1 or 1:1. PCG provided a sample schedule and a list of positions required to participate. In total, PCG facilitated five parent focus groups, with more than 60 stakeholders participating—general education teachers, special education teachers, related service providers, and special education chairpersons. In addition, PCG conducted 15 administrator interviews (comprised of central office administration, building principals, and assistant principals). Furthermore, PCG met with 17 teachers who signed up for post-classroom visit meetings.

During interviews and focus groups, we shared with all participants that we would maintain their anonymity. Specifically, we would not include personally identifiable information about them in the report unless we had their permission.

Specific information on the numbers on the configuration of interviews and focus groups include the following:

- In 4 out of the 8 school administrator interviews, we met with the principal and assistant principal at the same time. In 1 out of the 8 school administrator interviews, we met with the building principal separately and the assistant principals separately. In 3 out of the 8 school administrator interviews, we met with the assistant principals separately. And in 1 out of the 8 school administrator interviews, we met with just the assistant principal and not the principal.
- In 5 out of the 6 central office interviews, we met with the central office administrator alone. In 1 out of the 6 central office administrator interviews, two administrators were interviewed at the same time.
- All members of the CCSD Board of Education were invited to participate in interviews; two members participated alone.<sup>1</sup>
- PCG conducted 4 virtual parent focus groups. At no time did PCG meet with parents alone; however, parents had an opportunity to submit feedback via email.
- PCG conducted 17 post classroom visit interviews; each of these were voluntary and occurred during time slots selected by teachers.

In describing the outcomes of these interviews, when it is appropriate and does not reveal the individuals who provided the information, PCG quantifies the occurrence of a topic. However, in ensuring the confidentiality of participants, there are also times when PCG uses terms such as ‘a few’, ‘some’, ‘several’, or ‘many’ to refer to participant feedback.

### **Student File Review Focus Groups**

From October through November 2021, PCG conducted student-centered file review focus groups that allowed for further discussion about school-based practices and included a review of a variety of student documents, specifically eligibility documentation, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and student progress reports. Through this records review, PCG focused on several topics related to special education management, student identification, programs and services, curriculum and instruction, staffing, and parent engagement, while addressing specific process questions about the development of IEPs, their implementation, and documentation. Student records were selected at random by PCG and included a wide cross-section of schools, ages, gender, and disability categories. CCSD staff provided access to the relevant Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) associated with the selected students and provided redacted

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that although two members of the CCSD Board volunteered to participate in the special education program review interviews, members of the Board met with PCG when it presented on its special education program review proposed scope of work.

copies to participants ahead of meetings. An average of three student records were discussed during each focus group session.

Participants included special education teachers and individuals who both knew and did not know the student. Each group consisted of approximately four to six participants. To ensure adequate participation in each group, the Special Education Office worked in conjunction with school-based leadership to select special education staff for participation. In total, PCG facilitated 12 student file review focus groups, with more than 55 stakeholders participating.

### **In-Person Classroom Visits**

During October 2021, PCG conducted 58 classroom visits across all six schools. PCG consultants visited classrooms to witness core instructional practices, supplementary aids and services, and approaches to differentiated instruction that should be evident within a classroom setting that supports diverse learners. These included foundational attributes to learning environments such as Universal Design for Learning and differentiated instruction. PCG's classroom visits sought evidence of the presence and implementation of:

1. Specially Designed Instruction;
2. Elements of Universal Design for Learning;
3. Student Accommodations;
4. Approaches to Co-Teaching and Consultation Teaching; and
5. Differentiation and Inclusion.

The resulting data from all classroom visits are categorized and aggregated to inform impressions of the special education district-wide system and indicate areas in which professional development in special education practices may be considered. Using aggregated data across classroom level and type adheres to the agreement to not identify specific schools or staff. Furthermore, these data are used primarily as another set of data for overall triangulation.

To select those designated for visits, PCG requested CCSD schedule classroom visits in which there were students with IEPs and the level, subject area, and placement designation. The intent was to ensure that all placement settings were represented. One PCG staff participated in each visit. Visits occurred across a three-day period that included a visitation, and a voluntary post-visit reflection with teachers who signed up to participate.

### **Staff and Parent Surveys**

An online survey process was implemented to collect data on stakeholder perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of CCSD's special education services. PCG collaborated with the District to vet survey items and disseminate two surveys: one to CCSD staff, and one to CCSD parents of students with IEPs.

Parents and staff were also invited to anonymously submit feedback to PCG via email. PCG received a total of eleven emails regarding CCSD special education programming. All emails were from parents.

### **Survey Items**

Survey items were drawn from the research and practice literature in special education and clustered to acquire data from each stakeholder group regarding the extent to which these groups perceived that policies and practices shown in the literature to support effective programming, parent involvement, and positive results for students with special needs were evident in CCSD. To the extent possible, staff and parents were asked parallel questions to gauge how perceptions about the same topic were the same or differed.

## Survey Process

PCG collaborated with the District to facilitate an electronic survey process that would result in the highest possible rate of return. An announcement notice was drafted by CCSD's communication department and families were reminded to participate. All potential participants were informed of the purpose of the survey and were provided with instructions for accessing the survey online.

The staff survey was administered on October 12, 2021 and was open for two weeks. All educators, including general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, and building administrators, received a link to the electronic survey. Reminder emails were sent to all CCSD educators. A total of 109 CCSD staff members completed the online survey—this comprised of 29 special education teachers, 46 general education teachers, 5 paraprofessionals, 6 related service providers, 8 student support service personnel, and 2 building administrators.

