Montclair Public Schools
Special Education Program Review
May 2021

Findings and Recommendations

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Contents

Introduction

The Montclair Public Schools Board of Education contracted with Go Teach Consultants, LLC (the Team) to conduct an independent, systemic review of the district's special education program. The review began on January 11, 2021 and was completed on April 22, 2021.

The Team used a Process-based approach to conduct the review. A Process-based approach is appropriate when attempting to determine how well an established program is functioning on a systemic level. In the case of the Montclair School District, a Process-based approach is especially relevant given that the district has 11 schools and operates a magnet system that can produce variability in programming across school sites. It is important to understand how well the processes related to the special education program function across the district as a unified system of service.

Methods Overview

The Team used a case study design with mixed-methods to conduct the review. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected remotely and on-site.

- Focus group interviews
- Individual interviews
- Survey
- Document review
- Quantitative data from NJSMART, NJDOE Reports, and IEP Direct

Interviews were conducted with over 205 people representing 11 stakeholder groups:

- Parents, representing every major program and classification in the district
- Board of Education members
- Recent high school graduates
- Special Education Supervisors
- CST members
- Central Office
- Principals
- Elementary Teachers
- Middle School Teachers
- High School Teachers
- Advocates

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze interview and survey data from each stakeholder group. Single-case analysis and cross-case analysis were used to identify major themes and sub-themes within each stakeholder group and across groups.

Cross-case analysis is particularly useful when looking for processes, procedures, and programs that function effectively across an entire system and processes that need strengthening across the system. One result of the magnet system is that students move from building to building based on programmatic needs. The quality of the services that students and parents/guardians/caregivers experience should not depend on the building that they attend.

Disproportionality Calculations

The Team performed disproportionality calculations to examine the issue of racial disproportionality in the special education program. There are various methods for calculating disproportionality. In many cases the differences in methods are a result of the questions being asked.

The Team followed the recommendations and formulas from the *Methods for Assessing Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: A Technical Assistance Guide (***See Citation).* For this review, the Team sought to answer one main question related to disproportionality and used a corresponding formula:

Question: What was the likelihood for [specific Race] children with disabilities receiving special education and related services inside the regular classroom < 40% of the school day or out-of-district compared to the likelihood for all other children with disabilities in the district?

Formula: Likelihood = % District-level < 40% educational environment for [specific Race] / % District-level < 40% educational environment likelihood for all other children

The following calculations and results were based on data obtained by reviewing the amount of time educated in the LRE for every student with special needs, by race, in the district through reports run from IEP Direct (See Table 1).

Table 1: LRE Placement by Race*

	Over 80%	< 40%	OOD	Total 1011
White	428 (84%)	27 (5%)	52 (10%)	507
African American	220 (73%)	37 (12%)	42 (14%)	299
Latino	100 (82%)	11 (11%)	10 (10%)	121
Asian	49 (75%)	8 (12%)	8 (12%)	65
Native American	N/A	N/A	N/A	19

*494 students classified as OHI

**Note: Data on number of students classified, time in the LRE, and race and ethnicity, obtained from IEP Direct does not match Oct 15 report in terms of numbers of students classified, racial makeups, and % of day in various settings. For example, the New Jersey Department of Education October 15th count for 2019 included 663 students receiving special education services whereas the report we ran from IEP direct was able to account for 1011 students. It is not uncommon for some discrepancies to occur between state and local reporting, but some large differences exist that merit the district reviewing their data entry procedures and training protocols.

Classification by Race

The following results must be interpreted with caution, due to the possibility of data errors within the IEP Direct database. The results reported should be viewed as approximations within a possible range due to the standard error of measurement associated with the data.

Black: 19% of race is classified
1.6 times more likely to be placed in self-contained or out of district compared to all other races combined.

Asian: 18.1% of race is classified
1.23 times more likely to be placed in self-contained or out of district compared to all other races combined.

Hispanic: 14.2% of race classified
1.07 times more likely to be placed in self-contained or out of district compared to all other races combined.

White: 15% of race is classified
.65 times likely (less than 1.00) to be placed in self-contained or out of district compared to all other races.

***Reference
Bollmer, J.M., Bethel, J.W., Munk, T.E., & Bitterman, A.R. (2014). *Methods for Assessing Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: A Technical Assistance Guide (Revised)*. Westat & IDEA Data Center, United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Grant No. H373Y130002.

Themes and Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the results from the cross-case analysis. The recommendations are aimed at improving the systemic effectiveness of the special education program in the Montclair Public Schools. The recommendations are organized thematically. The Team used data triangulation to develop the recommendations (All recommendations derive from at least three data points).

Theme	Recommendations
Systemic Approach	Implement a systems-based approach to special education that provides the protocols, process, practices, and oversight necessary to ensure educational equity and quality across programs and schools. Common protocols must be followed throughout the district (e.g., IEP development, determination of the need for paraprofessionals, data collection for progress monitoring and reporting, dyslexia screening, I&RS, RTI). Strengthen the linkages between the general education program and pupil services to provide best-practice supports in the general education setting across the district. (e.g. Professional development for general education teachers in areas such as behavior supports, reading interventions, accommodations versus modifications, effective co-teaching, and dyslexia screening and instruction). Provide school scheduling oversight and scheduling support to increase effectiveness and efficiency with the deployment of in-class support special education teachers and the use of paraprofessionals within individual schools. Create a systemic PK-5 approach to language arts in general education and special education settings that includes best practice interventions, revised curriculum, and fidelity of implementation of programs and resources for literacy. *"As someone with multiple children, in multiple programs and grade levels, I can say the program is very inconsistent. It really depends on who you get year to year. Sometimes you get lucky, sometimes, you don't."*
Rebuild Culture for Equity	Change the general perception of the special education evaluation and classification process from adversarial to collaborative based on information and data sharing. Work to consistently inform and include stakeholders throughout the process.

	The data suggest there is a general feeling that information is not forthcoming and that parents/guardians/caregivers are made to "figure things out" as they move through the process. *"Parents who come with more information and resources get more services."* Create a system of checklists and protocols that include important information that parents/guardians/caregivers should receive during each step of the process to ensure continuity of information across the district. Create a more comprehensive Directory of Services than what currently exists and then implement the services listed with fidelity across the district. The Directory should list every program in the district and where that program exists and who the program is best suited to serve. Parents/guardians/caregivers and teachers could be important resources in the development of such a directory. Develop a clear Chain of Command document with specific levels of responsibility so parents/guardians/caregivers know who to call with questions or information. Identify the type of questions that can be answered at each level. *"Parents are not told about all their options. I had no idea an in-class support program was available in another school, even though I expressed an interest in options for the least restrictive environment. I had to find this out on my own and bring it to the team"* *"Parents get stuck in a whirlpool of bureaucracy and the district seems to lead you around in circles instead of pivoting to a new plan. Change takes a long time and kids fall through the cracks.* *"There needs to be a culture of -why don't we try this? "* There is evidence to suggest that parents/guardians/caregivers who come into the process with more resources (e.g., advocates, attorneys, private evaluations), get more resources out of the process. This creates educational inequities within the system.
Communication	A systemic approach to communication should be implemented. Communication about special education programs and processes needs to be coordinated and differentiated to the programs across the district, not just at the building level. A committee approach that includes various stakeholder groups could provide important input into the type and format of communication that is necessary.

