PCG Education Team

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Purpose of the Study

To assess data and information regarding the effectiveness and efficacy of BCPS’s special education policies, procedures and practices, and student outcomes and to evaluate the extent to which research-based interventions are provided to students when they first exhibit academic achievement and/or social/emotional or behavioral issues.
Our Approach

1. Outcome Analysis
2. Organizational & Program Analysis
3. Research & Practice Literature

Data Collection Activities:
- Document Review
- Interviews/Focus Groups
- Staff Surveys
- Case Studies
Overall Areas of Strength

- Long history of interdisciplinary approaches
- Merger of Student Support Services Department with OSE
- New curriculum on digital platform
- Timely evaluations
- Increased academic proficiency for students with IEPs
- More inclusive educational opportunities
- “Guide to Inclusive Education”

- Collaborative central office partnerships
- Community work experiences
- Professional development
- Knowledgeable OSE supervisors
- OSE/Transportation regularly scheduled meetings
- In-house counsel for special education
- Overall positive view
- Significant amount of data are accessible to administrators
Referral/Eligibility for Services

Key Findings

• Students in foster care more likely to be identified in the area of ED
• Overall rate for students with IEPs (11.4%) smaller than the state (12.1%), nation (13.1%), and surveyed urban school districts (12.9%). Yet, perception that there are students identified as having a disability who, with early intervention and support, may not need special education services.
• Concerns that criteria for SLD not based on an RtI framework and MDSE’s RtI Guidance

Action Step

Review and revise local eligibility criteria and target activities/assess data for high-risk disability areas.
Response to Intervention (RTI)/MTSS

Key Findings
• No comprehensive RtI manual
• Focus on effective first instruction
• Varied reports regarding the extent to which students with IEPs could participate in RtI interventions
• Inconsistent methods for maintaining academic and behavior data for students

Action Step
Build on current elements in place to develop/implement a framework of multi-system of supports (MTSS) for academic achievement, positive behavior, and social/emotional growth (including enrichment) for all students.
Inclusivity

Key Findings

• Growing recognition that general education classes are the best setting for almost all students with IEPs to receive core instruction
• Support for a configuration of services that would enable more students to remain in their home schools, assuming the schools received the resources needed to meet student needs
• Concerns about co-teaching: high caseloads, use of paraeducators, general education teacher of one of record

Action Step

Establish a vision and expectation for BCPS whereby almost all children and youth with IEPs will be educated alongside their nondisabled peers and plan for an integrated service model designed to improve the educational outcomes for all students.
Early Childhood

Findings
• Limited number of seats for three and four year olds without disabilities in their early childhood programs
• No Head Start programs
• Capacity issues have impacted inclusion of children with IEPs in regular EC programs, and availability of special programs
• Transition to early childhood programs has been challenging for some children and their families

Action Step
Increase the capacity for educating young children with IEPs along with their typical peers, and improve their achievement outcomes.
Access to Advanced Coursework

Findings
• Increase in students with IEPs enrolling in advanced courses
• Magnet schools and programs viewed as having programs of high interest for students but that they are selective and are less accessible to students with IEPs

Action Step
Enable schools to increase the education of students with IEPs in general education/accelerated classes, and magnet schools/programs, with instruction aligned with the Common Core State Standards and principles of MTSS.
Postsecondary Transition

Findings

- Students with IEPs graduation rates below target
- More access to credit recovery needed to reach graduation target rate
- Drop out rate has increased
- Issues raised related to transition services and activities: Access to High School Magnet Programs, Completer Courses, Support for Diploma-bound Students, and Community-based Work

Action Step

Improve postsecondary school transition outcomes for students with IEPs.
Interdepartmental Collaboration

Findings

• OSE and OSSS staff work together to provide professional development and communicate regularly
• Reported Concerns with C&I: School Visits, Communication & Inclusivity, and Training
• Positive feedback provided about the collaboration between the fiscal representatives of C&I and OSE

Action Step

Enhance collaboration between OSE and other departments to leverage resources and expertise.
Transportation

Findings
• Transportation routes typically under 90 minutes one way; longest route is two hours
• Assignments based on transportation routes overly restrict placement options
• All students with IEPs who receive transportation as a related service transported on a special bus

Action Step
With OSE and transportation, review current transportation policies for students with IEPs.
Organization of OSE and Student Support Services

Findings

- Additional OSE support necessary for teachers of students with challenging behavior
- About 50 percent of the specialists’ time relates to compliance
- Related services is under the OSE structure and student support services units remain separate

Action Step

Maximize coordination and collaboration between special education and student support services staff.
Staffing Ratios, Caseloads & Support

Findings

• Significant variation across the district regarding personnel designated to serve as an IEP chairperson and concern they do not have sufficient time to devote to this role.
• In most elementary schools, the assistant principal designated IEP chairperson. Numerous concerns: Expertise, Responsibilities, Additional Support, Turnover.

Action Step

Review data to ensure that ratios, caseloads and support for students meets BCPS expectations regarding the provision of specially designed instruction/related services are reasonably capable of being met.
IEP Development

Findings

• Varying accounts regarding the amount of time it takes to prepare a draft of an initial IEP or annual IEP
• Varying accounts regarding how pertinent information from the IEP can be shared for the many students with IEPs teachers see during the day
• Issues raised about the development of several IEP components
• Perception that Student Information System (STARS) does not “talk” to TIENET, and that insufficient data migration requires special educators to duplicate data entry into TIENET

Action Step

With OSE, school, legal and technology representatives, consider various aspects relevant to the development of IEPs to make the process more efficient.
Fiscal Matters

Findings

• From FY2006 to FY2012, special education expenses increased by 23.8% ($28,887,000) although the number of students with IEPs decreased by -5.9% (834 students)
• Perception that OSE program managers have become more fiscally aware
• Issues raised: Personnel, Private Day Placements, IEP Team Decision-Making, Third Party Billing, and Infants & Toddlers Program

Action Step

Implement recommendations to reallocate costs and provide improved instruction and support for students with IEPs. Take steps to ensure that documentation for all Medicaid eligible services and revenue is fully realized.
Leadership, Planning, Professional Learning & Accountability

Findings

• Strong consensus that the accountability paradigm for educating children and youth receiving special education needs to change, and that the charge must come from the Board, Superintendent, and collective BCPS leadership

• Concerns that principal walkthrough protocols were not sufficiently specific to assess the extent to which students with IEPs are effectively educated in general education classes

• Schools with a more inclusionary vision and practices are reportedly asked to educate more students with IEPs because of their success, and because the home school is less inviting

Action Step

Charge the deputy superintendent with oversight responsibility for the development/implementation of MTSS; and increased inclusivity and improved educational outcomes for students with IEPs.
Special Education Manual

Findings

- Need for a single comprehensive manual that is user friendly, provides clear information, and provides for a single message. In the absence of such a document, OSE personnel sometimes provide inconsistent information.

Action Step

Develop a single standard operating procedural manual (Manual) for special education that includes the procedural issues included in other recommendations.