A total of 104 parent surveys were completed—this comprised the following parents: 11 preschool parents; 30 grades K-5 parents; 32 grades 5-8 parents; 25 grades 9-Post graduate parents; and 6 out of district placement parents. Reminders about the survey were sent via the CCSD Communications Office.

## Survey Analysis

Selected survey responses appear within the main body of the report to support findings from specific topics.

## Study Limitations

During this special education review, PCG encountered the following study limitations:

1. A narrow timeline to conduct classroom visits, interviews, and focus groups during the start of the 2021-22 school year. This led to scheduling challenges specifically around scheduling pre and post classroom visits; ultimately, there were no pre visits and post visits were voluntary. Nevertheless, this did not impact the integrity of the data collection.
2. Data collection for this report was conducted during the 2020-21 school year. This report represents a specific point in time.
3. PCG was intending to review a more detailed budget that allowed for review from the district to building levels of special education programming. However, the district's budget was not organized in a manner that allowed for a deep analysis for special education.

## PCG's Foundational Approach

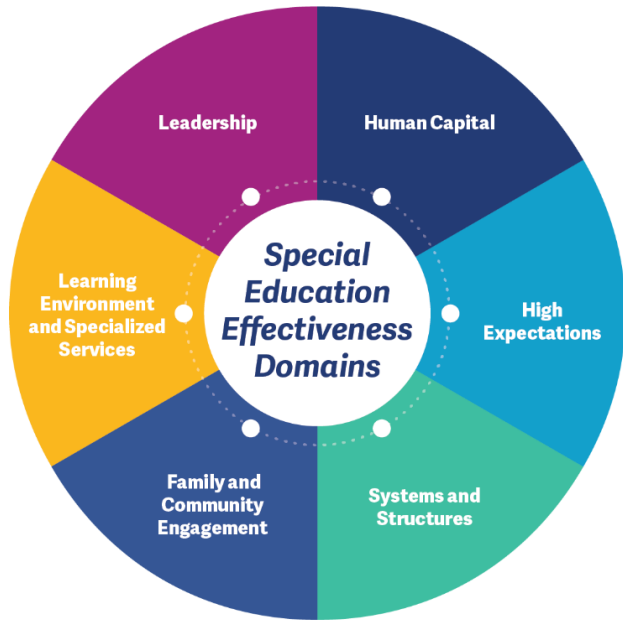
PCG approaches its work with state, county, and district organizations as a thought partner. That is, we act as an outside agent, with an objective perspective, who works alongside educational entities to recognize what is working, identify challenges and provide suggestions for improvement. We follow a mixed method Collaborative Program Evaluation model that is systematic, based upon qualitative and quantitative research methods, that produces credible and valid data to proactively inform program implementation, determine gaps, and drive recommendations for the continued improvement of the special education program. We value the importance of developing trust, open communication, and fostering collaboration between the review team and program staff.

Our philosophy for improving student outcomes in schools and districts is driven by the U.S. Department of Education's Results Driven Accountability (RDA) structure and is rooted in PCG's Special Education Effectiveness Domains framework.



## Special Education Effectiveness Domains

Building on extensive research, experience, and expertise serving over 5,000 school districts and state departments of education nationwide, PCG has developed this Special Education Effectiveness Framework to assist school districts in catalyzing conversations about, and reviewing and improving the quality of, their special education programs.<sup>2</sup>



It is designed to provide district leaders with a set of practices to strengthen special education services and supports, to highlight the multidisciplinary, integrated nature of systemic improvement, and to clearly establish a pathway for districts to move toward realizing both compliance and results. An intentional focus on improving outcomes for students with disabilities leads to improved outcomes for ALL students.

When implemented with a systems-thinking approach, the six domains of PCG's Special Education Effectiveness Framework help superintendents and other district leaders improve educational and functional outcomes for students with disabilities.

The recommendations we provide in this report are organized around these domains and are oriented toward extending CCSD's focus on outcomes for students with disabilities.

<sup>2</sup> [https://publicconsultinggroup.com/media/3347/special-education-effectiveness-framework\\_policy-paper.pdf](https://publicconsultinggroup.com/media/3347/special-education-effectiveness-framework_policy-paper.pdf)

## II. RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION STEPS

CCSD has many notable strengths, including its passionate and core beliefs of inclusion, its knowledgeable staff and its willingness to undertake this review and act on the recommendations as part of a continuous improvement cycle.

The following recommendations are considered priority recommendations. Each are interrelated and will require an investment on the part of CCSD to undertake. Implementation of these recommendations will set the foundation for all other action steps that emerge from this report. The action steps listed under each recommendation below are organized in a manner that provides a comprehensive view of the activities required to initiate change. Although components of the action steps can be implemented within a shorter timeframe, full-scale implementation of the recommendations may take three-to-five years.

PCG has mapped the recommendations in this report to the Special Education Effectiveness Domains. Action steps corresponding to the recommendations are included below.