	Checklists and flowcharts would be helpful to guide discussions and decision making on the part of parents/guardians/caregivers, teachers, and CST members. Return phone calls with substantive and factually correct answers within 48 hours (A clear Chain of Command will help address this issue). *"I can't rely on accurate communication about special education programming from the district. I have to always check everything with other parents who have gone through the system. For example, I found out about a program at another school that would be helpful to my child, but was told by my case manager that such a program did not exist."*
Boiler Plate IEP	IEPs need to be customized to the student and reflect the student's needs. A student-centered approach to programming is necessary. IEPs need to be thoroughly reviewed for errors: (a) incorrect student names, (b) incorrect birth dates, (c) accommodations and modifications not related to the child's needs or programming, etc. A system of random auditing should be set up to monitor IEP accuracy. IEPs must be read, clearly understood by special education, general education, and paraprofessional staff, and implemented with fidelity. "Modifications" must meet the definition of a modification. The Team identified cases in which strategies listed under "Modifications" did not qualify as actual modifications as defined by law. Some IEPs listed goals related to homework completion but the percentages for such goals seemed arbitrary. Professional development support in writing appropriate goals and objectives is recommended. Professional development support for general education and special education staff in the areas of writing and implementing classroom accommodations and modifications is recommended.
Deferring the Intervention	A culture of shared responsibility for special education instruction must become part of the general education environment systemwide. General education teachers must be supported so they become more comfortable and confident with implementing classroom-based interventions for academics and behaviors. Increase the consistency of the implementation of special education modifications and accommodations by general education teachers. In

	some instances, the general education teacher defers to the other staff in the room (e.g. paraprofessional, special education teacher) to implement the IEP supports for students with special needs. In other classes, the instruction was described as being fully integrated and a team approach exists.

In some instances, more involved instructional or behavioral issues are being deferred to the paraprofessionals in the general education settings. Using paraprofessionals for tasks in which they are not certified or prepared can reduce student independence and slow progress toward the LRE.

Additional training supports for special education and general education teachers should be provided on collaborative models of co-teaching, such as team teaching, parallel teaching, and alternative teaching. |
| Progress Monitoring | Progress monitoring must be based on actionable data. The current practices of progress monitoring are sometimes opaque and not systemic.

Systematize data collection and reporting for the purposes of progress monitoring IEP goals and objectives. There needs to be a culture of progress monitoring for goals and objectives based on actionable quantitative and qualitative data. Lists of acceptable data could be constructed and distributed, and training on how to collect, interpret, and the communicate the meaning of data should be provided.

The district should adopt an "asset-based" approach to data collection and progress monitoring and jettison any practices related to the "deficit-based" model. Data should be used to help uncover student strengths and identify opportunities to provide supports to move the student on the LRE continuum.

Data should inform the child's program rather than support a pre-determined placement. The data suggest that in some cases, the use of data emanates from what some stakeholders described as a *"make a child fit a program instead of creating supports that fit the child"* mindset.

A system of random auditing should be used to monitor the quality of progress reporting and data collection and use.

The dearth of quality data makes it difficult for the CST members to communicate, justify, and/or defend their positions and recommendations during IEP meetings. It also makes it difficult for parents/guardians/caregivers to determine whether their child is making progress. This leads to parents/guardians/caregivers requesting additional services or placements in an attempt to help their children be |

	successful and the district is unprepared to thoroughly consider and respond to those requests with data. *"There are things on my child's IEP that I never receive data on. It seems like things are simply included in the goals and objectives to make me feel like I am getting something. But those things are never thoroughly reviewed with data."* Professional development support for progress monitoring is recommended.
Communication within the Special Education Department	Maximize special education supports to schools in accordance with the NJ Code and federal law by increasing departmental communication to include a focus on supporting instruction and attaining positive movement of students toward the LRE through systemic best practice. Ensure consistent and common meeting times for CST across the district to support a systemic focus on programming. Time should be dedicated to review district-wide guidelines, protocols and procedures, and providing clear expectations and feedback to all. Provide an updated institutionalized record/handbook/policy manual and set of checklists and protocols to which all staff, including new staff, can refer to and follow regardless of the school/s they serve. Monitor fidelity of implementation and coach, support, and evaluate staff accordingly. Schedule bi-monthly department meetings, at a minimum, for all CST team members to share best practices and distribute any protocols and general information related to systemic operations. In addition, develop a schedule for the calendar year for district administration to meet with each CST team (per school building) at least monthly to discuss individual school needs and how those needs relate to systemic goals. Ensure adherence to the MEA contract as it pertains to 7.1(4) in order to maximize district dedicated time for CST members to accomplish duties five days immediately after the close of school and five days immediately prior to school. Notice must be given of such duties by May 15 of each year. Adhering to the contract will reduce the amount of per diem paid to employs for work done outside of the contracted days during the summer and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of special education services for children.
Continuum of Services Special Education Instructional Programs	The continuum of services requirement states that school districts must have a range of program options available to be able to implement the IEPs for students with special needs.

	Programs within schools should be developed as result of the individual student needs as identified by the IEP. Expand programs so students of varying disabilities can be moved to less restrictive settings.
IEP Direct Program	CST/RSP, special education teachers, general education teachers and supervisors should attend regular IEP/Progress Report training through Frontline to support their efforts to ensure IEPs are up to date and that everyone is working with the same information.
Continuous Improvement	Create a continuous improvement dashboard based on a system of data collection and analysis that will enable the superintendent, administrators and certificated staff to (1) monitor the effectiveness of programs, (2) review student growth, (3) identify patterns within programs, and (4) make informed decisions. Possible program purchase-Frontline 504, RTI and I&RS.
Paraprofessionals	District must develop clear operational standards for determining when additional support is needed for a student with disabilities and when mores student independence can be fostered. Review paraprofessional need in classrooms that have an existing large proportion of adults to students support. Overuse of 1:1 paraprofessionals can stymie efforts to build student independence and movement on the LRE continuum. When paraprofessional support is no longer needed there should be an effective mechanism for transferring the support elsewhere. There is evidence to suggest that paraprofessionals are kept in current assignments after students transfer to other schools. School scheduling support needs to be implemented at the building level to aid with the efficient use of paraprofessionals and certified in-class support special education teachers. The way students with disabilities are scheduled at the school influences the efficient and effective use of staffing resources and the quality of services received by students. In some cases, paraprofessionals are expected to provide direct academic instruction and/or behavioral supports that are quite complex, yet they are not specialists in those areas. Using paraprofessionals for tasks in which they are not certified or prepared can reduce student independence and progress toward the LRE. *"I know my child's paraprofessional is handling the majority of the IEP implementation and in some cases instruction, because I ask my child who is working with my child and on what."*

