

Executive Summary

Special Education Program Review - Report of Focus Groups

Focus Group Process

A series of 18 Focus Groups of various stakeholders was held over the last 6 weeks. A total of 153 people participated in the Groups. The responses to the Focus Group prompts resulted in information that has been aggregated according to the following themes:

- Identified Strengths of Special Education
- Critical Factors That Contribute to Student Progress
- Philosophy/Vision/Leadership
- Areas Identified for Improvement

Identified Strengths of Special Education

- Needham has high quality staff
- Special education liaisons and teacher assistants develop positive, trusting relationships with students
- Collaboration between special education and general education is improving
- The inclusion model is effective, especially when the support is seamless
- The availability of specialized programs Preschool-grade 12 help students stay in district and receive effective educational programs
- The schools demonstrate flexibility in meeting students' needs or to change the course of things that are not working

Critical Factors that Contribute to Student Progress

- Preschool focus on home/school connection and targeted services
- Elementary school focus on early intervention, use of data and well-coordinated team of professionals
- Middle School students who begin to take responsibility for their own learning make the most progress
- High School students need a program/coursework and accommodations and supports to help them become self-advocates and independent learners
- Home-school connection

Philosophy, Vision and Leadership

- Participants' reflection on the district's vision and philosophy about special education was similar, but there was disagreement about whether the special education practice in the district reflects that vision
- Concerns that there is not a sense of shared ownership of all students in the district, whether students with or without disabilities

Areas Identified for Improvement

- Transitions and Preschool-12 Continuum of services
- Communication and Collaboration
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- Professional Development

Next Steps

- Share Focus Group results with stakeholder groups
- Administer a Parent Survey to parents of students with disabilities (complete by April 2)
- Share results; discuss implications and develop priorities with Sp. Ed. leadership and District Leadership Team
- Develop a proposal for continuing the special education review process (May 1)

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