Domains	Recommendations
 <b>Learning Environment and Specialized Services</b>  Delivering instruction and interventions within an inclusionary framework and with IEP fidelity, leading to increased access and progress in grade-level learning standards and reducing disproportionality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Multi-Tiered System of Supports</li> <li>2. Identification Practices</li> <li>3. IEP Development</li> <li>4. Inclusive Practices: Planning, Guidance, and Implementation</li> <li>5. General Education Classroom Composition, Collaborative Teaching, and Co-Teaching</li> <li>6. Out of District Placements</li> </ol>
 <b>Leadership</b>  Supporting students with disabilities (including increased collaboration and ownership of school administrators and staff) and coordinating to enhance relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Continued Inclusive Education Vision and Planning</li> <li>8. Cross-Departmental Collaboration</li> <li>9. Special Education Leadership Presence in Schools</li> </ol>
 <b>Human Capital</b>  Investing in people from recruitment to retirement to ensure highly qualified and effective staff have the skills/training needed to provide services and support to promote the success of diverse learners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Professional Development</li> </ol>
 <b>Systems and Structures</b>  Defining expectations for service delivery, resource allocation, and data management infrastructure to guide data-driven decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Special Education Policy and Procedure Manual</li> <li>12. Record Keeping</li> <li>13. Assistive Technology</li> <li>14. Budget</li> </ol>



## Family and Community Engagements

Embracing partnerships to make informed decisions and provide equitable opportunities for all students

15. Enact Report Recommendations
16. Website
17. Parent Trainings Awareness
18. Family Engagement Vision

## Learning Environment and Specialized Services

### 1. Multi-Tiered System of Supports

- **MTSS framework.** Build on CCSD's current RTI and processes to develop a unified and clear structure of MTSS for academic achievement, positive behavior, and social/emotional growth for all students. Create guides to explain how the intervention models, such as RTI, PBIS, etc., complement each other. Move from an RtI Model to an MTSS Framework, including both academic as well as behavior needs in the three-tiered triangle.
- **Districtwide leadership team.** Develop an MTSS cross-departmental district-level leadership team, including senior leadership, school principals, and representatives from every educational unit (e.g., special education, curriculum, and instruction, building leadership). Schedule meetings at least monthly to review, update, operationalize, and monitor the fidelity of MTSS implementation. Establish comparable school-based leadership teams to oversee MTSS implementation at each school.
- **Expectations.** Establish, communicate, support, and monitor clear expectations for MTSS, with clear lines of accountability and responsibility across departments and schools, aligning them with relevant standards and guidelines.
- **Guard rails.** Determine what expectations will be required district-wide and which will be a school-based decision. Incorporate the expectations into administrator, principal, teacher, paraprofessional, and related-service personnel evaluations.
- **Consistent school-based MTSS teams.** Require all schools to consistently operate a school-based MTSS team to support problem-solving, data-based decision making at all tiers to support academic advancement and positive behavior, and consistency between schools. Ensure principals schedule time for teams to implement the problem-solving process, meet and review progress monitoring and intervention data, be empowered, and be held accountable for adjusting school schedules to provide the necessary supports for all struggling students.
- **Written guidance.** Create an electronic user-friendly, and accessible MTSS manual for school teams and for parents to understand the MTSS process and to document procedures/practices relevant to the management/operation of MTSS in CCSD. Include protocol for collecting progress monitoring data and assessing student growth; what constitutes adequate progress and associated lengths of time to allow for progress, and requirements for initiating a special education evaluation when such progress is not shown. Ensure a common understanding and buy-in around the district for the need for MTSS, why and how it is implemented, what desired targets it is intended to meet, and what progress CCSD is making toward achieving the goals. Maintain the manual by updating it regularly as there are changes to policy or practice.
- **Electronic dashboard.** Develop a transparent and widely accessible district-wide early warning dashboard to monitor student intervention data use and growth for academics and behavior to enable leadership at the central office and schools to review MTSS implementation and student growth, identify patterns, solve problems, and make data-informed decisions.

Review and expand upon rubrics currently in use to have a universal set of documents that are relevant based on grade levels and types of schools.

- **Professional development.** Provide MTSS professional development for all school-based staff. Have central office staff develop turn around trainings for school-level staff, so a unified voice is heard throughout the district.
- **Academic Intervention Services (AIS).** Start Academic Services earlier in the year. Address concerns around quality of services. Schedule services so they occur during the school day. Determine whether a student with an IEP needs AIS or additional supplemental support via pull-out in a resource room setting. Clearly define AIS as a Tier 2 Intervention if that is how it is being leveraged. If student with IEP needs more intensive services than AIS, consider other supplementary instruction to support students.
- **Behavioral Supports.** Ensure students have access to behaviorists when it is determined appropriate (e.g. Board Certified Behavior Analyst). For students with Autism and/or complex disabilities, a behaviorist can play a critical role in conducting a Functional Behavior Assessment, creating a Behavioral Intervention Plan, and providing targeted, individualized behavioral protocols for students (e.g. Applied Behavior Analysis; Token Economies; Reinforcement Plans when appropriate).

## **2. Identification Practices**

- **CPSE Exits.** Ensure formal written protocols and a consistent understanding among teachers and administrators around the process, in regulation, of declassifying preschool students prior to becoming school-age (kindergarten).
- **Monitoring.** Based on the areas of practice identified through the above activities, identify data to be collected and monitored, along with any practices to be monitored, to support consistent implementation across CCSD and to identify schools needing additional support or intervention. Monitor disability categories by race to ensure there are not patterns of over/under identification by race or disability category, especially in the disability classifications of Emotional Disability (ED) or Multiple Disabilities (MD).