Personnel caseloads & supports	There is evidence to suggest that the CST caseloads need to reviewed for appropriateness. Reports of rushed IEP meetings (i.e. 30 minutes), "boiler plate" IEPs, mistakes on IEPs, and not returning parent/guardian/caregiver phone calls in a timely manner point to potential issues of case overload. Include analysis of student numbers, frequency of services, number of schools served, and the intensity of services needed by each student in relation to CST caseloads.
Staffing needs	Investigate the potential need for additional CST/RSP to maintain a full team in each school building. Secretarial staff to schedule special education meetings and assist with paperwork may be necessary to ensure processes are completed in a timely manner. Additional Special Education Supervisor to supervise schools. An additional supervisor would provide the district with more resources for support and oversight. Additional BCBAs to provide supports with the behavioral needs in the district and to provide professional development to staff on teaching replacement behaviors when dealing with challenging, problem behaviors. Additional Reading Specialist and additional Wilson/Orton-Gillingham trained teachers. Less intense and less costly Orton-Gillingham training could be extended to more teachers to provide them a larger set of instructional tools in the area of multi-sensory literacy instruction. The district might consider implementing a Data Coach position to organize district data, provide oversight of data use, and provide support to special education and general education staff on collecting and using data for decision making and programming. This position might be part of an additional supervisor's role.
Stakeholder Education	Collaborate with the SEPAC to create a new and improved Special Education Academy to disseminate information and demystify the process and procedures. Disseminating information will reduce the culture of mistrust that exists in some buildings and reduce adversarial feelings that currently exist. Query parents/guardians/caregivers on topics. Create an FAQ document from the most common questions parents/guardians/caregivers have and attach it to the *Directory of Services* or Chain of Command Documents.

	Create an information kit for parents new to special education. Include things like a digital post card with the steps and timelines for the process, links to the *Directory of Services*, Chain of Command, and FAQ, and acknowledge that the parent has the right to explore supports necessary for LRE. *"The rights of parents should not be kept a secret."*
Intervention and Referral Services	Provide professional development supports to staff to increase their knowledge of the I&RS process, the mechanisms for student supports, expectations for implementation of supports in the general education environment, and data collection to determine efficacy of supports. Decisions must be made based on quality data. Anecdotal stories do not provide the level of reliability to make life changing decisions about children. Provide a foundation of intervention practices for students, and ensure that general education teachers have the adequate tool and training to effectively support students academically and behaviorally. Monitor the fidelity of implementation of academic and behavioral supports in the general education setting. I&RS teams would benefit from being able to have articulations at least one time per year to share best practices. There are 494 students classified as Other Health Impaired (OHI), representing over 40% of the special education population. There is some evidence to suggest that the OHI classification is used in some cases to appease parents/guardians/caregivers. The frequent use of the OHI classification is driven in part by a lack of quality data collected during the I&RS process and ineffective implementation of supports in the general education environment. It is difficult for the district to justify its positions and recommendations without quality data. Thus, in some cases, the district is pressured into classifications.
Response to Intervention/Tiered Supports	Response to Intervention (RTI) services, processes, practices, and procedures should be strengthened and institutionalized across the district. The quality and effectiveness of RTI interventions varies across the district. Fidelity of implementation and consistent support for teachers is a key factor needed to systematize RTI. High quality RTI resources should be provided throughout the district. There have been substantial advances in RTI resources since the inception of the Pre-referral and Intervention Manual (PRIM) that could

| | be brought to the forefront, such as educational technology and other evidence-based interventions.

Expectations for data collection and use in the RTI process should be systematized. There is evidence to suggest that some decisions are being made in the absence of specific data.

The support offered at each tier should become progressively more intense. The current process in some schools essentially uses the teacher as the main intervention deliverer in both tiers 1 and 2. Students do not receive more intense support until tier 3.

A system to share and communicate RTI plans across the district should be developed given the fact that students move among schools due to the magnet system. There are instances in which students switch schools and their plans are not following them and it takes months to get services restarted. |
|---|---|
| Student Mobility with the District | A system to share information about students who switch schools within the district should be established. The magnet system creates additional movement among schools and the current system of record keeping and tracking does not provide adequate information or timeliness for students with special needs who switch schools.

"We switched schools to get the help my child needed and it took months to get the services. Everyone acted as if they had no idea about my child's case." |
| Dyslexia | There needs to be a systemic approach to dyslexia identification, instruction, and tiered supports that are available in every school.

There needs to be a standardized system of dyslexia screening across the district in which staff are trained, provided the resources, and held accountable to use the system. The screening tool should be a recognized tool for screening dyslexia and teachers need to be supported with its implementation and interpretation.

The challenges students face because of dyslexia must first be addressed in the general education program. Waiting for a special education classification to address what is, in some instances, a general education issue, is counterproductive and causes years of wasted time for students.

There is a lack of continuity of interventions for dyslexia across the district and a lack of fidelity of implementation of those interventions due to inadequate staff training. Staff need to be supported to address dyslexia and the outcomes need to be monitored. |

	"We spent years telling the district that our child had dyslexia. Support did not occur until we finally fought for classification in fourth grade."
Principal Leadership	Principal leadership and understanding of special education programs and processes is key in establishing a systematic approach to special education programming and building a culture of collaboration and trust with parents/guardians/caregivers. Principals should be provided the support necessary so that they can feel comfortable in their knowledge base in order to take an active role in special education programming in their buildings when necessary and answer questions from stakeholders. They are an important link in the Chain of Command.
General Education Connection	Ensure the curriculum is updated and meets educational standards and the needs of the students. Greater use of educational technology in the general education setting, such as talk to text, text to speech, automatic readers and audio books, etc., should be deployed for students in order to break down barriers to learning. Educational technology is used with increasing regularity in higher education at the undergraduate and graduate levels and students have the right to request accommodations and modifications in higher education. Students should not have to wait until college to be provided educational technology that can change the trajectory of their academic careers. Collaborate with content area supervisors to build stronger curricular and instructional linkages between special education and general education. Provide training and support for understanding the difference between accommodations and modifications and how to implement common accommodations and modifications for academics and behaviors. A mindset of educational equity must be implemented across the district. There is evidence to suggest that a conformity mindset (everyone should get the same and do the same) exists in pockets across the district. This causes a perception on the part of some adults that students who can't do things the same way as other students do not *deserve* to be in the general education classroom/LRE. Whether an adult believes a child deserves to be in a general education setting is not an appropriate, or lawful means to make educational placement determinations. Although the data suggest that a conformity mindset is the exception, not the rule in Montclair, it still undermines efforts to bring about educational equity.