## **3. IEP Development**

- **Written procedures.** Include in CCSD's written special education guidance standards and examples for IEP development processes that are appropriate and consistent across the district. Guidance would include but not be limited to Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP) and data use within; student needs; IEP goals; and progress reporting. Include a procedure for discussing additional material and human resources than those currently available to meet a particular student's needs, including those needed for students who would otherwise be placed out of district.
- **Monitoring IEPs.** Establish and implement a process for periodically reviewing student IEPs for their consistency with expected standards. Consider using a school-based process, which would include an impartial CCSD facilitator to review, analyze and discuss IEPs with teachers and related service providers.
- **Collaboration.** Foster positive CSE collaboration by creating more planning time between general education and special education teachers; ensuring adequate time and coverage for staff participating in CSE meetings; and transparent processes around timelines, data, and information sharing with parents to enhance trust and partnership among all CSE members.

#### ***4. Inclusive Practices: Planning, Guidance, and Implementation***

- **Review district's "full inclusion" definition and ensure that all staff understand its meaning.** Ensure that educators do not see "full inclusion" as mainstreaming and/or integration into the general education classes, as indicated in the staff survey. Set an orientation as meeting the unique learning needs of students and providing them adequate supports. Ensure this definition includes the appropriate supports needed for students with complex disabilities; ensure that it does not preclude them from services and supports needed for them to succeed or create official and/or unofficial time-limits for the receipt of special education services (e.g. 2 hour cap for CT when student may need more as part of his/her program).
- **Implementation guide.** Develop a clearly articulated district/school implementation guide based on the inclusive education framework with expected guidance, procedures and practices. Determine the role of schools to adapt the framework to their unique needs versus CCSD requirements. This process could also include CCSD's advance approval for a school to adapt the framework with deviations CCSD defines as significant.
- **Scheduled time for collaboration.** Establish written guidance for the use of inclusive master school schedules, which establish common planning time for collaborative teaching, co-teaching, and other activities for general educators with special education and other personnel. Develop various scheduling models that schools could use and/or adapt.
- **Master Schedules.** Ensure master schedules are not limiting students from receiving special education services. In particular, at the middle school, ensure that schedule is not pulling students from the arts, band, or foreign language to receive special education services.

#### ***5. General Education Classroom Composition, Collaborative Teaching, Co-Teaching, and Learning Centers***

- **Collaborative Teaching.** Draft guidance for collaborative and consultative teaching to support students with disabilities that are consistent with best practices and meeting mandates in New York Regulations. Ensure that students are not limited to receiving a 2-hour maximum of service when in fact their IEP team agrees that additional services are required to meet their needs. Ensure that middle school schedules aren't dictating the quantity of CT services.
- **Inclusive Co-taught instruction.** Draft guidance for the delivery of co-taught instruction based on the most effective model for instruction purposes and use of the special educator in addition to meeting mandates in New York Regulations.<sup>3</sup> Based on the developed guidance, provide intensive professional development and follow-up coaching and modeling to give co-teachers the information and support they need to be true partners in the planning and delivery of classroom instruction.
- **Professional development.** Provide professional development on collaborative teaching, co-teach to ensure teachers engage in a true instructional partnership. Provide planning time for general education and special educators and others to become true collaborative partners.
- **Learning Centers (Resource Rooms).** Provide resource rooms at elementary schools for students who may require pull-out services or supplemental services in an environment that meets their needs and their IEPs.

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<sup>3</sup> See Marilyn Friend's website, *The Co-Teaching Connection* for information about six models of co-teaching, retrieved from <http://www.marilynfriend.com/approaches.htm>, as well her home page with additional resources, retrieved from <https://coteach.com/>.

## 6. Out of District Placements

- **Parent outreach.** Talk with parents and CSE teams who sought or obtained an out of district placement to better understand their motivations and CCSD program gaps.
- **School assessment.** Visit or obtain other information about the most common out of district placements to ascertain how these resources are different from any currently available for any student in CCSD schools. Place special emphasis on students at middle school levels – specifically focusing on how programming offered at out of district placements within neighboring school districts can be replicated in CCSD.

## Leadership

### 7. Inclusive Education Vision and Planning

- **Renewed guiding vision and mission of “Full Inclusion”.** Clearly articulate “full inclusion” in a manner that all can understand the vision and mission – from leadership to educators. Ensure educators do not mistaken mainstreaming or integration as inclusion.
- **Clear expectations.** Either in the renewed vision/mission or other documentation, communicate to schools, parents, and the broader community that CCSD expects and will take steps to ensure (1) students with disabilities make the greatest amount of progress possible in the general education curriculum (or modified curriculum per IEPs) through rigorous and high quality standards-aligned instruction, and specially designed instruction and interventions, along with differentiated instruction, accommodations, and modifications; (2) inclusion is not merely mainstreaming or integrating; (3) inclusion can still be achieved when students, especially students with complex disabilities, receive additional specialized services and supports outside the general education classroom; and (4) partnerships with families are critical for trusting and collaborative partnerships.
- **Strategic plan.** Develop a long-range strategic plan based on the above recommendations as well as other relevant information.

### 8. Cross-Departmental Collaboration

- **Increase Collaboration with Office of Curriculum and Instruction.** Establish a schedule for routine, collaborative meetings between the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, the Special Education Office, and the Office of Pupil Personnel Services to ensure that special education and curriculum are functioning in lock-step.
- **Collaboration between Office of Special Education and Office of Diversity, Equity, and Wellness.** Collaborate on matters such as the identification of racial minorities with disabilities to ensure students are not being overidentified. Ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities is not being excluded from the “inclusion” definition within the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Wellness.
- **Collaborative work.** Use these collaborative partnerships to establish consistent and integrative approaches to support improved instruction for various purposes by creating cross-functional workgroups.
- **Key performance indicators (KPIs).** Set goals for all cross-departmental initiatives and establish KPIs with targets to measure the extent to which they are beneficial or require modification.

## **9. Special Education Leadership Presence in Schools**

- **Administrator Visibility in schools.** Ensure Special Education Director and Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services are known faces in buildings; establish opportunities for staff within buildings to meet/collaborate.

## **Human Capital**

### **10. Professional Development**

- **Special Education Planning.** Include special education in the district's existing professional development planning. Ensure that supporting the needs of students with IEPs, IEP writing, and other essential components of special education are part of CCSD's mentoring process. Include professional development opportunities that address complex disabilities.

## **Systems and Structures**

### **11. Special Education Policy and Procedure Manual**

- **Standard Operating Procedures Manual.** As stated earlier, create an interactive, web-based CCSD special education manual to support user-friendly and transparent access to procedures/practices relevant to the management and operations of special education and to which school staff can be held accountable for implementing. Streamline resources so that school teams can easily access relevant information and use embedded hyperlinks to provide information for staff as needed. Update the manual on a routine basis. Include criteria, procedures, and practices for each area in the manual relevant to the implementation of these recommendations, e.g., criteria for child find; MTSS progress criteria to support the referral of students for special education evaluations; inclusive instruction; revised continuum of services; transportation protocol; etc. Make this an internal and external facing document.
- **Assistive Technology.** Ensure that students with devices, especially speech generating devices, have access to Assistive Technology Professionals in addition to the supporting Speech and Language Pathologist, to provide staff training, student training, parent training, and ensure ongoing functionality within the child's Special Education program.
- **Budget.** Engage in a special education budgeting process that allows for a building-by-building breakdown of special education expenditures.

### **12. Record Keeping**

- **IEP Accuracy.** To build community trust, implement the recommendations in this report and publicly report at least twice per year on progress made or obstacles/delays encountered.
- **Board Mandates.** Ensure board has the required documentation on the provision of services for children with IEPs in the form of a list; instead of providing redacted IEPs. Within its capacity to arrange for the appropriate special education programs and services to be provided to a student with a disability as recommended by the committee on special education, the district can provide a list that includes the following information instead of redacted IEPs: a brief summary that includes recommendations and service details that warrant or incur a cost to the district; however, the student ID or other personally identifiable information cannot be listed.



## Family and Community Engagement

### **13. Enact Report Recommendations**

- **Implement and publicly report recommendation progress.** In order to build community trust, implement the recommendations in this report and publicly report at least twice per year on progress made or obstacles/delays encountered. Ensure this information is shared with key stakeholders including the Special Education PTA.

### **14. Website**

- **Content.** At least annually, review and update materials posted on the CCSD website regarding special education process (CSE and CPSE), instructional models, related services, and supplementary aids and services. Ensure this information is clearly accessible and comprehensive and accessible to parents with diverse linguistic needs and sensory limitations.

### **15. Family Engagement Vision**

- **Collaborative vision.** With representatives of parent support groups as well as other CCSD diverse representatives, have discussions about family engagement, specific to special education. Based on these discussions, create a core belief vision statement of agreed-upon ideals. Share it with other stakeholders to build family engagement support across the District.
- **Parent Training Engagement and Communication.** In consultation with representatives of parent support groups, develop a training plan for families in the areas of IEP process, role of the child study team, helpful hints for parents at home, and how families can take an active and collaborative role at IEP meetings. Ensure a communications plan exists to ensure the widest possible audience.



### III. DISTRICT CONTEXT

#### District Context

The Chappaqua Central School District (CCSD) is located in Chappaqua, New York and includes all of the hamlets of Chappaqua and Millwood, and parts of Armonk, Briarcliff Manor, Mount Kisco, Ossining, and Pleasantville, New York. The district is located 35 miles from New York City. CCSD describes itself as "...a nationally renowned, public school system characterized by highly motivated students, a broadly educated and talented staff, and an actively involved parent community."<sup>4</sup> The population is approximately 18,000 residents, many of whom commute to New York City or one of the surrounding business centers in the Tri-State Area.<sup>5</sup>

CCSD has a reputation for having high-quality schools and programs. Of significant note administrators, teachers, and staff PCG interacted with had a deep connection to the school community. Building leaders and teachers knew almost all students by name and could speak about their interests, their families, and the contributions their students make to their school community.

In CCSD, according to the New York State Education Department, Chappaqua's classification rate of students receiving special education services has been the following: 2017-18, 10.1%; 2018-19, 9.6%, and 2019-20, 9.4%. During these school years, the rates trended below state averages. According to data submitted by CCSD to PCG, 404 out of 3577 students ages 6-21 have IEPs, yielding a classification rate of 11.2%.