Out of District Placements	Develop a systemic plan for reviewing the progress, services and supports needed for returning students who are currently in out-of-district placements back to Montclair public schools. The plan should also include methods to maintain students in district. This plan should be based on honest and open discussions with parents/guardians/caregivers to determine their concerns and expectations. Prior to a student being returned to the district, develop a plan that details the skills, supports, and progress monitoring that will be provided to the student to be successful in the district.
Vertical Transition Planning	Develop a district-wide plan with input from key stakeholders to create consistent practices that support successful vertical transitions for students with IEPs. Seek additional ways to ensure that students' transitions between each school year and teachers are facilitated to support appropriate and successful classroom learning and social experiences.
Behavioral Supports	Data suggest a lack of fidelity of implementation of strategies necessary to successfully, manage, accommodate, and accept behaviors outside of what some label as "acceptable" within the general education setting. This appears to lead to over-classification in some cases via the OHI or other categories. Professional development support for general education and special education teachers and paraprofessionals in the area of behavioral supports is recommended.
Transition Planning	IDEA requires transition planning, including a coordinated set of activities, which is designed to facilitate movement from school to post-schooling environments. These activities should be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account his/her strengths, interests, and preferences. Transition services should encompass instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and ultimately toward LRE.
Supporting CST	The CST would benefit from support in methods to engage in collaborative problem solving with parents/guardians/caregivers. Provide training and coaching for CST members on (a) "having difficult discussions" (b) "dealing with challenging people" and (c) running productive meetings would increase levels of efficacy. Provide training and coaching on how to conduct effective progress monitoring and data usage to support recommendations.

Supports in Honors and AP	Provide appropriate IEP supports in Honors and AP courses at the high school. In some subject areas there are practices that either excludes students with IEPs or does not provide the supports they are entitled to in Honors and AP courses. In other areas, teachers are taking it upon themselves to provide the supports they know are necessary.
Professional Development for Teachers	Teachers would welcome targeted and differentiated professional development that allows them to collaborate (special education and general education) on issues that they face. The district should investigate a differentiated professional development model that balances district requirements with teacher needs. This can be done through a mix of virtual and face-to-face venues.

The next section presents an <u>example</u> of a three-year plan for continuous improvement.

<center>**Example Three-Year Plan for Continuous Improvement**</center>

<center>**Year 1**</center>

Summer 2021

CULTURE
- Convene a retreat for administration and CST members to create a mini-strategic plan that defines goals, objectives, and action steps related to a systemic vision.
- Provide professional development (PD) on special education "do's and dont's" and empathy coaching for administration and CST.
- Begin work on a comprehensive "Directory of Services" and "Chain of Command for Question" as well as FAQ document that addresses parent/guardian/caregiver concerns and questions for each stage of the special education process. Collaborate with a committee from SEPAC.
- Provide training and coaching for CST members on "having difficult discussions" and "dealing with difficult people".
- Develop/revise a Special Education Academy for parents/guardians/caregivers for the 2021-2022 school year and include a SEPAC committee on the planning and implementation team. Plan to hold face-to-face and virtual events throughout the year (e.g. What to Expect at Your First IEP Meeting, Transition Services for HS, What's New with Progress Monitoring…. Etc.)
- Develop a culture of data-driven decision making and programming.
- Provide training to principals on the special education programs in the district and set expectations for their role in the process.

RTI
- Provide PD to relevant stakeholders to create a reformulated and systemic RTI program with three distinct tiers of interventions.
- Develop a process and set of procedures (**for academics**) for RTI that all building teams follow.
- Train CST and RTI leaders in the RTI process and procedures and maintain all necessary paperwork within the CST files.

SCREENING
- Decide upon a universal Dyslexia screening tool for use across the district and create a training plan to roll out in the fall. The tool should be recognized as a screener for Dyslexia.

DATA & PROGRESS MONITORING
- Review all the internal data collection tools used for progress monitoring and screenings and decide upon on a standardized set of tools for systemic use across the district. For instance:
    - Reading Levels
    - Dyslexia screening results
    - Math
    - Frequency data on things like behaviors, etc.

- - ■ Qualitative data
- Create a student data warehouse where teachers and CST can enter and retrieve data.

IEP DEVELOPMENT
- CST training on writing appropriate accommodations and modifications.
- CST training on writing appropriate goals and objectives for IEPs based on needs of students based on data.

PERSONNEL
- Evaluate the need for additional BCBA staff to provide behavior support and training to special education and general education staff for the 2022-2023 school year.
- Evaluate the need for additional and case managers/CST so that each building has its own CST by the 2022-2023 school year.
- Monitor scheduling of paraprofessionals at the building level to maximize efficiency of staff and services to students during the 2021-2022 school year. Implement a process for determining paraprofessional need and for approving paraprofessional as well as a vision for how paras should be utilized at the building level.

School Year 2021/2022

CULTURE
- Implement strategic planning action steps.
- Launch the revised comprehensive directory of services, chain of command for questions, and FAQ document. Conduct parent presentations to raise awareness of new services and resources.
- Launch the revised Special Education Academy for parents/guardians/caregivers.
- Conduct audits of IEP meetings to provide coaching and feedback to CST members on their implementation of the PD based on "having difficult discussions" and "dealing with difficult people".
- Monitor principal involvement and knowledge of the special education program.

RTI
- Provide PD to relevant teachers and counselors on interventions that can be used in literacy for true Tier 1 academic interventions within the new RTI process for academics.
- (Fall) Provide follow-up professional development for CST and Special Education Teachers on IEP writing, more specifically-
  - Each section and relevancy
  - Appropriate goals and objectives writing and progress monitoring and assessing those goals
  - Selecting and implementing appropriate accommodations and modifications
- Structure a before or after-school, as well as a during school intervention, for Strategic Reading Intervention.
  - FastForWord or something similar could be used.
  - Basic Skills Instructors could use a product called "SPIRE" to also address this for general education and students with disabilities.
- Parent/guardian/caregiver trainings on what to expect with RTI.

SYSTEMIC PROGRAMMING
- Perform an internal review district special education programs and look to create consistency of services provided across the elementary schools by 2022-2023 to reduce the transitory impact on children. Providing a full range of programmatic resource options as well as inclusion in the elementary schools would allow for students to be placed appropriately without disrupting the child's social and emotional well-being. In addition, it appears some schools run inclusion support in all core academic settings and some just focus on ELA and Math. Inclusion support should be consistent across the district.
- Full Curriculum audit of the literacy program in grades PK-5 to check for any gaps and create consistency in how reading is taught, supported, and remediated across the district.

SCREENING
- Implement a universal Dyslexia screening tool.

DATA & PROGRESS MONITORING
- Provide PD to special education and general education staff on how to collect and use data for progress monitoring:
  - Reading Levels
  - Dyslexia screening results
  - Math
  - Frequency data on things like behaviors, etc.
  - Qualitative data
- Provide training on how to use the student data warehouse where teachers and CST can enter and retrieve data.