### IV. SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Educator Commitment.</b> The District has committed educators (teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers) dedicated to supporting students with IEPs. Many of the staff PCG consultants met shared their enthusiasm for working in CCSD.</li> <li>• <b>Deeply Engrained Belief in "Full Inclusion."</b> All staff PCG encountered have a belief that students with IEPs should be participating with their typically developing peers to the maximum extent.</li> <li>• <b>Out of District Placement Rates Consistent with Neighboring Peer Districts.</b> CCSD's placement rate is consistent with peers.</li> <li>• <b>Physical School and Classroom Environment.</b> The culture and climate of each of the Chappaqua schools visited were clean, secure, well-designed and appointed, and reflected a welcoming student friendly atmosphere.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Multi-Tiered System of Supports.</b> There is inconsistent use of an MTSS or RtI framework to support struggling learners or special education referral data and conflicting beliefs on how the process can potentially support the needs of struggling students who may be identified in the future as students with disabilities. It is predominately found at the elementary schools; minimally followed in the middle schools; and is not followed at the high school.</li> <li>• <b>Outdated and Under-utilized RtI Handbook.</b> CCSD has an RtI handbook that is over a decade old and is inconsistently used and/or referenced.</li> <li>• <b>Academic Intervention Services (AIS).</b> AIS reading and math occur later in the year and the district has challenges filling the roles. They are sometimes used as supplemental instruction for students with IEPs; however, AIS frequently occurs before the start of school.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.chappaquaschools.org/district>

<sup>5</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/19TSaRIH4cQ8Wfn4x2JR9pP\\_ScUjHyTIL/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/19TSaRIH4cQ8Wfn4x2JR9pP_ScUjHyTIL/view)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Universal Design for Learning (UDL).</b> Although many teachers did not know it by name, several were engaged in core UDL concepts.</li> <li>• <b>Effective Integrated Co-teaching (ICT).</b> In classrooms where ICT was being conducted, it appeared to be effective and well planned.</li> <li>• <b>Reading as a Related Service.</b> Teachers and parents pleased by the programming provided through this service.</li> <li>• <b>Drop Out Rate.</b> Exceptionally low dropout rate for students with IEPs.</li> <li>• <b>College Matriculation.</b> Exceptionally high rate of students with IEPs matriculating into college.</li> <li>• <b>Scores and Achievement Gaps on Standardized Assessments.</b> Students with disabilities as a cohort are improving in their overall scores (as proficient) and narrowing the achievement gap with general education students in Grade 3 Math and ELA; Grade 4 Math and ELA; Grade 5 ELA; Grade 7 ELA; and Grade 8 ELA. Proficiency decreased in the areas of Grade 5 Math; Grade 6 ELA and Math; Grade 7 Math and Grade 8 Math.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>IEP/CSE Process.</b> The process lacks consistency across the District because staff feel messages and communication styles have changed with leadership changes in the Special Education Office, and the newly created Office of the Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel.</li> <li>• <b>CPSE Exit Process.</b> There are no formal written protocols and an inconsistent understanding among teachers and administrators around the process of declassifying preschool students prior to becoming school-age (kindergarten).</li> <li>• <b>Inconsistent alignment in IEPs from Present Levels Statement to Needs and to Goals.</b> Staff inconsistently write Present Levels and Needs thus sometimes missing opportunities to create goals that address specific needs. It was also identified that the goals CSE teams frequently write are skill based while the instruction is content based, which sometimes creates an inherent mismatch between the instruction and the goals.</li> <li>• <b>Inconsistent Definition of “Full Inclusion.”</b> Based on survey results, some educators see it as mainstreaming and/or integration into the general education classes. Others see it as meeting the unique learning needs of students and providing them adequate supports</li> <li>• <b>Limited Continuum of Services.</b> With an emphasis on maximizing the time spent in a general education classroom, some students with unique learning needs may not be getting access to learning supports and strategies that they need in order to be successful.</li> <li>• <b>Continuum Challenges Impact Modifications.</b> There are intensive modifications required by some students that resulted in them being instructed often by paraprofessionals or special ed teachers separately in the classroom. This was also the result of insufficient time for students to receive learning center, resource support or the special ed teacher being in the class for a limited amount of time</li> <li>• <b>Out of District Placements at the Middle School Years.</b> Challenges with the continuum may be driving out of district placement rates.</li> <li>• <b>Consultant Teacher Model and Time Limits.</b> CSEs function under a limit of 2 hours of special education services.</li> </ul> |
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Middle School Schedule Influences Services.</b> CSEs frequently feel restricted by schedule and make special education and related service decisions around schedule instead of student need.</li> <li>• <b>Middle School Encore and Students with IEPs.</b> Middle school pull-out often occurs during the arts, music, and band; thus requiring students with IEPs to miss important courses essential to middle school students.</li> <li>• <b>Learning Centers (Resource Rooms) Not Available at Elementary Schools.</b> Students who may require services in resource room settings do not have access in elementary schools.</li> <li>• <b>Specialized Behavior Supports for Students with IEPs.</b> For some students with behavioral issues, there was no BIP prepared as they believed the program addressed behavioral issues. The district contracts out for some behavioral services but does not have any behavioral specialists available to teachers and teams.</li> <li>• <b>Transition.</b> Transition goals frequently lack the use of quantitative data, no use of career inventories to inform transition goals at high school; students leveraging services such as vocational rehabilitation or Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) may have these items noted but not within the transition section of their IEP.</li> <li>• <b>Scores and achievement Gaps on Standardized Assessments.</b> scores decreased and gaps widened in the following areas: Grade 5 Math; Grade 6 ELA and Math; Grade 7 Math; Grade 8 ELA.</li> </ul>
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## Summary and Implications

CCSD must be applauded for their efforts towards inclusive education. It appears to be implemented very well for many of the students and the teachers are extremely talented and trained to appropriately provide collaborative teaming to support the students with disabilities. The PCG consultants witnessed evidence-based inclusive education practices as well as superior instruction. However, to achieve “full inclusion” requires that every student receives the level and type of instruction that they require. If students are not making progress that they could make with support; not achieving the highest scores that they could achieve on the NY State assessments; and not working toward achieving a desired pathway to a diploma, additional models of support must be considered. In addition, teachers must not be over-extended trying to meet the needs of those students with more complex learning needs or a great system will never achieve further excellence for students with disabilities.