IEP DEVELOPMENT
- Set clear expectations that IEPs will be developed to meet the needs of the child and monitored appropriately.
- Provide follow-up CST training on writing appropriate accommodations and modifications.
- CST training on writing appropriate goals and objectives for IEPs.
- Provide monitoring through a random IEP audit process to track improvement of IEP development.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers on the difference between accommodations and modifications.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers on how to effectively implement IEP goals and objectives.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers on how to effectively conduct progress monitoring and data collection for IEP goals and objectives.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers on how to interpret data from progress monitoring and create effective instructional plans from the data.

PERSONNEL
- Make recommendations for the budget regarding the need for additional BCBA staff to provide behavior support and training to special education and general education staff for the 2022-2023 school year.

- Make recommendations for the budget the need for additional and case managers/CST so that each building has its own CST by the 2022-2023 school year.
- Evaluate the scheduling of paraprofessionals at the building level to maximize efficiency of staff and services to students during the 2021-2022 school year.
- Explore hiring a data coach for the 2022-2023 school year (there are options on how this can look) to lead the RTI process and progress monitoring for IEP purposes in the buildings. A data coach would:
    - Create TIP plans (Teacher Intervention Plans)
    - Manage the data associated with the process and work with teachers on appropriate interventions and assessments
    - Follow building wide caseloads of students in the RTI process
    - Look into a goal book subscription to support this person or persons

Year 2

Summer 2022

CULTURE

- Create/revise a paraprofessional resource handbook that defines and provides supports on what their job responsibilities are and expectations for performance.
- Include paraprofessionals in trainings for special education related topics.
- Provide follow-up training and coaching for CST members on "having difficult discussions" and "dealing with difficult people".
- Develop/revise a Special Education Academy for parents/guardians/caregivers for the 2022-2023 school year and include a SEPAC committee on the planning and implementation team. Plan to hold face-to-face and virtual events throughout the year (e.g., What to Expect at Your First IEP Meeting, Transition Services for HS, What's New with Progress Monitoring…. Etc.)
- Continue to expect a culture of data-driven decision making and programming. Include proficiency in this area as part of CST formal professional development plan.

- Provide follow-up training to principals on the special education programs in the district and set expectations for their role in the process. Include proficiency in this area as part of principal professional development plan.

RTI
- Provide PD to relevant stakeholders to create a formalized RTI process (for behaviors) that all building's follow.
- Revisit the RTI process in place (for academics) to look at numbers of students, gauge effectiveness of programs in place to support and identify next steps to improve upon the process.
- Develop formalized I&RS process and procedures for use across the district.
- Train CST and RTI leaders in the RTI processes and procedures for academics and behavior and maintain all necessary paperwork within the CST files.
- Develop formalized I&RS process and procedures for use across the district.

- Set clear expectations for the implementation of RTI and I&RS processes and procedures across the district and monitor.

SCREENING
- Review the data obtained from the universal Dyslexia screening tool used across the district to identify training and resource needs.
- Set clear expectations for the use of the universal Dyslexia screening tool across the district.

DATA & PROGRESS MONITORING
- Audit data systems that were implemented during the 2021-2022 school and revise system as needed.
    - Reading Levels
    - Dyslexia screening results
    - Math
    - Frequency data on things like behaviors, etc.
    - Qualitative data
- Provide professional development as needed.
- Revise/further develop the student data warehouse where teachers and CST enter and retrieve data.

IEP DEVELOPMENT
- Set clear expectations that IEPs will be developed to meet the needs of the child and monitored appropriately.
- Audit of IEPs to determine growth and compliance in goals, objectives, accommodations, modifications, and progress monitoring.

PERSONNEL
- Evaluate the scheduling of paraprofessionals at the building level to maximize efficiency of staff and services to students during the 2022-2023 school year.

School Year 2022/2023

CULTURE

- Continue to implement and evaluate strategic planning action steps.
- Revise/update comprehensive directory of services, chain of command for questions, and FAQ. Conduct parent presentations to raise awareness of new services and resources.
- Continue revised Special Education Academy for parents/guardians/caregivers.
- Conduct audits of IEP meetings to provide coaching and feedback to CST members on their implementation of the PD based on "having difficult discussions" and "dealing with difficult people".
- Monitor principal involvement and knowledge of the special education program.
- Provide PD to relevant teachers and counselors on interventions that can be used in behavior for teacher led interventions within the new RTI process.

- Power of 2 trainings for special education and General education teachers. Teachers should now be formally evaluated on how well they implement co-teaching models.

RTI & I&RS
- Monitor the implementation of the RTI processes and procedures for academic and behaviors. Provide ongoing support for teachers.
- Reinforce expectations for implementing RTI and I&RS with fidelity and hold principals accountable for the implementation.

SYSTEMIC PROGRAMMING
- Perform an internal review district special education programs to monitor consistency of services provided across the elementary schools.

SCREENING
- Implement a universal Dyslexia screening tool.

DATA & PROGRESS MONITORING
- Set clear expectations that progress toward achieving IEP goals and objectives will be monitored.
- Provide PD to special education and general education staff on how to collect and use data for progress monitoring:
    - Reading Levels
    - Dyslexia screening results
    - Math
    - Frequency data on things like behaviors, etc.
    - Qualitative data
- Provide training on how to use the student data warehouse where teachers and CST can enter and retrieve data.

IEP DEVELOPMENT
- Set clear expectations that IEPs will be developed to meet the needs of the child and monitored appropriately.
- Provide monitoring through a random IEP audit process to track improvement of IEP development.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers new to the district on the difference between accommodations and modifications.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers new to the district on how to effectively implement IEP goals and objectives.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers new to the district on how to effectively conduct progress monitoring and data collection for IEP goals and objectives.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers new to the district on how to interpret data from progress monitoring and create effective instructional plans from the data.

Year 3

Summer 2023
- Revisit the RTI process in place to look at numbers of students, gauge effectiveness of programs in place to support and identify next steps to improve upon the process.
- Evaluate the scheduling of paraprofessionals at the building level to maximize efficiency of staff and services to students during the 2023-2024 school year.
- Provide follow-up training and coaching for CST members on "having difficult discussions" and "dealing with difficult people".
- Revise a Special Education Academy for parents/guardians/caregivers for the 2023-2024 school year and include a SEPAC committee on the planning and implementation team. Plan to hold face-to-face and virtual events throughout the year (e.g. What to Expect at Your First IEP Meeting, Transition Services for HS, What's New with Progress Monitoring…. Etc.)
- Continue to expect a culture of data-driven decision making and programming. Include proficiency in this area as part of CST formal professional development plan.
- Evaluate the scheduling of paraprofessionals at the building level to maximize efficiency of staff and services to students during the 2023-2024 school year.

School Year 2023-2024

CULTURE

- Continue to implement and evaluate strategic planning action steps.
- Revise/update comprehensive directory of services, chain of command for questions, and FAQ. Conduct parent presentations to raise awareness of new services and resources.
- Continue revised Special Education Academy for parents/guardians/caregivers.
- Conduct audits of IEP meetings to provide coaching and feedback to CST members on their implementation of the PD based on "having difficult discussions" and "dealing with difficult people".
- Monitor principal involvement and knowledge of the special education program.

RTI & I&RS
- Monitor the implementation of the RTI processes and procedures for academic and behaviors. Provide ongoing support for teachers.
- Reinforce expectations for implementing RTI and I&RS with fidelity and hold principals accountable for the implementation.

SYSTEMIC PROGRAMMING
- Monitor consistency of special education programs across the elementary schools to reduce the transitory impact on children. Inclusion support should be consistent across the district.

SCREENING
- Continue to implement the universal Dyslexia screening tool and track results in data warehouse.

DATA & PROGRESS MONITORING
- Set clear expectations that progress toward achieving IEP goals and objectives will be monitored.
- Provide PD to special education and general education staff on how to collect and use data for progress monitoring:
  - Reading Levels
  - Dyslexia screening results
  - Math
  - Frequency data on things like behaviors, etc.
  - Qualitative data
- Provide training on how to use the student data warehouse where teachers and CST can enter and retrieve data.

IEP DEVELOPMENT
- Set clear expectations that IEPs will be developed to meet the needs of the child and monitored appropriately.
- Provide monitoring through a random IEP audit process to track improvement of IEP development.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers new to the district on the difference between accommodations and modifications.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers new to the district on how to effectively implement IEP goals and objectives.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers new to the district on how to effectively conduct progress monitoring and data collection for IEP goals and objectives.
- Provide PD to general education and special education teachers new to the district on how to interpret data from progress monitoring and create effective instructional plans from the data.

Appendix A
Additional Anonymous Survey Responses

What is something that does not work well with your child's special education program?

1) Despite providing OT and in-class support with writing, there seem to be pieces of the puzzle that haven't yet been figured out with my (elementary) grade son. His IEP is for hand strength, and a preschool IEP for sensory processing disorder. It now seems likely to us that he has ADHD, but that is something that has never been raised by the CST, so we have finally gone the route of an independent eval. This is frustrating and very expensive. - the IEP meetings are somewhat productive, but there isn't nearly enough time allotted. Once we have talked about what we see, and the teachers and therapists have spoken, there's barely any time left to strategize about how best to support him. All the players are in the room and prepared to work together but there isn't enough time. - it's also frustrating to learn from people outside the CST (other parents, a consultant) that there are resources available in the district that have not been offered to us that could be helpful. For example, assistive technology and behaviorists. Only when we request these resources are they discussed and potentially incorporated into the IEP.

2) To start - the district does not know how to write an IEP - unqualified child study team leaders. After, parents employ their own educational experts to write the IEP. Teachers are both not trained to implement the IEP...nor do they have the time given 25 plus kids per classroom. Years of inaction, years of educational advocates and lawyers...the bulk of the work is clearly on the parents to get our dyslexic children the supports they need an education in this district.

3) Teachers need training on how to read and follow the IEP.

4) Ms. XXXXX at XXXX school and the 5 day/week Orton Gillingham is excellent. While this is the correct frequency the class is neither leveled and it is often oversubscribed. There were 14 children in the class, of all different levels, when my son was enrolled. I would also acknowledge that the district has sent 12 teachers to FDU to complete OG training. These teachers are utilized in a free, one day per week after school program. While this is a great first step, it in no way can substitute for adequate school day literacy instruction both in special ed and gen ed. Children need effective instruction everyday.

5) Of course remote is not at all helpful to provide services needed. My son needs someone 1:1 para that is provided by his IEP to keep him redirected when lessons are being taught. There is nothing working well right now.

6) My child has a piecemeal program that is not working well. There is no communication among his teachers. Many of the educators are not educated about dyslexia. My child will never see his Orton teacher since she is located in another school. He has a virtual program that will remain virtual, therefore it is not and will never be multi-sensory.

7) 1. Lack of trained teachers in programs necessary for students with decoding struggles to thrive. 2. Delays, obfuscations, and dishonesty. 3. Mixing decoding and comprehension in

the same pull-out class. 4. School attorneys with poor intentions for students. Ask the district how the special ed attorney has improved life for special ed students.

8) The current team that teaches my son is not well trained in best practices for reading, math, behavioral interventions, and how to employ para-educators to work with students.

9) 1) The case manager has not been doing an effective job of managing the cases from end to end...including pulling the necessary information together, synthesizing it into meaningful/thoughtful insights and recommendations, communicating her full recommendations, creating the IEP, communicating goals to the various service providers/ /principal/parents; evaluating and communicating progress, assessing root cause issues, adjusting, etc. 2) the model for addressing social/emotional/behavioral goals is not working - Specifically, time spent in social group counseling does not seem relevant/connected to IEP social/emotional/behavioral goals and counselor is not actively working with teachers, other service providers and parents to ensure those IEP social/emotional/behavioral goals are begin met across the student's experiences at school. Also, there is lack of clarity/agreement/consistency between the school guidance counselor's involvement with the student. In the past she has gotten involved in social/emotional/behavioral challenges when the child study team counselor is not in the building and without having line of sight to the IEP or the requisite special ed skills/experience/responsibilities, the involvement of the guidance counselor has exacerbated the situation vs helped. 3) the aide/para model is isn't working. The aide/para is not a part of the IEP process and seems to have no line sight to the goals. the aide/para is not allowed to communicate with parents and it's unclear whether they communicate with other support professionals or teachers about their students' , goals, progress, suggestions, etc. They also get shifted around to different students/classes a fair amount, which makes it hard to build a relationship of trust with the student. And they don't seem well-trained on some of the relevant diagnoses and strategies to manage - esp.ADHD. 4. None of the staff members at the school or on the child study team are well-versed in ADHD or other neuro-diverse classifications. They don't seem to understand it, have a lot of misperceptions, seem to conflate many ADHD symptoms with misbehavior/emotional issues, etc. I have yet to see them use tools specific to helping students with ADHD and in fact many of their approaches (while most are very caring and well-intentioned) are sometimes counterproductive. 5. Exec functioning (study skills) support in elementary school is inadequate and only seems to happen if in-class resource teacher finds ways to integrate it informally.

10) More transparency and proactivity in the information provided and in diagnosis.

11) Need more Orton Gillingham trained teachers - not that complicated - all children (not just dyslexic children) can learn in this manner.

12) Principals reporting the "open rate" of IEPs - Genesis does have the ability to run this type of report. Self-contained classroom needs to be moved out of the basement of MHS.

13) I would like to see the district truly follow what is in the district's handbook. That requires a collaborative program between gen ed and special ed. Children need to be screened early

(with appropriate screener) and if identified as a struggling reader, placed in Tier 2 or 3 intervention with a person knowledgeable in multisensory reading instruction. There needs to be rigorous progress monitoring. If child is not making progress, he then needs to be evaluated by CST and if eligible, placed in special ed for more intensive instruction. The district needs to embrace this preventative model and it will ultimately lower the cost of special ed.

14) Training for paraprofessionals and teachers. Provide more leveled material for children not needing reinforcement academically and work on tools to help focus and behavior. That has been zero as the tools used are not helpful and the waiting game to see if new method or star chart works, is a waste of everyone's time and energy.