The district staff refers to the variety of additional support for students that may be struggling or need additional assistance, as Response to Intervention. There appear to be “RtI” teams within each elementary school and loosely defined at the middle schools, which are designed as mechanisms for

early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. It was unclear if this system identified students through a universal screening.

However, the district may want to review the existing supports (AIS Before-School) and the “RtI” protocols, for the purposes of assuring that the variety of existing supports are organized differently within tiers and made available and more uniformed across all schools. Leveraging Grades 3-8 standardized assessment data reviewed earlier, the district may want to further study the supports offered based in the following areas: Grade 5 Math; Grade 6 ELA and Math; Grade 7 Math; Grade 8 ELA.

Since Response to Intervention is a term used for a specific research-based approach to addressing the support of struggling learners prior to any consideration of classification, it may be more accurate to refer these services as a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Lastly, the district may consider formalizing their system of tiered support so to identify students with learning challenges that may be designated as special education.

It is recommended that AIS become a component of Tier 2 intervention within the newly organized MTSS system; and used to provide struggling students with assistance. The district may want to consider not using AIS as a special education service and replace this with Resource Room supplemental instruction adhering to the NY State Special Education Regulations.

It appears that the implementation of the CT model with a limit of 2 hours or less per day, across the district may be sufficient for some of the students, however, it is not meeting the needs of all of the students.

In addition, teachers report they are concerned about assuring all their students are getting what they need regarding special education service time. Classroom visits and interviews identified the need of additional special education teachers and well as a need to refine the current models and services. This is not to suggest that the district’s foundational philosophical of “inclusion” needs or should be abandoned or must be compromised. In fact, by providing more special education teachers, creating more robust collaborative teaming options; and providing the needed direct instructional supplementary services, the goal of inclusion can be strengthened.

For example, the district may consider expanding on the CT model re-designing the way it provides these services to align with a more open and flexible service model. A more flexible service delivery model that is can more appropriately respond to the individual needs of students with disabilities and decrease the need to remove them from the general education classrooms such as Collaborative Consultation which is very similar to the district’s current CT services however increases the time and way the special education teacher may provide support to his/he caseload.<sup>6</sup>

Within this model, the student is always placed in the general education classroom the special education and general education teachers have the flexibility in meeting the individualized and evolving needs of students with disabilities. Special educators are provided a caseload of students with disabilities, across a number of classrooms and/or teachers, for whom they are responsible for providing the specialized supports needed by each student. Unlike a more static model the special educator, in collaboration with their general educator, determines the daily/weekly level of support of the student in response to the changing demands of the curriculum and instruction.<sup>7</sup> The special educator uses all the vehicles of special education services available in a flexible schedule. This schedule may include small group or individual direct instruction within or outside the general education classroom; monitoring of students within the general education classroom; traditional models of co-teaching (including in-class support); modifications

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<sup>6</sup> Deshler, D., Schumaker, J., Bui, Y., & Vernon, S. (2006). Teaching adolescents with disabilities: Accessing the general education curriculum. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

<sup>7</sup> Eisenman, L.T., Pleet, A.M., Wandry, D., McGinley, V., (2011). Voices of special education teachers in an inclusive high school: Redefining responsibilities. Remedial and Special Education 32(2) 91-104. Sage Publishing.

and adaptation to general education curriculum and instruction; teacher consultation; and technical assistance.

The special education faculty work diligently to customize the instruction for students with learning needs; and best practices were documented. However, both general and special education teachers identified areas in which they could benefit from some specialized and targeted professional development. Areas mentioned included (1) understanding and instructing students on the Autism Spectrum especially those that are dual diagnosed; (2) new approaches to co-teaching / consultant services; and (3) new approaches to the inclusion of student with extensive support needs.

## V. SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Highly Talented Staff and Retention.</b> CCSD is one of the highest-paying districts in the region and generally does not have recruitment or retention challenges. Teachers and administrators shared that rigorous tenure process leads to a highly talented staff.</li> <li>• <b>Mentorship Program.</b> New teachers and administrators appreciate the mentorship program.</li> <li>• <b>Wilson Trained Special Education Teachers.</b> The district made a considerable investment to train its special education teachers in the Wilson Reading method.</li> <li>• <b>Professional Development.</b> On the whole, the staff appreciate the PD offerings of the district.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Standard Operating Procedures Guide.</b> The district does not have a standard operating procedures guide.</li> <li>• <b>Special Education Administrator Presence in Schools.</b> Administrators and teachers would like increased opportunities for the Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Personnel Services and the Special Education Director to visit their schools.</li> <li>• <b>Consistent Communication from Special Education Department.</b> Due to turnover, teachers and building administrators feel the directives they have received from the Special Education Department have been inconsistent.</li> <li>• <b>Mentorship Program.</b> New teachers and administrators would like to see more special education instructional supports as part of the mentorship program.</li> <li>• <b>Professional Development.</b> Teachers would like more professional development to support the needs of complex learners (e.g. behavioral supports; supporting students with Autism; supporting students with emotional challenges).</li> <li>• <b>Interdepartmental Collaboration.</b> The Special Education Department needs to renew its close connection to the Office of Curriculum and Instruction.</li> <li>• <b>Special Education Budget.</b> The district does not have special education budgets by building or by setting (e.g. ICT, CT, Resource) at the building level. In addition, the detailed budget does not include a breakdown by service provider (e.g. OT, PT, Speech), and costs for special education instructional materials.</li> <li>• <b>Record Keeping.</b> During file review focus groups, inaccuracies were found regarding service-minutes for special education.</li> <li>• <b>Board Receipt of Redacted IEPs.</b> Board members receive whole redacted IEPs when the requirement set forth in Part 200.2(a) 4 indicates that the Board of Education is responsible for data reporting which only makes mention of the collection and maintenance of lists of number of students</li> </ul>