15) I think improvement needs to be made in educating and training the staff that works with our children (teachers & paraprofessionals especially). They should be aware of the individual children's needs (beyond the IEP) and trained with strategies to help them.

16) Please educate the staff on dyslexia. The child study team members should be aware of the New Jersey laws, as well as the district Dyslexia Handbook and protocols. Also, please hire certified teachers in multi-sensory programs.

17) My dream would be to have a reading center at xxxxx school that operates similar to independent special education schools. Also, provide more training teachers in Orton Gillingham!

18) Central Office responsiveness. We and other XXXX parents cannot get any response to voicemails or emails.

19) More training and supervision of special ed teams.

20) 1. The district needs to invest in training special ed staff and gen ed teachers and administrators around ADHD and other neurodiversity. All programs need to be upgraded to adequately support kids with these classifications (esp. if there are many kids with these classifications in the school system) 2. The district needs a better approach to teaching kids social/emotional/behavioral skills + executive functioning skills that are appropriate to each grade level, and helping them generalize those lessons across all their classroom experiences 3. Case managers need the training, time and resources needed to better manage the full experience of classified students and their parents end to end. from evaluation to recommendations to IEP planning/goal setting, communications, progress reports, etc. 4. Communications from the district to parents of classified children need to improve drastically with real, hands on education and support for parents

21) I am always reaching out proactively to my child's team - it would be nice if they reached out to me. Also, in the beginning of each year I also reach out to get his services going and each year it seems like they don't get off the ground until October. If he has an existing IEP there should be no surprise and the staff should be able to work the schedules out over the summer instead of losing the whole first month of school. Not to mention that they stop services at the end of May and with school breaks and all of the abbreviated days he barely gets 6-7 months of services which is not helping with the main goal of graduating kids to a

level that they don't need services. We could do that if there wasn't some many delays in getting started and opting to write off the last month of school.

22) More transparency and supports for parents and students.

What is the most important improvement you would like to see made within the next three years?

1) I hope that my child is able to have his/her intellect and his/her abilities not be stymied by attention deficit and executive function issues.

2) We're not certain our children can receive a suitable education in Montclair. Thus, we are not ready to comment on 'graduation'. For example - given how far behind my XXXX is...XXX is now taking LindaMood Bell (LMB) instruction. LMB testing has determined that she is reading/writing in some respects, like a 3rd grader. It's remarkable...in all the wrong ways...but she is in her last semester of XXXX grade currently and her grades leading into this year (and including this year)....have been A's and B's. Something just doesn't add

3) We will need accommodations following XXX to college.

4) Our hope is that our children can read and write well enough to fulfill their potential in college and beyond.

5) That XXXX is successful and received the best education possible from this district. Sadly, I don't think that will be the case.

6) I want my child to be independent and have skills to help them move on to either higher education or a career.

7) I hope to see my child attend college after XXXX graduates from Montclair. Sadly, if XXXX continues in this district, I do not believe he will actually have that opportunity.

8) I wanted my child to go to college. This would have been impossible without attorneys and out of district placements. Two of my children with dyslexia graduated in XXXX and will start college in XXXXX. They were reading at a 1st and 2nd grade reading level in 6th grade and not a single person in the district thought this was a serious problem. It took an enormous lift on our family's part to get them into college - attorneys, out of district placements, and lots of money. If we had left this up to the Montclair schools, it would not have happened.

9) I want to know that my child has achieved the highest educational ability possible and has been sufficiently included to happily develop friendships across the neurotypical and special education students.

10) I hope for a happy, confident, self-sufficient child who has figured out how to function and shine and can thrive (by all standards) in the world around us.

11) We are too far away from it, but I would like to see my child be well prepared for middle school.

12) I would hope to see that my child is a functioning young adult and on to a 4-year college.

13) Attending a 4-year college.

14) Acceptance at a good university

15) I would love my child to be accepted into a good college and enjoy learning.

16) I want my child to live as independent a life as possible.

17) To be able to find some meaningful work or employment (with supports) and start to live semi-independently (with supports).

18) I hope that my child graduates Montclair high school ready to realize his full potential and with all the tools in his toolbox to manage his disability and be successful.19)

19) Path to accredited college

20) Knowing how far my child has come, I see my child graduating with honors and going onto college to become a doctor or lawyer or super hero (child's words).

21) That my child feels confident in the ability to learn, and possesses the tools and strategies needed to pursue additional educational or occupational pursuits.

22) I want my child to be a curious, confident life-ling learner. I understand my child may not be at grade level nor be valedictorian but I want my child to be challenged and expected to push the boundaries as the norm, not just modifying work to be easy.

23) There needs to be more personalization in the IEP and special education process so that each child can be met where they are and their strengths can be leveraged to the maximum.

Feel free to let us know any other SPECIFIC aspects of the special education program that could be improved and why you believe it needs improvement.

1) There are several good teachers who we have been lucky to have involved with our dyslexic children. It took incredible effort and a lot of money to make certain supports were given...but the problems continue and our eldest daughter still doesn't have her IEP being implemented (an IEP that was removed without consent after 5th grade). "paper work not returned"...or "we'll jump on this ASAP"...to many excuses to note...but the short of it is that the District clearly has direction to curb supports for special education children and it is clearly budget driven. Take money from anywhere else - people move(d) to Montclair for the schools...make them work, make them good and if that is a budget issue, pull it from somewhere else. The District is frequently at odds with the Teachers (budget).

2) Dyslexia screenings for ALL kindergarten students and for all students whose parents request it. Followed by effective, appropriate comprehensive interventions. Linda Mood Bell, Wilson etc by teachers fully trained in those methodologies

3) 1. Bring in an effective dyslexia screener. DRA is missing a lot of struggling readers 2. Provide training for administration-we need leaders who understand what dyslexia is and how to effectively treat it in order to see change throughout the system 3. Training for teachers. We need teachers who understand symptoms of and interventions for dyslexia . There are so many free dyslexia pd resources on the NJ dept of ed. We should not have teachers who are afraid to talk about or delay addressing it ("he'll grow out of it) 4. A true dyslexia program between gen ed/spec ed. with goals, progress monitoring, teacher training and mentorship/supervision/collaboration among schools (we do have a few excellent specialist and the FDU program). Ideally(I know money won't allow) this should have its own leader. currently it seems no one really takes responsibility for dyslexia/literacy bc it straddles both gen ed and spec ed 5. the word dyslexia be included in all IEPs--Specific Learning Disorder consistent with dyslexia. This important so parents/teachers truly understand what is going on (diagnosis drives intervention) and for progress monitoring. the district should be concerned if their programs are effective and you cannot monitor without this basic information. Currently the district is unable to tell stakeholders how many children in district have dyslexia despite multiple (over several years) attempts to get this data--unacceptable

4) Too many to list.... Lack of response from XXXXX, lack of training for teachers and paras to provide best practices to children of different needs. Having social workers more involved.