	served via special ed and number of students not served.
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## Summary and Implications

CCSD is one of the highest-paying districts in the region and generally does not have recruitment or retention challenges. Teachers and administrators shared that rigorous tenure process leads to a highly talented staff. At the same time, teachers and administrators appreciate the district's recent mentorship program for new teachers.

In the past few years, CCSD made a considerable investment to train its special education teachers in the Wilson Reading method. This is appreciated both staff and parents alike; the districts Reading as a Related Service is led by Wilson Trained Reading Specialists and received high praise. On the whole, the staff appreciate the PD offerings of the district.

Challenges, however, have been felt by staff and administrators because the district does not have a standard operating procedures guide. This issue is compounded by administrator turnover; due to turnover, teachers and building administrators feel the directives they have received from the Special Education Department have been inconsistent. Under present leadership in the Office of Pupil Personnel Services and Special Education, building leaders and teachers alike voiced their desire to see more of the central office administration in their buildings.

Although professional development received praised, there were also areas noted for improvement: (1) New teachers and administrators would like to see more special education instructional supports as part of the mentorship program and (2) Teachers would like more professional development to support the needs of complex learners (e.g. behavioral supports; supporting students with Autism; supporting students with emotional challenges).

Over the past few years, Special Education and Curriculum and Instruction have gone from "attached to the hip" to being "siloed." Special Education Department needs to renew its close connection to the Office of Curriculum and Instruction.

The district does not have special education budgets by building or by setting (e.g. ICT, CT, Resource) at the building level. In addition, the detailed budget does not include a breakdown by service provider (e.g. OT, PT, Speech), and costs for special education instructional materials. This makes it challenging for an outsider (such as PCG) or internally (such as the Office of Pupil Personnel Services) to see special education expenditures at the building level.

In regards to record keeping PCG found challenges with IEP inaccuracies regarding During file review focus groups, inaccuracies were found regarding service-minutes for special education.

PCG also identified issues around information shared with the Board of Education regarding student IEPs. Presently, Board members receive whole redacted IEPs when the requirement set forth in Part 200.2(a) 4 indicates that the Board of Education is responsible for data reporting which only makes mention of the collection and maintenance of lists of number of students served via special ed and number of students not served. Within its capacity to arrange for the appropriate special education programs and services to be provided to a student with a disability as recommended by the committee on special education, the district can provide a list that includes the following information instead of redacted IEPs: a brief summary that includes recommendations and service details that warrant or incur a cost to the district; however, the student ID or other personally identifiable information cannot be listed.



## VI. PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Highly engaged parents.</b> The parents of CCSD students are highly engaged and care about their child's school and their child's academic outcomes.</li> <li>• <b>CCSD Special Education Website.</b> The CCSD Special Education Department webpage contains a lot of useful information for parents.</li> <li>• <b>Responsiveness.</b> Most surveyed parents believe the district responds within a reasonable timeframe.</li> <li>• <b>Parent Trainings.</b> CCSD offers several opportunities for parent trainings through the district and the Special Education PTO.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>CCSD Special Education Website.</b> Some information on the CCSD Website is dated and needs to be updated.</li> <li>• <b>Parent Training Awareness.</b> Surveyed parents overwhelmingly said they were not aware of the trainings.</li> <li>• <b>Communication about Student Progress.</b> Many parents shared they want more information on student progress relative to their IEP.</li> <li>• <b>Service Delivery.</b> Many parents expressed concern for a lack of time their child has with the Consultative Teacher.</li> <li>• <b>Full Inclusion.</b> Some parents felt that they appreciated the full inclusion philosophy but that their child was excluded because of the lack of appropriate services.</li> </ul>

### Summary and Implications

The parents of CCSD students are highly engaged and care about their child's school and their child's academic outcomes. Several parents shared favorable statements about the CCSD Special Education Program; this was most notable in the parent survey. Most surveyed parents believe the district responds within a reasonable timeframe. Parents, both during focus groups and in the survey, shared they were pleased with responsiveness, particularly with special education teachers.

CCSD offers several opportunities for parent trainings through the district and the Special Education PTO. Yet, surveyed parents overwhelmingly said they were not aware of the trainings. This may be on account on how the information is shared. It is noted by PCG that information on the CCSD Website is dated and needs to be updated.

Many parents shared they want more information on student progress relative to their IEP. Many parents also expressed concern for a lack of time their child has with the Consultative Teacher.

Through interviews and surveys, some parents felt that they appreciated the full inclusion philosophy but that their child was excluded because of the lack of appropriate services, especially if their child has complex needs.





**Solutions that Matter**