5) I think that these children do not fall into one bucket. They need to be looked at and taught as individuals. They should have the opportunity to learn with "like" learners by teachers who have the training and sensitivity to bring out the best in these children.

6) This district needs educators who have knowledge of dyslexia and programming that is appropriate to help dyslexic students learn how to read.

7) We didn't discuss this enough this afternoon, but the high school is not really equipped for students with dyslexia. Students are left to muddle through HS while years behind in reading.

8) Last fall we twice faced the prospect of the ABA virtual class shutting down while the central office demanded our child's teachers teach on-site at XXXX school, even for remote learners like my daughter. We watched our teachers in tears on the screen telling us the circumstances where they felt they either had to take a risk of getting infected or go on leave, and if forced to do so they would choose leave. A number of parents had to plan how to home-school our children as we could not get any substantive response from XXXX, XXXX, or XXXXX. (XXXX said that XXXXX called all parents but he only called some and had nothing substantive to offer as to how remote learning would stay in place). Additionally, our child study teams and principal's office informed us that they also could not get any response as to what the plan was to continue remote learning. The Board of Education also met us with silence. Fourteen of the XXXXX parents then reached out to

local press, our congresspeople, the NJ Department of Education, the Essex County Superintendent of Education, the Mayor and members of the Town Council. Mayor Spiller and Counselor Yacobellis were responsive and were able to speak with XXXXX and the Board and then inform us remote learning would continue. I think this is not a reasonable way of treating the parent community, particularly because if Mayor Spiller and Counselor Yacobellis had not responded our only option would have been litigation, as we believed Montclair's actions conceivably constituted and IDEA violation. As far as I know, all the parents involved would love to be supportive of XXXXX, XXXXX and XXXXX, but that's sadly not possible given their lack of communication, not only with us but with their own staff given that the child study teams and principal's office was treated similarly. I sincerely hope this can change in the future as I want the central office to have a trusting and fulsome relationship with the special education ABA parent community.

9) I am not sure why the same teacher teaches the ABA program in XXXXX school for three years. I don't think this is a good idea if there is a confrontational relationship between the teacher and the parent. Not a good practice for the student.

10) I think you have a lot of caring, hard-working lovely people who are ready and willing to work with parents but until you can address some of my suggestions above, they cannot be effective. At the moment I do not recommend Montclair as a place for people to send their kids for school if they have any learning differences, and especially if they have ADHD. For a community that prioritizes equity and inclusion I believe we are currently leaving our special needs community (I can speak mostly to the neuro-diverse) behind. And I believe that is likely even more the case for those whose parents do not have the resources, communication skills or professional experience currently seemingly required to advocate for their children with special needs. Happy to chat more about it and help create the solution!!!

11) Communication and scheduling. Also, some assessments should be done on the push-in's and how effective they are.

12) I was surprised to learn from others in the audit group that self-contained seems like the baseline from which they offer services for many students. I would like to see them start at inclusion and then move to a more restricted environment as warranted for each students' needs.

13) The idea of inclusion should be embedded in all decisions made by special and general education staff and promoted by all administrators.

14) The district needs to be in compliance with federal regulations for education in the LRE - with the first consideration being the general education classroom with all the necessary supports and services infused within this setting. This is long overdue. Families are literally told things that are blatantly in violation of the law, and there is no accountability for it. I have personally accompanied parents to IEP meetings where they were misinformed, or LRE was not considered, or, a bogus reason (and the same one for countless children!) for not providing it was stated. My pointing out that the reasons violated laws were of no avail. This means that unless a family takes legal action (which comes at a cost to them, and not all families can go this route), nothing can be done. This is highly problematic in terms of social class disparities and unequal outcomes for children based on SES. Families need to be given

accurate information regarding what is actually possible with regard to inclusivity, and what is legally required. Families should not need to educate themselves about the workings of special education; educators should take on the role of advocates for inclusivity in schools. The "burden of proof" for whether a child can be placed in a general education class is NOT on the child - no child should be expected to demonstrate that they belong. Additionally, the burden of proof for whether a child can benefit from inclusion does NOT fall on the family. As per IDEIA, the burden of proof for removal from a general education classroom actually falls on the district - they must demonstrate why a child is being removed from LRE, not the other way around.

15) I feel like the RTI and IR&S processes are set up in a way that parents really have to fight. The smallest improvements are viewed as successes but in most cases it takes significant parent involvement to insist on full and formal testing. I would shorten that process and test children sooner so you know what you are dealing with instead of just throwing more and more RTI services, sometimes for years, at them without significant improvement.

16) Integration, inclusion and better communications. For example, groups are being held to present 2021/2022 course options. There should be an option for a follow up discussion/separate discussion for kids who need more time to digest and process information.

17) Clear information regarding the programs and services offered with contacts, escalation, and details on how parents/caregivers go about receiving them for their child(ren)

18) Communication between staff and families; communication amongst staff (with administration).

19) So much needs to be improved but if each child was truly looked at like an individual and alternate educational strategies were used to find the way my child learns and then capitalize on strengths, I believe weaknesses would organically diminish.

Appendix B

Teacher Comments about Professional Development Needs

Prompt: What types of professional development opportunities do you think would be helpful in the future?

- *Articulation trainings between ES and MS and MS and HS.*
- *University of Kansas special education strategies*
- *Behavioral issues- more issues with behaviors. Need more support in behavior modification*
- *More training on dyslexia*
- *Not a lot of special ed training.*
- *Paras need to be trained for the tasks they are being asked to perform when it comes to academics and behaviors.*
- *Special ed does not receive its own PD*
- *General education and special education need training on how to co-teach because general education teachers sometimes delegate the special ed work to the special ed teacher*
- *Need training for paras on how to read and implement an IEP*
- *Teachers need training on accommodations and modification*
- *ABA has a breakdown between ES and MS when it comes to resources and training. No communication between ES and MS*
- *Expansion of CPI;*
- *Inclusion (with gen ed and spec ed attending the same training);*
- *Paraprofessional training;*
- *Transition from remote to hybrid;*
- *Behavioral interventions for paraprofessionals;*
- *Overview of disabilities;*
- *Strategies with general ed teachers and paraprofessionals;*
- *Articulation sessions across the district;*
- *Classroom visitations;*
- *Trauma, ACES, and Mental Health training*
- *Orton Gillingham for more staff because the strategies are good for all students who struggle*
- *Making sure that all SE staff are all trained on the district's SE programs*
- *Special education department meetings would be helpful- (haven't had one in a few years);*
- *Information on the types of self-contained programs within the district*
- *More PD geared toward specific types of learners and special education program*
- *Need an updated curriculum for our programs. Current curricula are up to 15 years old in the area of ABA for example*
- *Need more supplemental resources for different types of learners*
- *Workshops geared toward self-contained students. Finding materials, teaching strategies, activities, assistive technology, combine middle schools.*
- *Pull in content area teachers with special education teachers for special education training to help with strategies. Make a systemic effort.*